P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC

DAILY EDITORIALS
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Editorial of the Day – 01.08.2025

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1. NISAR Mission (TH) -01
2. Vice President of India (IE) -02

1. NISAR Mission (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
TOPIC: SPACE TECHNOLOGY
New phase: On the NISAR mission

1. Overview

1. NISAR = *NASA–ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar* satellite.
2. Launched on July 30 by India's GSLV-F16 rocket from Sriharikota.
3. Marks 10 years of Indo–US collaboration in space technology.

2. Unique Features

1. First satellite to carry dual-frequency radars:
    1. L-band radar (NASA-built)
    2. S-band radar (ISRO-developed)
2. Can detect surface changes as small as a few cm, even through clouds and vegetation.
3. Weight: 2.8 tonnes.

3. Scientific Capabilities

1. Open-access data on:
    1. Glacier movements
    2. Ground deformation
    3. Biomass estimation
    4. Land-use change
    5. Sea ice variations
2. 12-day revisit cycle → captures in constant lighting conditions for high-resolution time series.
3. Applications include monitoring mangroves, urban subsidence, crop-soil interaction, polar ice shelf calving.

4. Global Impact

1. Supports Sendai Framework (Disaster Risk Reduction).
2. Helps improve climate models and IPCC forecasts.

5. ISRO's Milestone

1. First major international payload deployed using GSLV Mk II (once nicknamed "naughty boy" for reliability issues).
2. Built S-band radar → advanced ISRO's capability in precision electronics, thermal stability, and high data throughput.
3. Improved Indo–US technology cooperation and possible tech transfers.

6. Current Limitations

1. Key hardware (12 m antenna, Ka-band downlink, much software) imported from NASA.
2. India needs more domestic capacity in:
    1. Advanced materials
    2. Deep-space communication
    3. Systems engineering

4. Early-stage mission design participation.

7. Operational Challenges

1. Data transmission bottleneck: Ka-band downlink needs more ground stations.
2. Need for cloud-based processing and fast delivery of analysis-ready products (within hours).
3. Long-term success requires:
    1. Successor SAR missions before 2030.
    2. Clear data-sharing rules balancing innovation & security.

8. Strategic Significance

1. How India handles these gaps will decide if NISAR is just another satellite or a transformational tool for science, policy, and disaster resilience.

9. Conclusion

1. NISAR is the first radar satellite jointly built by NASA & ISRO**.**
2. Symbol of India's growing role in precision space missions and global space partnerships.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/new-phase-on-the-nisar-mission/article69878508.ece

2. Vice President of India (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: Role of Constitutional Offices and Parliamentary Functioning

8 suggestions for the Vice President of India — whoever that may be

1. Context

1. Jagdeep Dhankhar resigned before completing his term → only the third Vice President to do so after V.V. Giri and R. Venkataraman.
2. A new Vice President will soon take office and become the Chairperson of Rajya Sabha.

2. Role of the Vice President

1. Second-highest constitutional position after the President.
2. Steps in as Acting President if the President cannot perform duties (death, resignation, removal).
3. Ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
4. Elected by an electoral college of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs.
5. Inspired by the U.S. Vice Presidency model.

3. Key Responsibilities & Reforms for the Rajya Sabha Chairperson

1. **Take 'Notice' of Opposition**
    1. Notices for discussions dropped from 110 (2009–2016) to 36 (2017–2024).
    2. Rule 267 allows suspension of scheduled business for urgent national issues.
2. **Stop Mass Suspension of MPs**
    3. Dec 2023: 146 MPs suspended (100 from Lok Sabha) — highest ever.
    4. In UPA's 10 years: only 50 MPs suspended.
3. **Choosing Vice-Chairs Wisely**
    5. Chair nominates six members as Vice-Chairs in absence of Chair/Deputy Chair.
    6. In last 2 years → 30 MPs rotated.
    7. Should be experienced MPs and consult their parties before appointment.
4. **Ensure Transparency in Proceedings**
    8. Sansad TV often avoids showing Opposition protests.
    9. Need fair, balanced visual coverage for public trust.
5. **Send More Bills to Committees**
    10. Bill scrutiny ensures quality lawmaking.
    11. Referral rate has dropped:
        1. 14th LS: 6/10 bills
        2. 15th LS: 7/10 bills

3. 16th LS: 3/10 bills
4. 17th LS: 2/10 bills.

6. **Let MPs Exercise Voting Rights**
    1. MPs can demand division (electronic voting) on bills.
    2. This right has been denied in recent years (e.g., farm bills).
7. **Accept Points of Order**
    3. MPs can raise these if rules are violated.
    4. Chair must address, not ignore them.

4. Conclusion

Vice President, as Rajya Sabha Chairperson, must:

1. Be impartial and uphold parliamentary conventions.
2. Ensure fair proceedings and protect MPs' rights.
3. Promote transparency and constructive dialogue.
4. Strengthen institutional credibility through procedural integrity.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/derek-obrien-writes-8-suggestions-for-the-vice-president-of-india-whoever-that-may-be-10162485/

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1. The fact is mangroves drive business (TH) -01
2. Why Arya Samaj marriages are under the scanner of courts (IE) -02

1. The fact is mangroves drive business (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, Biodiversity, Climate Change

Mangroves & Blue Carbon Ecosystems

1. Context

1. Mangroves & other blue carbon ecosystems are critical for climate resilience & coastal economies, but rarely included in official budgets or policies.
2. Their loss means degradation of natural infrastructure that protects coasts, sustains fisheries, and avoids billions in climate-related damages.

2. Importance

1. Provide ecosystem services worth billions (e.g., ₹3,535 million in Pichavaram; ₹664 billion in Sundarbans).
2. Carbon sequestration in Sundarbans alone worth ₹462 million/year.
3. Act as storm buffers, fish nurseries, biodiversity hubs, and alternative livelihood sources.

3. Mangrove Coalition's 3 Strategic Pillars

A. Mapping with Technology

1. Tools: Satellite imagery, drones, geospatial AI for accurate mapping & carbon quantification.
2. Enables better policy-making & restoration.
3. Ensure local communities with traditional knowledge are involved & benefit.

B. Involving Communities

1. Community-led conservation builds long-term stewardship.
2. Fisherfolk link mangroves to sustainable fisheries.
3. Urban mangroves (Mumbai, Chennai) face pollution & degradation, weakening resilience.
4. Benefits like more fish, cleaner air, storm protection motivate community protection.
5. Support alternative livelihoods – aquaculture, beekeeping, eco-tourism.
6. Use participatory models like Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) & Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) for inclusive ownership.

C. Mobilising Citizen Science

1. Train locals to monitor and document changes in mangrove ecosystems.
2. Links mangrove health to wetlands, rivers, freshwater flows, sediment, biodiversity.
3. Early detection of negative trends → timely interventions.
4. Builds shared responsibility & awareness.

4. Platforms for Engagement

Need a comprehensive mangrove health tool tracking:

1. Area & coverage changes
2. Freshwater flow quantity/quality/timing
3. Biodiversity metrics (birds, plants, molluscs, fish)
4. Community livelihood dependence
5. Public perception of benefits (storm protection, air quality, income)

Example: **"**Mangrove Mitras" platform to:

6. Involve citizens & urban residents
7. Provide hands-on restoration experiences
8. Reconnect people with nature
9. Promote awareness of ecological, economic & cultural value

5. Conclusion

1. Mangrove protection must be a collaborative partnership – science, industry, communities working together.
2. View mangroves as essential assets for climate resilience & economic stability, not just biodiversity reserves.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-fact-is-mangroves-drive-business/article69884190.ece

2. Why Arya Samaj marriages are under the scanner of courts (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Polity & Governance

TOPIC: specifically, under *Indian Constitution, legal provisions, judicial pronouncements, and issues related to personal laws & marriage regulations*.

Arya Samaj Marriages

1. Context

Allahabad HC directed UP govt to investigate fake Arya Samaj Societies solemnising marriages without verifying age & violating anti-conversion laws.

2. About Arya Samaj

1. Founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati as a Hindu revivalist movement.
2. Promoted Shuddhi (purification) – reconverting people to Vedic Hinduism.
3. Supported inter-caste & interfaith marriages before the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954.
4. Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937 recognised Arya Samaj marriages.
5. Weddings follow Hindu rituals, require only marriageable age & declaration as Arya Samajis.

3. Why Eloping Couples Prefer Arya Samaj Weddings

1. Recognised under Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs).
2. Non-Hindus can marry after quick conversion to Hinduism.
3. Faster & easier than SMA (no 30-day notice).
4. SMA requires public notice → risk of harassment.

4. Legal Concerns Raised

1. Pending SC case (since 2022) on whether Arya Samaj marriages must follow SMA requirements.
2. BJP-ruled states' anti-conversion laws ban alternative conversion-based marriages without prescribed process.
3. Shuddhi before Arya Samaj interfaith marriages often skips legal conversion procedure.
4. HCs flagged mass-scale marriages without age verification or proper conversion compliance.
5. Allegations of marrying minors with forged documents.
6. 2022: SC said Arya Samaj has "no business" issuing marriage certificates.
7. Delhi HC directed verified witnesses for authenticity.

5. Way Forward

Create a regulatory framework for:

1. Age verification
2. Proper documentation
3. Compliance with anti-conversion laws

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/why-arya-samaj-marriages-are-under-the-scanner-of-courts-10164498/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20Supreme%20Court,by%20the%20temple%20were%20genuine.

Editorial of the Day – 01.08.2025

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1. **An unravelling - On the Malegaon acquittals (TH)** -01
2. **For energy security, a redesign (IE)** -02

1. An unravelling - On the Malegaon acquittals (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3 - Internal Security
TOPIC - Internal Security & Role of Investigative Agencies

Malegaon Blast Case

1. Context

1. 2008 Malegaon blast during Ramzan killed 6, injured 95; initially linked to Hindutva extremists.
2. Case reveals flaws in investigation, prosecution, and political neutrality.

2. The 2008 Blast

1. Intended as a "blast for a blast" retaliation, mimicking Islamist terror tactics.
2. Key evidence -
    1. Electronic transcripts of covert meetings.
    2. Confession by Aseemanand (Sangh Parivar activist).
3. Politically sensitive, tied to communal tensions.

3. ATS Investigation

1. ATS probed impartially after wrongful arrests in 2006 Malegaon case.
2. Aimed to break religion-terror stereotype.
3. Later shifted as Hindutva-aligned political forces gained power.
4. Case transferred to NIA, which faced allegations of going soft on accused.
5. 2018 Special Court resisted dilution, ordered full trial.

4. Final Acquittal (After 17 Years)

1. All accused, incl. Lt. Col. Purohit & Pragya Singh Thakur, acquitted.
2. Concerns -
    1. Lapses in investigation.
    2. Witnesses turning hostile (alleging ATS coercion).
    3. Political influence undermining justice.

5. Evidentiary Failures

1. Electronic transcripts rejected for procedural flaws.
2. Hostile witnesses weakened case.
3. Purohit's infiltration claim dismissed, but acquitted due to lack of proof.

6. Political & Communal Dimensions

1. Accused reframed as victims of communal targeting.
2. 2019 - Pragya Singh Thakur contested & won Bhopal seat while still under trial.
3. Her remarks praising Nathuram Godse showed mainstreaming of extremist ideas.

7. Conclusion

1. Case shows how politicised investigations and weak prosecution erode justice.
2. Terrorism has no religion; failure to uphold this weakens democracy.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/an-unravelling-on-the-malegaon-acquittals/article69890434.ece

2. For energy security, a redesign (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3 - Environment & Ecology

TOPIC - Energy, Environment, Infrastructure

Energy Security & Renewable Transition

1. Changing Definition of Energy Security

1. Traditionally - Access, reliability, affordability of fossil fuels.
2. Now - Must include climate goals — India targets net zero by 2070.

2. India's Two-Track Energy Path

1. Fossil fuels - Coal, oil, gas — share to be reduced.
2. Renewables - Solar, wind, bio — share to be increased.
3. Goal - Conserve fossils + simplify energy regulations.

3. Fossil Fuel Strategy Successes

1. Diversified crude sources, resisted Western pressure on Russia.
2. Russian crude share up from 2.1% (2021-22) to 35.1% (2024-25) → saved ~$2/barrel.
3. Improved energy efficiency → less fossil use per GDP unit.

4. Renewable Energy Progress & Issues

1. Renewable capacity up from 19% (5 yrs ago) to 49% (234 GW).
2. Problem - Growth slowdown & lack of matching transmission/distribution infrastructure.

5. Causes of Slowdown

1. Complex, overlapping regulatory approvals — months to get clearance.
2. Capacity building not matched by -
    1. Interstate transmission networks.
    2. Backup storage.
    3. Distribution systems.
    4. Seamless connectivity in the value chain.

6. Structural Advantage in Renewables

1. No geological constraints — sunlight/wind free, tech established, cost-competitive, investor interest.
2. Key obstacle - Multiplicity of regulators, no single nodal authority.

7. Solutions

1. Redesign regulation - Merge agencies, standardise rules, digitise approvals.
2. Simplify land acquisition, align technical & safety standards.
3. Transparent pricing, quick dispute resolution.

8. Conclusion

1. Challenge - Legacy vested interests.
2. Need political will to break growth-energy-environment link → achieve Energy Atmanirbharta.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/vikram-singh-mehta-writes-for-energy-security-a-redesign-10167902/

Editorial of the Day – 05.08.2025

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1. **The missing link in India's battery waste management (TH)** -01
2. **How a new project plans to curb rhino poaching through radioactive isotope injections (IE)** -02

1. The missing link in India's battery waste management (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Environment, Pollution, Waste Management, Sustainable Development

Battery Waste Management & EPR Policy

1. Growing Battery Demand

1. EV battery demand: 4 GWh (2023) → ~139 GWh (2035).
2. Boosted by EV adoption + renewable energy storage needs.

2. Environmental Risks

1. Improper disposal → toxic leakage into soil & water.
2. Lithium batteries: 700,000 MT of 1.6 million MT e-waste (2022).
3. Govt introduced Battery Waste Management Rules (BWMR) 2022.

3. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

1. Producers must fund collection & recycling of batteries.
2. They rely on recyclers → recyclers earn EPR certificates.
3. EPR floor price ensures recyclers recover costs for:
    1. Infrastructure, R&D, tech, skilled labour, safe processing.

4. Current Challenges

1. Floor price too low → legitimate recyclers struggle; informal recyclers thrive.
2. Results in fake certificates & hazardous dumping (like in plastic waste sector).
3. Losses: Environmental damage + $1B forex loss by 2030 due to poor material recovery.

5. Benefits of Fair EPR Pricing

1. Recovers valuable minerals (Li, Co, Ni) → reduces import dependency.
2. Supports circular economy & strengthens supply chain.
3. Doesn't necessarily raise consumer costs — OEMs can absorb due to stable metal prices.

6. Resistance & Global Lessons

1. Large manufacturers often resist compliance, esp. in developing nations.
2. UK recycles EV batteries at ₹600/kg — far above India's rate.
3. India needs globally benchmarked pricing reflecting real recycling costs.

7. Way Forward

1. Revise EPR floor price → fair, realistic, market-shift-ready.
2. Strengthen enforcement:
    1. Digital tracking of EPR certificates.
    2. Robust audits & strict penalties.
    3. Train & integrate informal recyclers into formal system.

8. Conclusion

1. Battery waste management is an environmental, economic & strategic priority.
2. Strong EPR policy → cleaner environment + green growth + true circular economy.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-missing-link-in-indias-battery-waste-management/article69894461.ece

2. How a new project plans to curb rhino poaching through radioactive isotope injections (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment & Ecology

TOPIC: Environment, Conservation of Biodiversity & Wildlife Protection

Radioactive Isotope Tagging to Prevent Rhino Poaching

1. Project Launch

1. University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa) launched Rhisotope Project (31 July).
2. Supported by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

2. How It Works

1. Inject low-dose radioactive isotopes into rhino horns (non-invasive, harmless to rhinos).
2. Radioisotopes emit detectable radiation → traceable via Radiation Portal Monitors (RPMs) at ports, borders, airports.
3. Makes horn detectable, useless for trade, and poisonous to humans.

3. Testing & Safety

1. Used 3D-printed rhino horns to test detection through 40-foot shipping containers.
2. Monitored 20 rhinos using biological dosimetry → no cellular damage found.
3. Safe for rhinos, unlike dehorning which affects social behaviour.

4. Poaching Crisis

1. Rhino population: 500,000 (1900) → 27,000 (present).
2. South Africa lost 10,000+ rhinos to poaching in last decade.
3. Demand driven by Asian markets for medicine & status symbols.

5. Potential Impact

1. Not a "silver bullet" but expected to be a strong deterrent.
2. Less disruptive than dehorning (which reduces poaching by 78% but harms social life).
3. Potential future application for elephants & pangolins.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/rhino-poaching-radioactive-isotope-injections-10167467/#:~:text=Through%20a%20non%2Dinvasive%20procedure,to%20identify%20unauthorised%20nuclear%20materials.

Editorial of the Day – 06.08.2025

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1. Dangerous turn: On Trump and the Ukraine war (TH) -01
2. What caused Uttarkashi flash floods: Heavy rainfall, rugged topography (IE) -01

1. Dangerous turn: On Trump and the Ukraine war (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation
TOPIC: India & Global Affairs, US–Russia Relations, Ukraine Crisis

US–Russia Tensions & Ukraine Conflict

1. Escalating Tensions

1. Trump repositioned two nuclear submarines after remarks by Russia's Dmitry Medvedev calling his tariff threats "a step towards war."
2. No clarity if subs were nuclear-armed.
3. Marks shift from Trump's earlier promise to improve US–Russia ties.

2. Ukraine War Frustrations

1. Trump gave Putin 50-day deadline to end war → later cut to 10–12 days.
2. Threatened secondary tariffs on nations trading with Russia (incl. India, China).
3. Urged Ukraine to accept ceasefire & assured no NATO membership.
4. Russia only agreed to limited Black Sea truce & temporary pause in attacks.

3. Diplomatic Gap

1. West wants immediate ceasefire.
2. Russia demands comprehensive peace deal including NATO non-expansion.
3. Russia holds military advantage; Ukraine struggling on the ground despite drone strikes.
4. Trump's bombing of Iran (for Israel) may have hardened Russia's stance.

4. Need for Diplomacy

1. Past diplomatic approach more constructive than current escalation.
2. Nuclear brinkmanship risks global peace; dialogue is the only sustainable solution.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/dangerous-turn-on-trump-and-the-ukraine-war/article69897650.ece

2. What caused Uttarkashi flash floods: Heavy rainfall, rugged topography (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Disaster Management
TOPIC: Flash Floods

Uttarkashi Flash Floods

1. Incident

1. 4 dead in Dharali village, Uttarkashi; buildings, shops, hotels damaged.

2. Flash Flood Cause

1. Common in upper Uttarakhand; usually triggered by cloudbursts, but not this time.
2. Trigger: Continuous heavy rainfall → landslides → mud, debris rush into rivers → downstream flash floods.

3. Topography

1. Elevation: 800–6,900 m above sea level.
2. Contains Gangotri & Yamunotri glacier sources.
3. Rugged terrain: sharp ridges, deep gorges, steep valleys, slope towards southwest.

4. Rainfall Pattern

1. Annual avg: 1,289 mm; July wettest (312 mm avg).
2. Monsoon: June–Sept; southern slopes get most rain.
3. Frequent thunderstorms in hills.

5. Why Flood Risk is High

1. Continuous rain + steep slopes + loose moraine & soil = high landslide & flood risk.
2. Climate change → increased rainfall intensity + faster glacier melt.
3. Region built on centuries-old mudslide layers; limited vegetation.

6. Why Not a Cloudburst

1. Cloudburst definition (IMD): ≥100 mm rain/hour over 10×10 km area.
2. Rainfall recorded was below threshold.

7. Way Forward

1. Region-specific adaptation: factor in topography & soil.
2. Improve early warning systems.
3. Targeted disaster preparedness & long-term adaptation plans.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/heavy-rainfall-rugged-topography-what-caused-flash-floods-in-uttarkashi-10171931/

Editorial of the Day – 07.08.2025

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1. Judicial overreach: On the top court and democratic dissent (TH) -01
2. How India's pesticide market is changing (IE) -01

1. Judicial overreach: On the top court and democratic dissent (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Governance
TOPIC: Separation of Powers, Judiciary, Constitutional Provisions

Supreme Court's Observations on Rahul Gandhi

1. Background

1. Case relates to Rahul Gandhi's 2020 Galwan remarks about Chinese intrusion in Indian territory.
2. Supreme Court stayed proceedings in a defamation case but made oral comments on patriotism.

2. Court's Remarks & Concerns

1. Justice Dipankar Datta said if Gandhi were a "true Indian" he wouldn't have made those remarks.
2. Critics say this is outside legal scope and risks undermining constitutional principles.
3. Court's role: interpret law, not define patriotism or enforce nationalism.

3. Legitimacy of Opposition Critique

1. Gandhi's comments targeted government's border policy, not the nation.
2. Such criticism is part of Opposition's democratic role.
3. Protected under Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech.
4. Political criticism keeps government accountable.

4. Factual Basis for Remarks

1. Claims supported by satellite imagery, news reports, parliamentary documents.
2. Parliamentary report: loss of access to patrol points in eastern Ladakh.
3. Independent defence experts estimate loss of ~2,000 sq. km.
4. Local communities confirm loss of grazing access.

5. Risks of Judicial Commentary

1. Could create a chilling effect on political speech.
2. Sets precedent to delegitimise dissent by questioning patriotism.

6. Need for Judicial Restraint

1. Courts should avoid moral/nationalistic judgments.
2. Focus on objective legal reasoning.
3. Protect constitutional freedoms and democratic dialogue.

7. Conclusion

Judicial credibility depends on restraint & impartiality. Gandhi's remarks were based on public evidence and within democratic rights. Criticism of government = strength in democracy, not a threat.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/judicial-overreach-on-the-top-court-and-democratic-dissent/article69902142.ece

2. How India's pesticide market is changing (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Agriculture
TOPIC: Major Crops, Cropping Patterns, Irrigation, and Use of Agrochemicals

Crop Protection Chemicals

1. Commonly called pesticides; include insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides.
2. Protect crops from insects, diseases, and weeds.
3. Example: White-backed plant hopper damages rice and spreads Fiji virus, causing stunted growth.

Market Scenario in India

1. Organised domestic market size: ~₹24,500 crore.
2. Largest segment: Insecticides; fastest-growing: Herbicides (>10% annual growth).
3. Key MNC players: Bayer (15%), Syngenta (12%), ADAMA (10%), Corteva (7%), Sumitomo (6%).
4. Indian players: Dhenuka Agritech (6%), Crystal Crop Protection Ltd – CCPL (4%).
5. CCPL acquisitions:
    1. *Ethoxysulfuron* from Bayer (rice, sugarcane weeds).
    2. *Gramoxone* (Paraquat-based herbicide) from Syngenta.

Why Herbicide Demand is Rising

1. Weeds compete with crops for nutrients, water, and sunlight; may also host pests/diseases.
2. Manual weeding:
    3. Labour-intensive (8–10 hrs/acre) & repeated often.
    4. Labour wages: ₹447.6/day in Dec 2024 (vs ₹326.2 five years ago).
    5. Labour shortage at crucial times.
3. Power weeders: Faster (2–3 hrs/acre) but ineffective for deep-rooted/densely planted weeds.
4. Herbicides act as labour-saving substitutes, similar to tractors.

Usage Patterns

1. Insecticides & fungicides: Sprayed based on pest/disease presence (economic threshold).
2. Herbicides:
    1. Mostly "post-emergence" (after weeds appear).
    2. Increasing "pre-emergent" (around/just after sowing) & "early post-emergent" use for preventive weed control.
    3. *Pre-emergent paddy herbicide market*: ~₹550 crore of total ₹1,500 crore.
    4. Preventive spraying growing fastest due to timely weed management needs.

Conclusion

Crop protection chemicals industry dominated by MNCs; Indian companies trying to compete via acquisitions and innovation. Herbicides emerging as a key growth area, driven by agricultural labour scarcity and shift to preventive weed control.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-pesticide-market-change-growth-fungicide-10167612/#:~:text=The%20fastest%2Dgrowing%20segment&text=The%20largest%20segment%20within%20that,rate%20%E2%80%93%20over%2010%25%20annually.

Editorial of the Day – 08.08.2025

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1. Mending ties: On state visit of Philippines President to India (TH) -01
2. Best of Both Sides: On tariffs, Russia is a red line for India (IE) -02

1. Mending ties: On state visit of Philippines President to India (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation
TOPIC: Philipphines –India Ties (Bilateral Ties)

India–Philippines Strategic Partnership

1. Introduction & Context

1. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made his first state visit to India since assuming office in 2022.
2. Visit marked a significant turning point in bilateral ties — both countries formally elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership.
3. The move comes amid heightened tensions in the Indo-Pacific, signalling India's intent to:
    1. Expand defence cooperation
    2. Strengthen maritime security posture
    3. Deepen diplomatic engagement with Southeast Asia

2. Strategic & Defence Alignment

1. Strategic Partnership Agreement signed during the visit — adds a hard power dimension to India–Philippines ties.
2. Marcos has adopted a firm stance against Chinese incursions in the West Philippine Sea, aligning closely with India's Indo-Pacific policy.

3. First-ever India–Philippines Joint Naval Exercises

1. Indian Navy conducted joint maritime exercises with the Philippine Navy in the South China Sea — a first in the history of bilateral relations.
2. Drills drew criticism from China, underlining the growing strategic alignment between New Delhi and Manila.
3. India reiterated support for the 2016 UNCLOS Tribunal ruling, reinforcing its advocacy for a rules-based Indo-Pacific order.
4. Philippines expressed appreciation for India's consistent diplomatic backing on maritime sovereignty issues.

4. Elevated Defence & Military Cooperation

Area	Key Developments
BrahMos Missiles	Philippines already the first export customer; expressed interest in purchasing more units
Military Framework	Terms of Reference exchanged to enhance cooperation across the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard
Other Agreements	MoUs signed to deepen strategic & defence collaboration

With this agreement, Philippines becomes India's 5th Strategic Partner, after:

1. Japan
2. Vietnam
3. Australia
4. South Korea

5. Diplomatic Reset & ASEAN Engagement

1. Philippines to Chair ASEAN in 2026 — also serves as the coordinator for the ASEAN–India Strategic Partnership.
2. The invitation to Marcos seen as part of damage control after strained ties due to Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's June 2025 remarks, where he called some ASEAN members "B-team of China".
3. India accelerating talks to revise AITIGA (ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement).
4. Separate negotiations underway for a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between India and the Philippines.

6. Trade & Connectivity – Gradual Progress

Aspect	Current Status
Bilateral Trade	$3.3 billion (2024–25)
Investments	Growing in technology and pharmaceuticals
Travel Facilitation	Visa liberalisation measures agreed; direct flights between India and the Philippines to be established

Trade volume still modest, but private sector collaborations are expanding steadily.

7. Larger Geopolitical Implications

1. Signals India's active outreach in Southeast Asia beyond the Quad framework.
2. Demonstrates India's commitment to:
    1. Peace & security in the Indo-Pacific
    2. Multi-alignment diplomacy — engaging with regional players as well as global powers
3. Marcos's visit reflects convergence of strategic interests between New Delhi and Manila in light of regional tensions.

8. Conclusion

Visit reaffirmed India's commitment to a rules-based Indo-Pacific, extending beyond its role in the Quad alliance. Enhanced military cooperation, emerging trade links, and resetting ASEAN ties underline India's calibrated yet assertive regional diplomacy. The Strategic Partnership with the Philippines serves as a symbol of India's expanding influence in an evolving multipolar Asian order.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mending-ties-on-state-visit-of-philippines-president-to-india/article69906347.ece

2. Best of Both Sides: On tariffs, Russia is a red line for India (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation
TOPIC: India–Russia Relations

India–Russia Relations

Context

NSA Ajit Doval visited Moscow (Aug 5) to discuss:

1. Regional stability
2. Counter-terrorism
3. Energy security
4. Defence purchases

High-Level Engagement

1. Russian President Vladimir Putin to visit India later this year (first in 4 years).
2. Strong activity in India–Russia ties, slower pace in India–US ties.

Economic & Trade Context

1. India negotiating FTAs with 6 countries (including US); has signed 16 in 5 years.
2. ASEAN-India FTA under review; >24 countries want trade links with India.
3. India building industrial capacity, new markets, supply chains (China+1 strategy).

4. Discounted Russian oil → keeps economy stable & prices in check.

Defence Cooperation

1. Russia: long-time reliable security partner.
2. S-400 system successful in Operation Sindhoor (vs Pakistan).
3. Russian defence deals worth $50B in 20 years; technology transfers & co-production.
4. US deals since 2008: $24B.
5. Domestic defence industry tripled in a decade → 65% of equipment made in India now.

India–US Contrast

1. US tariff threats, post-Operation Sindhoor outreach to Pakistan tilted public opinion towards Russia.
2. QUAD future uncertain; Trump's approach unpredictable.

Russia's Concerns with India

1. Trade imbalance → $68.7B bilateral trade, 90% oil, India has deficit.
2. Local currency trade (rupee–rouble) limits Russian investment in India.
3. India's neutral stance on Ukraine not pleasing Moscow.
4. At SCO: Russia aligned with China–Central Asia, India as outlier.
5. Ukraine war limiting Russia's defence exports to India.

Geopolitical Factors

1. US sanctions on Iran, Venezuela, and now Russia threaten India's oil supply.
2. BRICS tensions with US; India to chair BRICS in 2026.
3. India holding back Russia–India–China trilateral meeting to avoid US irritation.

Way Forward

1. Maintain oil supplies from Russia now + plan future diversification.
2. Take a stronger Ukraine stance → urge West to recognise Russia's concerns.
3. Putin's visit to India → signal strong partnership, may irk US.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/best-of-both-sides-on-tariffs-russia-is-a-red-line-for-india-10176334/

Editorial of the Day – 09.08.2025

Index

1. Industrial Accidents in India – Human Cost of Indifference (TH) -01
2. Was Jaisalmer ever a part of the Maratha empire?
Here's what historians say (IE) -02

1. Industrial Accidents in India – Human Cost of Indifference (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Disaster Management
TOPIC: Industrial Safety

Context

Recent tragedies (Sigachi Industries blast in Telangana, Tamil Nadu firecracker unit explosion) show a deep national crisis in industrial safety.

Background & Scale of Crisis

1. Writer with 37 years in oil & energy sector has witnessed factory tragedies firsthand.
2. These are not accidents of fate — they result from poor decisions, failed systems, and negligence.
3. Past 5 years: At least 6,500 worker deaths in factories, construction sites, and mines (~3 fatalities/day).
4. Andhra Pradesh & Tamil Nadu → >200 deaths from major industrial accidents in the last decade.
5. Real toll likely higher (especially in informal/unregistered sectors) but under-reported.
6. Each death = loss of breadwinner, families in trauma & poverty.
7. CSE 2022 study: >130 major chemical accidents in 30 months after 2020 → 218 deaths, 300+ injuries.
8. Most in SMEs outside strict regulatory scrutiny.

Common Causes (Preventable)

1. Factories running without Fire NOC.
2. Lack of firefighting equipment (alarms, sensors, extinguishers).
3. No permit-to-work system for high-risk jobs.
4. No safety training, especially for migrant/contract workers (language barriers).
5. Fire exits blocked, locked, or hidden.
6. Weak accountability — superficial audits, rare convictions, minimal penalties.

Safety Culture

1. Large Corporates: Focus on operational excellence, but safety is treated as compliance, not a core value.
2. Global Comparison: Germany, Japan embed safety into workplace design; India lags.

State Safety Records

1. Poor records not just in AP & TN; Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, UP also bad.
2. Gujarat in 2021 → >60 major fires/gas leaks.

Accident Frequency

1. DGFASLI data: 1 serious industrial accident every 2 days in registered factories.
2. Status of unregistered units unknown.

Recurring Pattern After Accidents

1. Tragedy → public outrage → compensation → committee formation → silence → repeat.
2. Root causes remain unaddressed.

Why the Cycle Continues

1. National indifference: public silence, regulator inertia, company cost-cutting.
2. Contract workers treated as disposable.

Class Bias in Enforcement

1. High-profile offices/software parks get more safety attention.
2. Migrant, contract, and poor workers undervalued.

The "Act of God" Excuse

1. Used to avoid responsibility, but these are man-made disasters.
2. Global evidence: accidents caused by negligence & failed systems.

Global Practices & Needed Reforms

1. South Korea, Singapore → corporate manslaughter laws (execs held criminally liable).
2. India must begin this conversation.

Call to Action

1. Not just regulatory reform — a moral and social commitment: "We care."
2. Reforms Needed:
    1. Corporate accountability.
    2. Strengthen labour safety boards.
    3. Digitise risk reporting.
    4. Protect whistle-blowers.
3. Safety is a right, not a favour.
4. Question is not capability, but willingness to act.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/industrial-accidents-the-human-cost-of-indifference/article69910773.ece

2. Was Jaisalmer ever a part of the Maratha empire? Here's what historians say (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 1: History

TOPIC: Modern Indian History (18th century) – Maratha expansion & polity

Princely State of Jaisalmer & Maratha Expansion

Background

1. Chaitanya Raj Singh → scion of the royal family of erstwhile princely state of Jaisalmer.
2. Royal records → No Maratha dominance, invasion, taxation, or authority over Jaisalmer.
3. Marathas never interfered in Jaisalmer's affairs.

Northern Expansion of the Marathas (18th Century)

1. Mughal empire breaking up → Peshwa Baji Rao I drove Marathas northwards.
2. Marathas already collecting tribute from Mughal territories in the Deccan.
3. Expansion into:
    1. Parts of Rajasthan
    2. Areas around Delhi & Punjab
    3. Bundelkhand
    4. Parts of Orissa, Bengal, Bihar
4. Control over Malwa after Battle of Bhopal.
5. Bengal raids under successors of Baji Rao I.

Early Conquest Policy

1. Marathas rarely displaced local rulers.
2. Agreements with zamindars to collect tribute.
3. Collected chauth & sardeshmukhi from Rajput territories.

Jaisalmer's Position

1. Historians confirm: Marathas raided Rajasthan for tribute but did not raid Jaisalmer & Bikaner.
2. Expansion mainly targeted Jaipur & Jodhpur.
3. Rajput's paid tribute, but no Rajput state was annexed for direct rule.
4. Jaisalmer remained under Bhati clan of Rajput's.

Nature of the Maratha Empire

1. Maratha control was patchy and irregular:
    1. Some regions fully administered by Peshwa's men.
    2. Others loosely controlled; zamindars often resisted from fortified strongholds.
2. Debate among scholars: Was Maratha polity a confederacy?

Three Historical Interpretations of Maratha Polity

1. Rise of regional consciousness in Maharashtra.
2. Hindu response to oppressive Muslim rule.
3. Attempt to reform Hindu society & uplift poorest members.

Extent of Claim vs Actual Control

1. Dominant Maratha clans in 18th century claimed sovereignty over large parts of north, northwest & Deccan.
2. Actual control varied greatly.

Conclusion & Map Representation

1. Short timeline for textbook preparation limits scope for in-depth primary source research.
2. Maps should use different colour shades to indicate:
    1. Direct control
    2. Tributary states
    3. Temporarily captured territories
    4. Areas of influence

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/jaisalmer-maratha-empire-history-10178204/#:~:text=Jaisalmer%20never%20part%20Maratha%20empire&text=Malwa%20was%20annexed%20to%20the,was%20also%20under%20Maratha%20rule.

Editorial of the Day – 11.08.2025

Index

1. Signing off on an entrenched symbol of stigma (TH) -01
2. The first step to Universal Healthcare: Make diagnostics accessible and cheap (IE) -02

1. Signing off on an entrenched symbol of stigma (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 1: Indian Society

TOPIC: Social Empowerment and Social Justice, Caste Issues, Social Inclusion and Exclusion, and Social Change.

Renaming Villages Ending with 'Colony' in Tamil Nadu

Announcement:

On April 29, 2025, Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin announced in the Legislative Assembly that all village names ending with 'colony' or containing derogatory caste references (e.g., *Pallappatti, Paraiyappatti, Naavidhan Kulam, Paraiyan Kulam, Sakkilippatti*) will be removed from State records and renamed.

Historical Background of Segregation:

1. Practice of segregating lower castes into separate settlements based on *varnashrama* system likely began around the 12th century CE.
2. Literary references from 12th century onwards confirm such segregation.

Caste-based Naming in Rural Tamil Nadu:

3. Names like *Cheri Street, Paraya Street, Palla Street, Scavenger Street, Harijan Colony, Adi Dravidar Colony, Old Colony, New Colony, Ambedkar Colony* evolved over centuries to denote lower caste areas.
4. In rural Tamil Nadu, 'colony' specifically refers to lower caste localities (unlike urban uses such as Railway Colony or Jayendrar Colony).

European Influence on the Word 'Colony':

5. Originated with Portuguese (15th century) and other Europeans referring to their settlements as 'colonies'.
6. Initially meant elite European quarters; over time, in rural Tamil Nadu, it came to mean ostracised Dalit settlements.

Social Stigma & Impact:

7. In rural contexts, 'colony' is a dog whistle revealing caste identity via addresses on Aadhaar, ration cards, passports, voter IDs, etc.
8. Leads to prejudice, discrimination, and psychological distress among marginalised communities.

Historical Usage of the Word 'Chery':

9. Ancient Tamil literature (e.g., *Tolkappiyam*, 7th century BCE) used 'Chery' neutrally to mean "settlement" without caste connotation.
10. *Kurunthokai* and *Aha-nanooru* mention 'Chery' neutrally.
11. *Silappathikaram* (2nd century CE) uses 'puranchery' for outskirts, including Brahmin settlements.

Shift in Meaning During Later Eras:

12. Bhakti movement (6th–9th century CE) → rise of grand temples → increased social segregation.
13. *Periya Puranam* (12th century CE) uses 'theendachery' (untouchable chery).
14. Vijayanagar rule & Nayakkas (14th–17th century) enforced varnashrama dharma harshly, deepening segregation.

Colonial & Modern Periods:

15. Mahatma Gandhi coined 'Harijan' for untouchables – later used derogatorily in names like *Harijan Colony*.
16. Iyothee Thass Pandithar suggested 'Adi-Dravidar'.
17. M.C. Rajah (Justice Party) in 1922 passed a resolution to replace 'Parayar' & 'Panchamar' with 'Adi-Dravidar'.
18. Even 'Adi-Dravidar' became a stigmatised term.
19. British administration documented caste-based locality names officially, preserving derogatory references.

Current Government Plan:

20. Remove 'colony' and 'chery' from names of Dalit neighbourhoods in rural Tamil Nadu.
21. Replace with names of flowers, poets, or scientists (avoid political leaders).
22. Urban names like 'Velachery', 'Pondichery', or secular colonies will remain unchanged.

Significance:

23. Not a welfare scheme but a symbolic and historic gesture for positive social change.
24. Aims to promote social integration and reduce caste-based stigma.
25. Seen as essential for progress and collective prosperity.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/signing-off-on-an-entrenched-symbol-of-stigma/article69917298.ece#:~:text=The%20Tamil%20Nadu%20government's%20administrative,aim%20of%20greater%20social%20integration&text=In%20rural%20Tamil%20Nadu%2C%20the,a%20'lower%20caste%20neighbourhood'.

2. The first step to Universal Healthcare: Make diagnostics accessible and cheap (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Governance

TOPIC: "Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources."

Diagnostic Services in India's Healthcare System: Challenges and Progress

1. Accurate diagnosis is crucial before selecting and administering effective therapy.
2. Diagnosis relies on:
    1. Well-recorded medical history
    2. Careful clinical examination
    3. Laboratory tests confirming or altering initial diagnosis
3. Lack of diagnostic access causes delays, misidentification, and mistreatment.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India

1. India committed to UHC under:
    4. National Health Policy 2017
    5. UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
2. UHC demands:
    6. High service coverage
    7. Financial protection (especially outpatient care)
3. Outpatient care is over 60% of out-of-pocket expenses.
4. Health insurance covers hospital expenses, not outpatient diagnostic services.

Diagnostic Services Availability

1. Private sector offers many diagnostic services.
2. However, rural poor and many rural areas lack easy access.
3. Private sector reaches farthest via point-of-care devices and mobile clinics.
4. Public healthcare system provides diagnostic services closer to home:
    1. Ayushman Aarogya Mandir (Health & Wellness Centre at sub-centre level)
    2. Primary Health Centre (PHC)

5. UHC objectives are met only if diagnostics are close to home.

Need to Match Diagnostics with Changing Disease Burden

1. Need to consider changing priorities of diseases:
    1. Rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes.
    2. Persistent infectious diseases like tuberculosis and malaria.
2. Early, accurate diagnostic assessments are necessary.

Advances in Diagnostic Technology

1. Molecular diagnostics and imaging have increased precision.
2. Technologies like tele-radiology, tele-pathology, and tele-dermatology connect primary care to advanced expertise.
3. Technical capacity in primary health centres and district hospitals has improved:
    1. Semi-auto analysers
    2. Imaging capabilities

Cost-Effectiveness Considerations

1. Need to evaluate:
    1. Which tests provide maximum diagnostic benefit?
    2. Balance between advanced, expensive tests and simpler, cheaper ones.
    3. Optimal sequencing or simultaneity of tests.
2. Government provides diagnostic algorithms and evidence-based guidelines.
3. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) should lead this effort.

National List of Essential Diagnostics (NLED)

1. First revised in 2019 by ICMR.
2. Considers epidemiological and technological transitions.
3. Expands diagnostic services at primary care frontlines.

Specific Recommendations by ICMR

1. Blood samples for HbA1c testing at PHC for diabetes monitoring.
2. Collection of sputum samples at sub-centres for molecular TB testing.
3. Transport of samples from primary centres to higher centres.
4. Recommendations for in-house TB testing at community health centres, sub-district, and district hospitals.

Challenges in TB Diagnosis

1. High burden of TB cases with many latent and late detections.
2. Improved molecular diagnostics needed for better detection.
3. Covid pandemic accelerated public focus on lab diagnostics.
4. RT-PCR and molecular tests are now common.
5. Need to build capacity at primary and secondary healthcare levels.

Training and Interpretation

1. Need to train more lab technicians and frontline health workers for point-of-care testing.
2. Interpretation of results requires understanding of:
    1. Sensitivity
    2. Specificity
    3. Predictive values
    4. Likelihood ratios
3. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help bridge diagnostic capacity gaps.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-first-step-to-universal-healthcare-make-diagnostics-accessible-and-cheap-10181669/

Editorial of the Day – 12.08.2025

Index

1. Reviving civic engagement in health governance (TH) -01
2. Global warming alone is not behind Uttarkashi flash floods. Greed is (IE) -02

1. Reviving civic engagement in health governance (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice
TOPIC: Health

Context

1. States like Tamil Nadu (Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam, 2021) and Karnataka (Gruha Arogya, 2024–25) deliver health care at citizens' doorsteps.
2. Raises key question: Are citizens able to participate in and influence health governance, or just passive receivers?

Citizen Engagement in Health

1. Health Governance Expanded: Now involves government, civil society, professional bodies, unions, etc.
2. Public Engagement Value: Strengthens self-respect, democracy, and reduces injustice.
3. Inclusion Impact: Ensures accountability, reduces corruption, prevents elite capture.
4. Benefits: Better trust, collaboration with frontline workers, improved service use, better outcomes.

Existing Platforms

1. NRHM (2005): Village Health Sanitation & Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs), Rogi Kalyan Samitis with funds for local use.
2. Urban Platforms: Mahila Arogya Samitis, Ward Committees, NGO-led groups.

Implementation Gaps

1. Many committees absent or weak.
2. Problems: unclear roles, rare meetings, unused funds, poor coordination, social hierarchy domination.

Problems in Current System

1. Mindset Issue: Communities seen as "beneficiaries," not partners.
2. Target-driven: Focus on numbers, not quality.
3. Language: "Beneficiary" implies dependency, not rights.
4. Policy-Practice Gap: Bottom-up planning exists on paper, weak in reality.
5. Medical Dominance: Leadership dominated by doctors, not public health trained administrators.
6. Hierarchy: Seniority-based promotions, not community-sensitive leadership.
7. Resistance: Fear of workload, accountability, loss of power.
8. Alternative Voices: Citizens resort to protests, media, courts to demand accountability.

Need for a Shift

1. Mindset Change: See people as partners, not passive targets.
2. Beyond Instrumentalism: Respect rights, not just use people to achieve outcomes.
3. Value of Process: Participation itself is as important as health outcomes.
4. Empowerment: Spread health rights awareness, provide tools/resources to citizens.
5. Early Education: Build civic awareness from school level.
6. Marginalised Focus: Actively include excluded/vulnerable groups.
7. System Training: Train officials to avoid blaming citizens for poor participation.

Conclusion

1. Blaming citizens risks deepening inequalities.
2. Real progress = treating communities as partners, not beneficiaries.

3. Strengthen and sustain engagement platforms for genuine impact.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reviving-civic-engagement-in-health-governance/article69921178.ece

2. Global warming alone is not behind Uttarkashi flash floods. Greed is (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 1: Geography

TOPIC: "Salient features of world's physical geography," "Distribution of key natural resources," "Critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and their location, changes in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes."

Monsoon Destruction in Himalayas

Recent Situation

1. This year's monsoon in Uttarakhand & Himachal Pradesh caused heavy erosion, flash floods, and destruction.

Causes – Beyond Climate Change

2. Climate change is real, but blaming all disasters on it hides the local, man-made causes.
3. The Himalaya is naturally unstable (hydrology, erosion, earthquakes).
4. Human actions like deforestation, unplanned construction, and land misuse worsen vulnerability.

Problem of Construction

5. Growing number of homes, hotels, guesthouses, ashrams, dhabas, military camps built along rivers and fragile slopes.
6. Many built on river margins and past landslide debris, making them unsafe.
7. Char Dham Yatra route expansion and religious tourism have triggered rapid construction.
8. Supreme Court ban in Mussoorie ignored → new illegal homestays and houses on fragile land.

Tourism Pressure

9. Pilgrimage routes once accessible only by foot now connected by wider roads and helicopters.
10. Uncontrolled inflow of pilgrims = more hotels, shops, yoga retreats, all built in risky zones.

Main Issues

11. Political opportunism & bureaucratic negligence allow unsafe construction.
12. People build in risky areas due to scarcity of flat land.
13. Disasters are often the result of greed and indifference, not just climate change.

Conclusion

14. True effects of global warming = melting glaciers & changing weather patterns, which are long-term.
15. But today's Himalayan disasters are mainly due to avoidable human factors like illegal construction and unchecked tourism.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/global-warming-alone-is-not-behind-uttarkashi-flash-floods-greed-is-10183574/

Editorial of the Day – 13.08.2025

Index

1. Justice and equality: On organ transplantation, gender skew (TH) -01
2. Opening India's agriculture to a free-for-all would have serious repercussions for the sector (IE) -02

1. Justice and equality: On organ transplantation, gender skew (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice
TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Context

1. No person in urgent need of an organ transplant should be denied access.
2. NOTTO advisory is a progressive step to address gender disparity in organ transplants.

Introduction

1. Women are more often donors than recipients in organ transplants.
2. The advisory challenges patriarchal norms in healthcare.
3. Aim: Make organ allocation fairer and more just.

Principle & Purpose

1. Natural Justice: Corrects social inequities.
2. NOTTO Advisory: Priority to women patients and relatives of deceased donors.
3. Rewriting Narratives: Addresses gender gaps in transplant access.

Evidence of Gender Imbalance

1. Decadal Data (2013–23): Clear skew in donor vs recipient roles.
2. Living Donor Transplants (2023):
    1. 63% women as donors.
    2. Far fewer as beneficiaries.
3. Share of Women as Beneficiaries (2023):
    3. Heart: 24%
    4. Lung: 47%
    5. Kidney: 37%
    6. Liver: 30%
    7. Pancreas: 26%
4. BMJ Analysis (2018–23):
    8. Women gave 36,038 donations, but received only 17,041 transplants.

Implementation Challenges

1. Current Protocols: Allocation based on health grounds only, no gender-based preference.
2. Unclear Scope: Ambiguity on "near relatives" and old donor families (since 1995).
3. Risk of Misuse: Organ rackets, fear of out-of-turn allotments.
4. Need for Balance: Don't discard policy, as it tackles deep-rooted gender bias.

Way Forward

1. Make policy participatory → consult all agencies.
2. Ensure compliance with Transplantation of Human Organs Act.
3. Expand organ access without weakening health-based priority.

Conclusion

1. Advisory intent = commendable step for justice & equality.
2. Success needs: clear rules, transparency, safeguards against misuse.
3. With integrity & accountability, it can:

1. Protect donor families.
2. Ensure gender fairness.
3. Set a precedent for socially just healthcare policy in India.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/justice-and-equality-on-organ-transplantation-gender-skew/article69924723.ece

2. Opening India's agriculture to a free-for-all would have serious repercussions for the sector (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Economy

TOPIC: Agriculture – issues of subsidies, MSP, farm pricing, procurement & food security.

Agriculture & Subsidy Debate

Introduction

1. Agriculture = 16% of India's GDP, but much bigger in employment & livelihood impact.
2. 250 million people directly depend on farming; 700 million linked to rural/agriculture sector.
3. Protecting farming is not just policy → it is economic, social, political, cultural survival.

Subsidy Issue in India vs US/EU

1. India → MSP (Minimum Support Price) for select crops; govt procures crops at MSP.
2. US → ERP, PLC, ARC, DMC systems:
    1. ERP = Effective Reference Price (like MSP).
    2. PLC (Price Loss Coverage) & ARC (Agriculture Risk Coverage) → direct govt payments to farmers if prices fall (no crop procurement).
    3. DMC (Dairy Margin Coverage) → supports dairy sector.
3. EU → Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) → direct income support if prices fall below intervention levels.

Key Differences

1. India → govt buys crops at MSP; US/EU → no procurement, only direct payments.
2. US/EU → complex, paperwork-heavy, suited to literate farmers. India's system → simpler, transparent.
3. Shifting Indian farmers to US/EU-style subsidies = bureaucratic mess + decades to implement.

Comparison of Subsidies

1. US spends $20 billion; EU spends $50 billion annually on subsidies.
2. Many US/EU subsidies are hidden; India's MSP is transparent.
3. US/EU → 80% subsidies to large farms.
4. India → 80% subsidies to small/medium farmers.
5. India = focus on small farmers' upliftment.
6. EU (latest reforms) moving closer to Indian model, targeting small farmers.

Way Forward for India

1. India must push for equitable, development-centred agreements globally.
2. Indian MSP is clear & context-based, unlike US/EU's complex systems.
3. Opening up fully to global markets while US/EU protect large farms with subsidies = asymmetric warfare against Indian farmers.
4. Uncontrolled liberalisation → huge social & economic upheaval in India.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/opening-indias-agriculture-to-a-free-for-all-would-have-serious-repercussions-for-the-sector-10185549/

Editorial of the Day – 14.08.2025

Index

1. Limited gains: On the inflation space (TH) -01
2. New Income Tax Bill 2025 passed in Parliament: key features, what changes (IE) -02

1. Limited gains: On the inflation space (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Economy
TOPIC: Inflation, Growth, and Structural Challenges

Context

Inflation has dipped sharply, but the benefit may not last.

Introduction

1. India's inflation has fallen from above RBI's comfort band (2–6%) to well below it.
2. July 2025 retail inflation: 1.55% (lowest since June 2017), mainly due to cheaper food.
3. Short-term relief, but economy still faces structural weaknesses.

Shift in Inflation Dynamics

1. 2 years ago, → inflation above RBI's range.
2. Now → below the lower limit (1.55%).
3. Driven by fall in food prices, not just a statistical "base effect."

Base Effect Significance

1. Base effect was already low in July 2024.
2. Current contraction shows real price reduction, not an illusion.

Drivers of Low Inflation

1. Good monsoon and sowing conditions.
2. Supportive base effect from late 2024.
3. Core inflation stable at 4.1% (RBI target level).

External Risks to Price Stability

1. If India shifts from Russian crude to costlier Gulf oil → prices may rise.
2. Trump–Putin talks may ease tariff pressures.

RBI's Inflation Outlook

1. Inflation likely to rise only from January 2026.
2. Short-term looks good, but RBI warns against complacency.

Signs of Growth Slowdown

1. IIP at 10-month low.
2. Weak output of capital & consumer goods.
3. GST revenue growth slowed (single digits).
4. Direct tax collections contracted.
5. Car sales (to dealers) at 18-month low.
6. UPI transactions declined 3 times in 2025 → weak demand.

Risks to GDP Outlook

1. RBI projects 6.5% growth (FY 2025–26) → may be too optimistic.
2. Even if new U.S. tariffs are removed, existing duties may cut GDP by 0.2% points.
3. Growth remains fragile.

Structural & Demand-Side Challenges

1. Deep structural bottlenecks continue.
2. Demand subdued despite low inflation.

3. Price relief is temporary without major reforms.

Conclusion

1. Low inflation = temporary breathing space.
2. Economic fragility: weak demand, sluggish industry, poor tax growth.
3. Without structural reforms, current price stability won't ensure long-term growth.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/limited-gains-on-the-inflation-space/article69928821.ece

2. New Income Tax Bill 2025 passed in Parliament: key features, what changes (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Economy

TOPIC: Taxation & fiscal policy reforms.

Income Tax Bill, 2025

Context

1. Parliament passed a new Income Tax Bill (replacing 1961 Act), effective from April 1, 2026.
2. Aim: Simplify provisions, reduce ambiguity, modernize tax law.

Key Features

Refunds

1. Restrictive clause removed → taxpayers can claim refund even if filed late.

TCS (Tax Collection at Source)

2. Nil TCS on foreign education remittances via financial institutions (clarified).

Corporate Taxpayers

3. Corrected errors in dividend deduction for concessional tax rate companies.
4. AMT (Alternate Minimum Tax) for LLPs aligned with old Act (kept at 12.5%, not 18.5%).
5. Nil-TDS certificate allowed for those with no liability.
6. Clearer rules for transfer pricing & carry-forward of losses.
7. Section 79 aligned → "beneficial owner" reference removed.

House Property Income

8. 30% standard deduction after municipal taxes clarified.

Non-Profits (NPOs)

9. Exemption: 5% of total donations (not just anonymous donations).

Tax Year Concept

10. New definition: April 1 → March 31.
11. Redundant provisions & archaic language removed.

Digital Searches & Powers

12. Tax authorities can access digital platforms (emails, social media, cloud servers, investment accounts).

Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2025

Foreign Investment Funds

13. Full I-T exemption to Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (like Abu Dhabi's ADIA earlier).

Pensions

14. Tax-free withdrawal (up to 60%) allowed for Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) like NPS.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/new-income-tax-bill-passed-in-parliament-key-features-10186767/#:~:text=The%20new%20Bill%20removes%20redundant%20provisions%20and%20archaic%20language%20and,chapters%20from%2047%20to%2023.

Editorial of the Day – 15.08.2025

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1. Ceremonial heads: On Governors (TH) -01
2. Only united action can stop the hyacinth's invasion (TH) -02
3. Push for transparency: What Supreme Court's order on Bihar SIR says (IE) -02

1. Ceremonial heads: On Governors (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Governance

TOPIC: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Context

1. Governors, acting as Chancellors, often hinder rather than help universities.
2. SC has censured Governors for overstepping powers, yet clashes continue.
3. Raises the issue of colonial legacy vs need for modern university autonomy.

Supreme Court vs Governor Interventions

1. April 2025: SC censured TN Governor R.N. Ravi for blocking 10 Bills on universities.
2. Court set timelines for Governors to act on Bills.
3. Declared Presidential intervention based on Governor's delay as invalid.
4. Despite this:
    1. Ravi referred the Kalaignar University Bill to the President.
    2. Kerala Governor Arlekar ordered "Partition Horrors Day" in universities → ideological criticism.
    3. Former Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan delayed/vetoed Bills.
5. President has also challenged SC rulings through references.

Universities as a Political Battleground

1. State universities = frequent conflict zones between Governors & State govts.
2. Governors' role as Chancellors gives them leverage.
3. Colonial Legacy:
    1. British made Governor's ceremonial heads to maintain control & influence.
    2. Post-independence, role retained to prevent separatism.
4. Many States (incl. TN, Kerala) still keep Governors as Chancellors.
5. Often Governors act as central proxies with political/ideological agendas.

Towards University Autonomy

1. Draft UGC Regulations: propose giving Chancellor full authority in VC appointments (reducing State govt role).
2. NEP 2020: stresses university autonomy → institutions should:
    1. Raise own funds
    2. Be accountable for spending
    3. Have professional leaders (academic + admin + fundraiser + manager)
3. Trend points towards professional leaders instead of Governors as university heads.

Conclusion

1. Conflicts highlight tension between constitutional role vs political agenda.
2. For healthy higher education:
    1. Move towards autonomy & professional leadership.
    2. Implement NEP 2020 vision + UGC draft reforms.
    3. Ensure accountability, independence & academic freedom.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/ceremonial-heads-on-governors/article69933460.ece

2. Only united action can stop the hyacinth's invasion (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context

1. Water hyacinth = invasive aquatic weed spreading every monsoon.
2. Introduced in colonial era as ornamental plant → now covers 2,00,000+ hectares of inland waters.
3. Worst-hit: Kerala backwaters & Vembanad Lake.

Impact on Livelihoods, Ecology & Climate

1. Farmers: Blocked irrigation channels, choked fields → ↑ cost & labour.
2. Fishermen: Reduces fish stock, blocks access, damages nets & boats.
3. Aquatic biodiversity: Blocks sunlight & oxygen → suffocates flora & fauna.
4. Tourism: Ramsar sites like Vembanad threatened → hits ecotourism & transport.
5. Climate: Decaying hyacinth releases methane → 25x more harmful than CO_2.

Innovations & Experiments

1. Odisha: Women SHGs → crafts, baskets, furniture.
2. Assam & West Bengal: Used for paper & biogas.
3. Limitation: Scattered, small-scale; need expansion.

Need for Policy & Coordination

1. Responsibility spread across multiple departments → piecemeal actions.
2. Requires single-point accountability & national + region-specific strategy.
3. Must give financial incentives, value chains, policy support.

Way Forward

1. Scientific removal: Mechanisation & local tech (esp. in Kerala).
2. Private sector role: Incentivise startups, promote research for crafts, biofuels, compost, textiles.
3. Collaborative models: Universities, experts, govt. & communities to scale solutions.
4. Awareness: Campaigns to turn experiments into sustainable practices.

Conclusion

1. Water hyacinth → not just ecological problem, but livelihood, food security & climate issue.
2. Needs urgent, united action by govt., communities, entrepreneurs & citizens.
3. Time to remove both the weed & policy inertia.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/only-united-action-can-stop-the-hyacinths-invasion/article69933965.ece

3. Push for transparency: What Supreme Court's order on Bihar SIR says (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Polity & Governance

TOPIC: Election Commission of India (ECI) – Powers & Functions

Supreme Court Order on Bihar Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Issue:

~65 lakh voter names deleted from Bihar draft electoral roll; reasons included death, migration, duplication.

Challenge:

Petitioners questioned

1. Substantive: Does ECI have power to conduct SIR?
2. Procedural: Validity of 11 documents as citizenship proof, use of 2003 voter list as cut-off, exclusion of Aadhaar.

SC's Observation:

3. ECI has power to conduct SIR.

4. Transparency is essential—citizens must know why their names are deleted.

ECI's Stand:

5. No legal requirement to publish deleted list separately.
6. Risk of misuse by political parties.
7. Concern: Violation of voter privacy.

SC's Interim Order:

8. ECI must publish booth-wise, searchable online list of deleted voters.
9. Reasons for deletion must be provided (death, migration, duplication).
10. Lists to be displayed at Panchayat Bhavans & BDO offices.

Significance:

11. Enhances transparency & accountability in electoral rolls.
12. Balances citizen's right to information vs. privacy concerns.
13. Ensures fair electoral process before Bihar polls.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/push-for-transparency-what-supreme-courts-order-on-bihar-sir-says-10190140/

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1. A conservation manual, drafted by the ordinary citizen (TH) -01
2. Planning the next leap forward (IE) -01
3. In Namibia, India shows a new way to engage Africa -02

1. A conservation manual, drafted by the ordinary citizen (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 1: History
TOPIC: Indian Heritage & Culture

Conservation of Monuments (ASI)

1. Current Approach & Challenges

1. PM stresses remembering freedom fighters; but memorialisation is often symbolic.
2. ASI's approach → isolates monuments, repairs, sometimes beautifies → outdated & limited.
3. Framework shaped by colonial methods (e.g., John Marshall's *Conservation Manual*, 1923).
4. Despite 3,600 protected monuments, many are in poor condition.
5. 2014 conservation policy not effectively implemented.
6. Govt inviting corporates to adopt monuments (e.g., *Adopt a Heritage scheme*).

2. Need for a New Approach

1. Conservation should not only protect structure but also improve lives of communities around.
2. Visitors should learn about builders' skill, resilience, and history.
3. Must involve experts from diverse fields (translators, ecologists, biologists, economists).

3. Lessons from Other Disciplines

Translators' perspective: Meanings change with time → ASI should make interventions transparent & review materials used in preservation.
Wildlife biologists' perspective: Focus on ecosystems, not isolated animals → ASI should see linkages of monuments with water bodies, forests, settlements, etc.
Mycologists' perspective: Fungi show value in decay → Even small forgotten monuments (walls, tanks, dovecotes) can provide groundwater recharge, local economy boost, habitats, tourism.
Economists' perspective: Value lies in *function*, not appearance → e.g., restore natural ventilation in havelis > repainting.

1. Promote research on monuments' significance to justify higher budget.
2. Use *creative destruction* → e.g., old submerged temples as labs for underwater archaeology.

4. Role of Citizens

1. Citizens must engage in conservation awareness.
2. Learn to "read stones" → understand stories, biases, silenced voices.
3. Treat India itself as a monument without walls → inclusive heritage preservation.

2. Planning the next leap forward (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Economy
TOPIC: Agriculture: Issues of subsidies, food security, agri-R&D, value chains.

Key Theme:

1. India has made major strides in growth, food security, and innovation since independence.
2. Now, the focus must shift towards rationalising subsidies, investing in agricultural R&D, efficient value chains, and environmental sustainability.

1. India's Growth Story Since Independence

1. India's GDP projected to cross $4.91 trillion by 2025, making it the fourth-largest economy (after US, China, Germany).

2. Poverty has reduced drastically – population below $3.3/day (World Bank estimate) has fallen to just 13.5%.
3. Literacy rate has reached ~77%, while life expectancy more than doubled (72 years in 2023).
4. Agriculture production multiplied manifold, now the world's largest rice exporter.
5. Foodgrain production ~353.9 MMT (2024–25), up from 51 MMT in 1950s.
6. India has achieved food security & is moving towards nutrition security.

2. Transformational Achievements

1. Green Revolution → Food Security.
2. Digital Revolution → UPI crossing 10 billion transactions/month.
3. Space Achievements → Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan, Moon's South Pole landing.
4. Women's empowerment, improved life expectancy, literacy.
5. India emerging as a global innovation hub.

3. Challenges Ahead

Nutritional Security: Malnutrition among children persists despite food surplus.

Subsidy Inefficiencies:

1. Govt spends heavily on subsidies (food, fertiliser, power).
2. Studies suggest 200–250% of actual benefit lost due to inefficiency & leakage.

Environmental Unsustainability:

1. Over-extraction of groundwater.
2. Soil degradation.
3. Rising climate risks.

Health & Human Development:

4. Malnutrition, stunting, anaemia remain high.
5. Gender gap in nutrition & education.
6. Poor sanitation (though improved via ODF).

4. Way Forward (Author's Prescription)

1. Rationalise subsidies – target the truly needy.
2. Shift focus to investments in agricultural R&D and innovation.
3. Build efficient value chains to reduce post-harvest losses.
4. Prioritise environmental sustainability in agriculture.
5. Invest in human capital (nutrition, education, healthcare).
6. Promote inclusive innovation for equitable growth.
7. Move towards "Viksit Bharat @2047" with focus on sustainability + equity.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/planning-the-next-leap-forward-10195278/

3. In Namibia, India shows a new way to engage Africa

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation

TOPIC: India–Namibia Relations (Role of India in Global South & South-South Cooperation)

India–Namibia Relations & Africa Diplomacy

1. Modi's Diplomacy in Namibia

1. Used local culture & language (poet, plant, Springbok, Oshiwambo phrases).
2. Showed inclusive & grounded approach → different from the West's aid-driven, conditional engagement.

2. India's 3-Step Approach in Africa

1. **Shared anti-colonial history**
    1. Support to SWAPO liberation movement.
    2. Indian general led UN peacekeeping during Namibia's independence.
    3. Creates long-term solidarity (contrast to West's episodic presence).
2. **Present-day cooperation**
    4. Bilateral trade: $800 million.

5. India's $12 billion development partnership across Africa.
6. Capacity building: IT excellence centre, India Wing at Namibia University.

3. **Future-oriented roadmap**
7. Namibia = 1st African country to adopt India's UPI digital payments.
8. Model for exporting India's digital public infrastructure + regulatory frameworks.

3. Namibia's Advantage

1. Politically stable, resource-rich (esp. uranium), growing tech base.
2. Shares India's call for reform of global economic & financial systems.
3. Seen as a partner in the Global South → reshaping world order for fairness & justice.

4. Challenges in India's Africa Policy

1. Long gaps in high-level visits (30 years gap before this).
2. Outcomes of visit modest → only MoUs on entrepreneurship, health, disaster resilience, biofuels.
3. Missed opportunity → no major deal on Namibia's critical minerals (esp. uranium).
4. India often struggles with implementation & consistency.

5. Way Forward

1. Move beyond symbolism → show sustained political will & follow-through.
2. Upcoming India–Africa Forum Summit → chance to formalize partnerships.
3. India must:
   1. Ensure institutional coherence.
   2. Back commitments with resources & implementation.
   3. Build trust through dialogue & African-led priorities.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/in-namibia-india-shows-a-new-way-to-engage-africa/article69944513.ece

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1. Required reforms: On reforms to the GST system (TH) -01
2. Familiar impasse: On the global response to eliminating plastic pollution (TH) -02
3. Why Centre is considering 'equivalence' in application of 'Creamy layer' condition in OBC quota (IE) -02

1. Required reforms: On reforms to the GST system (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Economy

TOPIC: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. (GST is a key tool for resource mobilization).

Core Idea

The central government is planning major GST reforms in 2025 to benefit the middle class and businesses by sacrificing some revenue to boost consumption.

Key Proposed Changes

Tax Rate Reduction:

1. Move 99% of items from the 12% slab to the 5% slab.
2. Move 90% of items from the 28% slab to the 18% slab.

Procedural Simplification:

3. Make GST registration easier.
4. Streamline the process for filing returns.
5. Speed up tax refunds.

Expected Economic Impact

1. Revenue: The government anticipates a temporary revenue loss.
2. Consumption: Lower taxes are expected to increase consumer spending and boost the domestic economy.
3. Compliance: A lower 5% tax rate is likely to reduce tax evasion and input tax credit scams.
4. Tax Base: The government hopes that increased consumption will widen the overall tax base, offsetting the revenue loss.

State Government Concerns

1. States are worried about their potential revenue loss from these rate cuts.
2. While they may not openly oppose the cuts, they are likely to ask the central government for compensation.
3. Bringing petroleum products under GST is unlikely in the near future due to these revenue concerns.

Conclusion

1. The reforms aim to create a simpler, fairer, and more growth-focused tax system.
2. Success will depend on effective discussions and coordination between the central and state governments.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/required-reforms-on-reforms-to-the-gst-system/article69947636.ece

2. Familiar impasse: On the global response to eliminating plastic pollution (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment:

The Core Problem

1. Global efforts to create a legally binding treaty to tackle plastic pollution are stalled.
2. The main disagreement is whether to limit plastic production at the source or just focus on improving waste management.
3. Negotiations are stuck due to a lack of trust between countries, with some fearing that production caps could be used as trade barriers.

Scale of the Plastic Crisis

Globally:

1. Over 430 million tonnes of plastic are produced annually.
2. Most of it is for short-term use and quickly becomes waste.
3. Plastic production is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

In India:

4. India generates about 3.4 million tonnes of plastic waste each year.
5. Only about 30% of this waste is recycled.
6. Bans on single-use plastics have had limited impact on the overall problem.

Why Current Solutions Fall Short

1. Focusing only on waste management and recycling has proven ineffective over the past decades.
2. Plastic, especially microplastics, is now found in human bodies, animal life, and marine ecosystems.
3. Coastal and island nations are being overwhelmed by plastic waste washing up on their shores.

Conclusion

1. Plastic pollution is a critical environmental and health crisis.
2. Experts believe the only effective long-term solution is to reduce plastic production.
3. Without cooperation and mutual trust, any global treaty will likely fail.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/familiar-impasse-on-eliminating-plastic-pollution-global-response/article69947653.ece

3. Why Centre is considering 'equivalence' in application of 'creamy layer' condition in OBC quota (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice

TOPIC: Vulnerable Sections

What is the 'Creamy Layer'?

1. It's a concept established by the Supreme Court in 1992 to exclude the more affluent members of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from the benefits of reservation.
2. The goal is to ensure that quotas reach the most deserving individuals within the OBC community, not those who are already well-off.

The Core Problem: A Lack of Uniformity

1. The rules for identifying the creamy layer are applied differently for different types of jobs.
2. For Central Government Employees: Their salary is NOT counted towards the creamy layer income limit (currently ₹8 lakh per annum). Their status is determined by their rank (e.g., children of high-ranking officers are excluded).
3. For Employees in PSUs, Universities, State Bodies: Often, their entire salary IS counted towards the income limit.
4. The Anomaly: This creates an unfair situation. For example, the child of a government school teacher might get reservation, while the child of a university teacher with a similar salary might be denied it and placed in the creamy layer.

What's Happening Now?

1. The government is trying to establish "equivalence" – a fair system to compare jobs across all sectors (central government, PSUs, state organizations, universities) to apply the creamy layer rule uniformly.
2. This was triggered after more than 100 successful Civil Services candidates had their OBC certificates rejected since 2015 because of this inconsistent application of rules.
3. There is a proposal to apply the new, fairer policy retrospectively (back-dated), which would allow those 100+ candidates to get their positions.

The Goal

The main objective is to ensure fairness and consistency in the reservation system. It aims to remove the disadvantages faced by children of employees in state government bodies, PSUs, and other institutions compared to the children of central government employees.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/why-centre-is-considering-equivalence-in-application-of-creamy-layer-condition-in-obc-quota-10197523/

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1. Sedition redux: On trampling on press freedom (TH) -01
2. 3 new cases of 'brain-eating amoeba' in Kerala: What you should know -01
3. Making India's climate taxonomy framework work (TH) -02

1. Sedition redux: On trampling on press freedom (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Polity
TOPIC: Fundamental Rights

The Core Issue

1. Police are using the new sedition law, Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), to target and intimidate journalists.
2. This confirms fears that the new law is just a rebranded and more dangerous version of the old colonial-era sedition law.

The Assam Police Case

1. Police in Assam summoned two senior journalists from *The Wire*.
2. The summons was issued on the same day the Supreme Court agreed to hear a challenge against Section 152 and protected these journalists from coercive action.
3. The summons was also procedurally flawed (lacked necessary details), suggesting the main purpose was intimidation.

Why Section 152 is Considered More Dangerous

1. Vague Terms: It uses broad and undefined terms like "sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India," which can be easily misused.
2. Lower Bar for Prosecution: Unlike the old law, it doesn't require proof of "malicious intent," making it easier to file cases against critics.
3. Chilling Effect: The law discourages free speech and dissent, as even legitimate criticism of the government can be targeted.

The Way Forward

1. The Supreme Court's intervention is critical to prevent the misuse of this law.
2. There is a need for strong judicial safeguards to protect freedom of expression.
3. Many argue that the Supreme Court should declare such sedition laws unconstitutional as they have no place in a democracy.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/sedition-redux-on-trampling-on-press-freedom/article69952849.ece

2. 3 new cases of 'brain-eating amoeba' in Kerala: What you should know

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Science & Technology
TOPIC: Awareness in the fields of Bio-technology; Public health; New and emerging diseases.

What is it?

1. It's a rare but extremely deadly brain infection called Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM).
2. It's caused by a single-celled organism, an amoeba named *Naegleria fowleri*.
3. This amoeba thrives in warm, fresh water like lakes, rivers, and poorly maintained swimming pools, as well as in soil.

How Does Infection Occur?

1. The amoeba enters the body through the nose, typically when someone is swimming or puts their head in contaminated water.
2. It then travels up the nerves to the brain, where it destroys brain tissue.

3. Crucially: You cannot get infected by drinking contaminated water, and the disease is not contagious (it doesn't spread from person to person).

Symptoms and Treatment

1. Early Symptoms: Headache, fever, nausea, vomiting.
2. Later Symptoms: Stiff neck, confusion, seizures, hallucinations, and coma.
3. Outcome: The infection is almost always fatal, with death usually occurring within 1 to 18 days. The global fatality rate is over 97%.
4. Treatment: There is no single effective cure. Doctors use a combination of strong drugs, but survival is extremely rare.

Situation in India & Kerala

1. Recent cases, including two deaths, have been reported in Kerala.
2. Until July 2024, every known case in India was fatal. A 14-year-old from Kerala became the first known survivor in the country.
3. The rise in cases in Kerala may be due to increased testing for brain infections, climate change, and environmental pollution.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-health/brain-eating-amoeba-meaning-kerala-case-symptoms-10198678/

3. Making India's climate taxonomy framework work (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment:

What is the Climate Taxonomy?

1. It's a classification system to define what qualifies as a "green" or "climate-friendly" investment in India.
2. Main Goals: To attract climate-focused investment, prevent "greenwashing" (false environmental claims), and provide clear guidance to investors.
3. It's designed as a "living document," meaning it needs to be regularly updated.

How to Keep it Updated: A Two-Tier Review System

1. 1. Annual Reviews: For small, timely adjustments based on new policies, stakeholder feedback, or international rules. This ensures the framework remains responsive.
2. 2. Five-Year Comprehensive Reviews: For a deep reassessment of the entire framework. This aligns with India's climate targets (NDCs) and the global climate review process (Global Stocktake).

What the Reviews Should Check

1. Legal Coherence: Ensure the taxonomy aligns with India's other laws (like the Energy Conservation Act, SEBI norms) and international obligations to avoid conflicts.
2. Content Clarity: Keep the definitions and technical benchmarks (e.g., emission reduction targets) accurate, clear, and up-to-date with the latest science and market standards.
3. Inclusivity: The rules must be practical and accessible for small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and the informal sector, not just large corporations. This could involve simpler guidelines or phased deadlines.

Who Should Be in Charge?

1. A dedicated body, likely under the Ministry of Finance, should be created to manage the review process.
2. This body must include a diverse group of experts: financial regulators, climate scientists, legal experts, and civil society representatives.
3. Transparency is vital: The process should involve public dashboards for feedback, and all review reports and proposed changes must be published openly.

Why This Matters Now

1. The taxonomy is being launched as other key climate finance initiatives, like the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme and green bonds, are gaining momentum in India.
2. A clear and credible taxonomy will strengthen these initiatives. A poorly designed one could undermine them.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/making-indias-climate-taxonomy-framework-work/article69952694.ece

Editorial of the Day – 21.08.2025

Index

1. India's democracy is failing the migrant citizen (TH) -01
2. After Wang Yi's visit, taking stock of India-China bilateral ties (IE) -02

1. India's democracy is failing the migrant citizen (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Governance
TOPIC: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act:

The Core Problem

1. Millions of migrant voters, particularly from Bihar, are being removed from electoral rolls.
2. In Bihar, 3.5 million names were deleted after they were marked as "permanently migrated" simply because they were not present during house-to-house verification.
3. This is leading to mass disenfranchisement, effectively taking away their right to vote.

Why the System Fails Migrants

1. Designed for "Sedentary Citizens": India's electoral system is built for people who live in one place and can easily provide proof of residence.
2. Barriers in Host States: Migrants often live in temporary housing and lack the documents needed to register as voters in their place of work.
3. Political Hostility: They are often seen as "outsiders," and local politics in host states discourages their enrolment.
4. The Double Loss: Migrants are unable to register in their host state and are now being removed from their home state's voter list.

Sale and Impact

1. Low Voter Turnout: States with high out-migration like Bihar have the lowest voter turnouts in India.
2. A Systemic Issue: The problem is similar to the challenges faced by the "One Nation One Ration Card" scheme, where bureaucracy and fear of losing entitlements limit its use by migrants.
3. Dual Identity Demonised: Migrants maintain an economic role in host states but a political identity in their home states. The current system punishes this reality.

Proposed Solutions (The Way Forward)

1. End Blanket Deletions: The Election Commission of India (ECI) should immediately stop the practice of deleting names based on absence during verification.
2. Create a Portable System: Move towards a flexible, mobile voter identity that is not tied to a single permanent address.
3. Cross-State Verification: Before deleting a name, officials should cross-verify with the electoral rolls of the destination state.
4. Empower Local Bodies: Use panchayats and civil society organizations to conduct outreach and re-registration drives for migrants.
5. Conduct Migration Surveys: States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh should adopt the "Kerala model" of conducting surveys to understand migration patterns and better serve their migrant populations.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-democracy-is-failing-the-migrant-citizen/article69956801.ece

2. After Wang Yi's visit, taking stock of India-China bilateral ties (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation

TOPIC: India and its neighbourhood- relations; Bilateral agreements involving India; Effect of policies of other countries on India's interests.

Background: From Conflict to Cautious Rapprochement

1. 2019: High point with the Modi-Xi informal summit in Mahabalipuram.
2. 2020: Low point with the violent Galwan Valley clash, leading to a rupture in ties and massive military build-up on the border.
3. Late 2024: Both countries agreed to disengage at the last friction points (Depsang and Demchok) and mend ties. This led to the recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The New Strategy: A "Twin-Track" Approach

1. India and China have agreed to revive an old strategy of working on two parallel tracks:
    1. Track 1: Continue to manage and resolve complex border issues.
    2. Track 2: Simultaneously move forward on other aspects of the bilateral relationship (like trade and travel).
2. The idea is to prevent the border dispute from completely halting all other forms of cooperation.

Key Agreements and Steps Forward

On the Border:

1. Three new border mechanisms will be created to work on boundary delimitation and effective border management to maintain peace.

On Bilateral Ties:

2. Resume direct flights and simplify the visa process.
3. Reopen border trade at key passes like Nathu La, Shipki La, and Lipulekh.
4. River Cooperation: China has agreed to share hydrological data on trans-border rivers during emergencies.

The Biggest Challenge: The "Trust Deficit"

India's trust in China remains very low due to several key issues:

1. Repeated Border Incursions: A pattern of Chinese aggression at the border since 2013.
2. China-Pakistan Military Axis: China's support for Pakistan, including supplying weapons and intelligence.
3. Brahmaputra Dam: Concerns over China's mega-dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo river.
4. Export Curbs: China's restrictions on exporting items crucial for India, like fertilizers and rare earths.

Conclusion

1. For the new "twin-track" strategy to be successful and lasting, the responsibility lies with China (Beijing) to address India's security and trust concerns.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/after-wang-yis-visit-taking-stock-of-india-china-bilateral-ties-10201684/

Editorial of the Day – 22.08.2025

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1. On the bills for political probity (TH) -01
2. How Haryana's new 'dictionary meaning of forest' will affect the Aravalli's (IE) -02

1. On the bills for political probity (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 4: Ethics
TOPIC: Probity in Governance

What the New Bills Propose

1. The central government has introduced new bills, including a constitutional amendment.
2. Key Provision: A Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or Minister will be removed from their post if they are arrested and detained for a serious offence (punishable with 5+ years in jail).
3. They can only be reinstated if a court finds them innocent (acquittal).
4. Stated Goal: To enhance probity and accountability in high office.

Major Concerns and Criticisms

Centralization of Power: Critics argue the bills are designed to concentrate power with the central government.

Selective Application:

1. In theory, the law applies to everyone, including the Prime Minister.
2. In practice, central investigative agencies (like CBI, ED) are controlled by the Centre and are unlikely to arrest a sitting PM.
3. However, these agencies have a history of arresting Opposition leaders, suggesting the law could be used as a political weapon against state governments.

Undermining Federalism: The bills weaken the power of states by giving the Centre a tool to remove elected Chief Ministers.

Threats to Justice and Democracy

Removal Without Conviction: The bills allow an elected official to be removed from office based on a mere **arrest by police**, not a conviction by a court. This goes against the principle of "innocent until proven guilty."

Disrespecting the Electorate: It allows an administrative action (an arrest) to overturn the democratic mandate of voters who elected that official.

Weakening Justice System: At a time when getting bail is already difficult under harsh laws (like PMLA), this adds another layer of punishment before a trial is even completed.

Conclusion

While the stated aim is to fight corruption, the proposed method is seen as dangerous. The bills risk being used to target political opponents, weaken state governments, and undermine fundamental principles of justice and democracy.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/lawfare-politics-on-the-bills-for-political-probity/article69960989.ece

2. How Haryana's new 'dictionary meaning of forest' will affect the Aravalli's (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Environment

TOPIC: Conservation; Environmental laws (specifically the Forest Conservation Act, 1980); Environmental degradation; Issues related to land use change.

The Background: Supreme Court's Order

1. In 1996, the Supreme Court (T.N. Goda Varman case) ruled that the term 'forest' must be understood by its broad "dictionary meaning". This protected any land that looked like a forest, even if not officially recorded as one.
2. In response to a recent amendment to the Forest (Conservation) Act, the Supreme Court in 2024 reiterated this order and directed all states to formally define and identify their forest areas based on this broad meaning.

What Haryana's New Definition Says

The Haryana government has now defined a 'forest' as a patch of land that meets BOTH of the following strict conditions:

Minimum Size: At least 5 hectares (if isolated) or 2 hectares (if adjacent to an existing forest).

Canopy Density: Must have at least 40% tree cover.

Exclusions: Plantations along roads, canals, railway tracks, and orchards are explicitly not considered forests.

Why Environmentalists are Criticizing It

Threshold is Too High: The conditions for size and density are considered extremely high and restrictive.

Excludes the Aravallis: The Aravalli hills in Haryana are a naturally dry and rocky ecosystem with sparse, thorny, and scrub-type forests. These unique forests will not meet the 40% canopy density requirement.

Loss of Protection: As a result, large parts of the ecologically fragile Aravalli's will be left without the legal protection of the Forest (Conservation) Act, potentially opening them up for real estate and mining interests.

Violates SC's Intent: Critics argue that this narrow definition goes against the spirit of the Supreme Court's Goda Varman judgment, which intended to provide broad protection to all forest-like areas.

Conclusion

Haryana's restrictive definition is seen as a way to legally exclude the Aravalli range from being classified as a 'forest', thereby removing its legal safeguards.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/how-haryanas-dictionary-meaning-of-forest-will-affect-the-aravallis-10202954/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 23.08.2025

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1. A productive visit: On India-China ties (TH) -01

2. Success of India's deep-tech push requires removing bureaucracy's colonial roots (IE) -02

1. A productive visit: On India-China ties (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation

TOPIC: India and its neighbourhood- relations; Bilateral agreements involving India; Effect of policies of other countries on India's interests.

Purpose of the Visit

1. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited India for high-level talks with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
2. The main goals were to discuss the boundary question and normalize relations after the four-year border standoff.

Key Positive Outcomes

Border & Connectivity: Agreed to resume border trade, restart direct flights ✈️, expand slots for the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra, and relax visa rules.

Trade & Economy: Discussed lifting Chinese export restrictions on crucial items like fertilizers and rare earths.

Boundary Talks: Both sides committed to speeding up the resolution of the long-standing border dispute.

Underlying Challenges and Concerns

China's Parallel Diplomacy: Immediately after the India visit, Wang Yi traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan to push for the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan—projects that India opposes.

China-Pakistan Nexus: China's continued strategic support for Pakistan, especially during recent terror-related incidents, remains a major obstacle to building trust with India.

India's Strategic Balancing Act: While India is showing a willingness to move on from the Galwan clashes, it must do so cautiously. Economic pressure from the U.S. might be a factor pushing New Delhi to reset ties with Beijing, but India must manage this without appearing weak.

Conclusion

The visit was productive, with concrete steps forward on trade and travel. However, major geopolitical challenges, particularly China's deep ties with Pakistan and its strategic ambitions in the region, persist.

India's path forward requires a delicate balance of engagement and strength, always prioritizing its own national interests.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-productive-visit-on-india-china-ties/article69965402.ece

2. Success of India's deep-tech push requires removing bureaucracy's colonial roots (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Governance

TOPIC: Role of civil services in a democracy; Important aspects of governance (accountability & responsiveness); Functions of Constitutional Bodies (UPSC).

The Goal: Technological Self-Reliance (Atmanirbharata)

1. Prime Minister Modi has set a goal for India to become self-reliant in frontier technologies like AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, and jet engines within the next two decades.
2. While India is a massive data consumer, it's mostly in low-tech areas. The push is to become a leader in high-tech and deep-tech.

The Biggest Obstacle: The "Steel Frame"

1. To achieve this technological vision, India must first address fundamental challenges in its core institutions: the bureaucracy, regulatory bodies, and the judiciary.
2. The main problem is that India's bureaucracy—the "steel frame"—is an outdated system inherited from the British colonial era.
3. This system was designed by the British to rule and control, not to foster innovation and development for a modern, democratic nation. It is seen as unaccountable and unresponsive.

Past Reform Efforts Have Fallen Short

1. Several attempts at administrative reform, like the Veerappan Moily Committee (2005), have been made in the past.
2. Key suggestions, such as bringing in domain experts for senior government jobs (lateral entry), have been tried but have met with limited success in changing the rigid system.

The Way Forward

1. The author argues that for a developed India (Viksit Bharat) to become a reality, the colonial bureaucratic model must be completely replaced.
2. A new, more accountable and responsive institutional framework is needed, where the bureaucracy is aligned with the goals of the elected political leadership, similar to models in the US and China.
3. The upcoming centenary of the Public Service Commission (UPSC) in 2026 is presented as an ideal occasion to initiate this overhaul.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/success-of-indias-deep-tech-push-requires-removing-bureaucracys-colonial-roots-10205757/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.08.2025

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1. Nourish to flourish, the nutrition and cognition link (TH) -01

2. Melting of Arctic sea ice has slowed down. This is not 'good news' (IE) -02

1. Nourish to flourish, the nutrition and cognition link (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice

TOPIC: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.

The Critical Window for Child Development

First 1,000 Days: A child's life from conception to their second birthday is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a strong foundation for their future.

Irreversible Impact: If this critical window for nutrition and brain development is missed, a child may never reach their full potential.

What Science Tells Us

Rapid Brain Growth: By age two, a child's brain reaches 80% of its adult weight. This period is crucial for developing skills like planning and self-regulation.

Nutrition is Essential: Nutritional deficiencies before age three can cause irreversible damage to a child's cognitive abilities.

Nutrition + Stimulation = Success: Combining good nutrition with learning activities (like playing and talking) is much more effective than providing food alone.

Fast Learning: Young brains are like sponges; they learn quickly and what they learn sticks with them for life (a concept called neuroplasticity).

Childcare Programs in India

ICDS Programme: One of the world's largest childcare schemes, providing both nutrition and early education.

Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi: An initiative to specifically link nutrition with cognitive development ("Nutrition and Education").

Navchetana Framework: A national guideline with 140 age-specific activities for parents and Anganwadi workers to stimulate a child's growth from birth to age three.

Focus on Play: The approach emphasizes play-based learning and caregiver interaction, not formal teaching.

Areas for Improvement

Wider Coverage: Expand the ICDS program to reach all targeted children.

Better Quality: Focus on high-quality delivery of health, nutrition, and learning services.

Use Technology: Employ digital tools for better monitoring and efficiency.

Urban Focus: Strengthen ICDS services in underserved city areas.

More Daycares (Crèches): Expand childcare options to support working women.

Regular Evaluation: Consistently assess children's health and learning outcomes.

Conclusion: Why This Matters Now

Future Jobs: As automation increases, there will be fewer jobs for unskilled workers.

Preparing for the Future: Investing in early childhood development gives children the strong cognitive and social skills needed to adapt and succeed in a technologically advanced world.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/nourish-to-flourish-the-nutrition-and-cognition-link/article69972351.ece

2. Melting of Arctic sea ice has slowed down. This is not 'good news' (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 1: World's Physical Geography
TOPIC: Changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps)

The Main Finding

1. For the past 20 years, the rate at which Arctic sea ice is melting has surprisingly slowed down.
2. This is happening despite the fact that overall global warming, caused by human activity, is still accelerating.

Why is the Melting Slowing Down?

1. The slowdown is not because climate change is getting better.
2. It's being caused by natural, long-term climate cycles in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.
    1. Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO)
    2. Atlantic Multidecadal Variability (AMV)
3. These natural cycles are currently bringing cooler ocean water into the Arctic, which is temporarily counteracting the effects of global warming and reducing the rate of ice melt.

Is This Good News? (Spoiler: No)

1. This slowdown is only temporary.
2. Scientists warn that once these natural cooling cycles end, the melting of Arctic sea ice is likely to speed up dramatically.
3. We are still emitting record levels of greenhouse gases, and mean global temperatures continue to rise.

Why This Matters for Everyone

1. The eventual rapid loss of Arctic sea ice will have severe consequences globally.
2. It will accelerate global warming because there will be less white ice to reflect the sun's heat.
3. It will contribute to a rise in sea levels.
4. It will destroy crucial ecosystems that many species depend on.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/melting-arctic-sea-ice-slowed-down-10206635/#:~:text=But%20a%20new%20study%20has,term%20average%2C%20the%20study%20said.

Editorial of the Day – 22.08.2025

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1. India-Japan ties — old partners, new priorities (TH) -01
2. Could we soon have space-based solar panels? Not really (IE) -02

1. India-Japan ties — old partners, new priorities (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation
TOPIC: Bilateral agreements involving India; Effect of policies of other countries on India's interests

The Big Picture

1. PM Modi's visit to Japan comes at a crucial time, as India's relationship with China is tense and its partnership with the U.S. is becoming uncertain.
2. The visit is a clear signal of India's strategy: strengthen ties with reliable friends while managing relationships with competitors.

Japan's Major Commitments to India

Huge Investment: Japan is investing a massive ¥10 trillion (~$68 billion) in India over the next 10 years.
Key Focus Areas: This investment will target infrastructure, manufacturing, clean energy, and technology.
High-Speed Rail: Japan is funding the next-generation Shinkansen (bullet train) for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad project.
Defence Partnership: The two nations are updating their joint security cooperation to face modern challenges.
Economic Security: They are working together to build secure supply chains for critical goods like semiconductors, essential minerals, and pharmaceuticals.

India's Strategic Balancing Act

The Itinerary Matters: PM Modi is visiting Tokyo (a trusted partner) and then attending a summit in China (a competitor) in the same trip. This shows India is balancing its relationships.
The U.S. Factor: This strategy is especially important now because the U.S. partnership under the Trump administration is seen as unpredictable, weakening a key alliance.
The Quad: The Quad (India, U.S., Japan, Australia) is still important, but its strength is at risk if the U.S. is not consistently engaged.

The Main Message & Conclusion

Japan is the Anchor: In a period of global uncertainty, Japan has emerged as India's most reliable and stable partner.
Shared Vision: Both countries share a commitment to a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific and are grounded in democratic values.
Clear Strategy: India is showing flexibility by keeping communication channels with China open, but it is also making it clear that its deepest partnerships are with like-minded, dependable powers like Japan.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-japan-ties-old-partners-new-priorities/article69975928.ece

2. Could we soon have space-based solar panels? Not really (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Science & Technology

TOPIC: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics

The Problem with Solar Power on Earth

1. It only works during the daytime.
2. It's affected by weather like clouds and rain.
3. It requires a very large amount of land.

The "Silver Bullet" Solution: Space-Based Solar Power (SBSP)

1. The idea is to place giant solar panel satellites in orbit.
2. These satellites would collect powerful, unfiltered sunlight 24 hours a day.
3. The energy would be converted into microwaves and beamed down to a receiving station on Earth, which then turns it into electricity.
4. This would provide a continuous, dispatchable, zero-carbon power source.

Why It's a Good Idea (In Theory)

Continuous Power: It solves the day/night cycle problem, providing electricity around the clock.
More Efficient: Solar radiation is much stronger and more consistent in space.
Weather-Proof: It is not affected by clouds, dust, or weather on Earth.

The Huge Challenges (Why It's "Not Really" Happening Soon)

Extreme Cost: The biggest hurdle is the massive expense of building, launching, and maintaining these giant structures. It is not economically viable with current technology.
Massive Scale: The structures would be gigantic. A single satellite could be over a kilometer long, and the ground station would need a footprint ten times larger.
Launch Logistics: It would require hundreds of rockets launches to build just one space power plant. For comparison, the much smaller International Space Station took over 40 flights to assemble.
Other Risks: The plan doesn't fully account for space-specific challenges like orbital congestion (space junk) or potential interruptions to the energy beam.

Conclusion

While the concept of space-based solar power is promising, the immense cost and logistical challenges mean it is unlikely to become a practical reality before 2050.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/could-we-soon-have-space-based-solar-panels-not-really-10211527/#:~:text=Reasons%20for%20scepticism-,While%20SPSB%20is%20based%20on%20existing%20technological%20principles%20and%20known,on%20Earth%20and%20in%20space.

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 27.08.2025

Index

1. Imagined righteousness: On conduct on social media (TH) -01

2. Two warships from 2 shipbuilders: Features and legacy of INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri, now commissioned into the Indian Navy (IE) -02

1. Imagined righteousness: On conduct on social media (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Indian Constitution

TOPIC: Fundamental Rights, specifically Article 19(1)(a) - Freedom of Speech and Expression, and its reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).

The Core Issue

1. The Supreme Court has asked the Indian government to create guidelines for regulating speech on social media.
2. The main concern is that this move could give the government, which already tends to restrict speech, too much power to control what people say online.

Dangers of Policing Speech

1. When authorities get the power to police speech, they might use it to suppress art, political criticism, or any dissent they dislike.
2. This can lead to citizens self-censoring—becoming afraid to express their opinions for fear of consequences.
3. A climate of censorship stifles the open discussion and creative expression that are essential for a healthy democracy.

Government Overreach pemerintah

1. The government has already expanded its control over online content through measures like the IT Rules, 2021.
2. India already has laws to deal with serious issues like hate speech and incitement to violence.
3. Giving an executive with a history of misusing such regulations even more power is considered highly risky.

The Proper Role of the Courts

1. The primary duty of the judiciary is to protect the constitutional rights of citizens, not to empower the state without limits.
2. Courts should act as a guardian of rights and maintain a balance between liberty and state control.

Conclusion: The Bottom Line

1. Excessive control over online speech by the government and courts threatens the core principles of democracy.
2. While harmful content is a real problem, the solution should not be to grant the state unchecked power that can be used to crush dissent and creativity.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/imagined-righteousness-on-conduct-on-social-media/article69979599.ece

2. Two warships from 2 shipbuilders: Features and legacy of INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri, now commissioned into the Indian Navy (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Science & Technology

TOPIC: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

What Just Happened?

1. The Indian Navy simultaneously commissioned two new advanced warships: INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri.
2. This is a significant milestone because it's the first time two major warships from two different Indian shipyards (one in Mumbai, one in Kolkata) were commissioned on the same day.
3. The project is a major boost for the "Make in India" initiative, involving over 200 small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

About the New Warships (Nilgiri-Class)

1. These ships belong to the Nilgiri-class of stealth guided-missile frigates, built under Project 17A (Alpha).
2. A total of seven such frigates will be built. These two are the second and third to be commissioned.
3. They are an advanced follow-up to the existing Shivalik-class frigates.
4. They are "blue water" ships, designed to operate in the deep sea, far from India's coast.

What Can They Do? (Capabilities)

Stealthy: Their design makes them difficult for enemy radar and sensors to detect.

Multi-Mission: They are versatile fighting machines capable of:

1. Anti-surface warfare (fighting other ships).
2. Anti-air warfare (fighting aircraft and missiles).
3. Anti-submarine warfare (hunting submarines).

Key Weapons: They are heavily armed with advanced systems like Brahmos supersonic cruise missiles, Barak-8 anti-aircraft missiles, torpedoes, and the latest radar and sonar technology.

Names and Legacy

1. The new frigates carry forward the names of an older, celebrated class of ships that served from the 1970s.
2. INS Udaygiri is named after a mountain range in Andhra Pradesh and will be based with the Eastern Naval Command.
3. INS Himgiri refers to the snow-clad Himalayan mountains and will be based with the Western Naval Command.

What's Next? (The Future)

1. The remaining four ships of the Nilgiri-class are expected to be commissioned in the next year and a half.
2. The Navy is already planning the next, even more advanced, class of frigates called Project-17 Bravo (P-17B), which will have a higher percentage of indigenous ("Made in India") content.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/warships-navy-features-legacy-ins-udaygiri-himgiri-comission-10211850/

Editorial of the Day – 28.08.2025

Index

1. H-1B visa changes: Why Trump aides want to change H-1B visa program (IE) -01
2. Trump's tariffs are a violation – and a lesson for India (IE) -02

1. H-1B visa changes: Why Trump aides want to change H-1B visa program (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation
TOPIC: Effect of Policies of Developed Countries on India's Interests; Indian Diaspora

What is the H1B Visa?

1. It's a US visa that allows American companies to hire skilled foreign workers for specialized jobs that require at least a bachelor's degree.
2. It was created in 1990 to help companies fill skill gaps they couldn't fill with the American workforce.
3. The visa is issued for up to six years. After that, the holder must either get a green card (permanent residency) or leave the US.
4. There's an annual cap of 65,000 new visas, plus an extra 20,000 for applicants with a master's degree or higher from a US university.

Benefits for US Companies

1. During the 1990s tech boom, companies like Google and Amazon used it to hire lakhs of skilled workers from countries like India and China.
2. This helped them overcome a shortage of domestic talent and gain a competitive edge in technology and research.
3. The program has been credited with boosting productivity and innovation in the US tech sector.

Criticism of the Program

1. Critics argue it's used to replace American workers with lower-paid foreign professionals.
2. It is blamed for contributing to problems like unemployment, wage stagnation, and other economic issues in the US.
3. The US Commerce Secretary recently called the program a "scam," urging companies to hire more Americans.

Why It's Important for India

1. Indians are the biggest beneficiaries, securing over 70% of all H1B visas issued.
2. The program boosts India's economy through remittances sent home by workers.
3. Indian IT companies, like Infosys, also benefit significantly from the scheme.
4. On average, an Indian IT worker on an H1B visa earns slightly less than their American counterpart.

The Way Forward for India

1. With the US already imposing tariffs, any negative changes to the H1B program would further harm India.
2. India should try to negotiate a trade deal with the US that includes a fixed quota for H1B visas for its skilled workforce.
3. Simultaneously, India must focus on strengthening its domestic economy by boosting manufacturing, increasing R&D spending, and improving the ease of doing business.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/why-trump-aides-h-1b-visa-program-10214484/

2. Trump's tariffs are a violation – and a lesson for India (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2: International Relation

TOPIC: India-US Bilateral Relations; Effect of Policies of Developed Countries on India's Interests; World Trade Organization (WTO).

Background of the Trade Issue

1. The US has imposed an additional 25% secondary tariff on Indian products, on top of existing tariffs.
2. This comes after a plan to boost bilateral trade to $500 billion by 2030 was announced.
3. In response to initial talks, India had already reduced tariffs on US products like bourbon, high-end motorcycles, and electric vehicles.
4. The US still had concerns about limited market access for its genetically modified (GM) crops and dairy products.
5. India restricted these items to protect its small and marginal farmers.
6. The US has now put the trade deal on the back burner, focusing on India's purchase of Russian oil.

Effect of US Tariffs on India

1. Around 55% of India's $85 billion in goods exports to the US will be impacted.
2. Key Indian exports like gems, jewellery, and textiles will be badly hit.
3. This can lead to job losses in labor-intensive sectors.
4. Export orders may be diverted to competing nations in South and Southeast Asia that face lower tariffs.
5. India should avoid retaliatory tariffs on US imports, as many are raw materials (like mineral fuel, diamonds, machinery) needed for Indian industries.

India's Limited Options

1. The World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute resolution system is non-functional because the US has blocked appointments to its top body.
2. This makes any complaint to the WTO largely symbolic.
3. The US tariffs violate the WTO's "Most Favoured Nation" principle, which calls for non-discrimination in trade.
4. A possible relief could come if the US administration faces domestic pressure from inflation and job losses before its 2026 mid-term elections.

Way Forward for India

Diversify Exports: Reduce dependency on the US and EU by finding new markets and selling a wider variety of products.

Strengthen Trade Pacts: Negotiate new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and improve existing ones with partners like Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

Expand BRICS Trade: Increase trade with BRICS nations.

Domestic Reforms: Implement multi-sectoral reforms at both Central and State levels to boost economic growth.

View as an Opportunity: Use this challenge to drive economic transformation, much like the 1991 LPG reforms.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/trumps-tariffs-violation-lesson-india-10215256/

Editorial of the Day – 29.08.2025

Index

1. Déjà vu: On India's monsoon vulnerabilities (TH) -01
2. How India's 'aquanauts will undertake deep sea exploration under Samudrayaan Project (IE) -02

1. Déjà vu: On India's monsoon vulnerabilities (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Disaster Management
TOPIC: the causes of disasters (erratic monsoon, landslides, floods), the gaps in preparedness (weak early-warning systems), the reactive nature of relief efforts, and the need for a mitigation-focused approach (climate-resilient infrastructure).

The Problem: Widespread Destruction

1. Heavy and intense monsoon rains have caused massive destruction across North India, especially in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Punjab.
2. This has led to deadly floods, landslides, submerged villages, and destroyed farmland.
3. The monsoon pattern has become erratic and unpredictable, with rain arriving in short, powerful bursts that overwhelm the landscape.

The Real Causes & Our Mistakes

1. Calling these disasters "unprecedented" is a mistake; it prevents us from learning from recurring events.
2. Human activities are making the situation much worse:
    1. Deforestation and clearing of forests.
    2. Unsafe road construction on fragile mountain slopes.
    3. Shrinking natural buffer zones (catchment areas), which increases the risk of floods and landslides.

We Are Not Prepared

1. Despite repeated disasters, our early-warning and evacuation systems remain weak.
2. Improved weather forecasts are not being effectively translated into alerts for people on the ground.
3. Relief and rescue efforts are almost always reactive (acting *after* the damage is done) instead of being proactive.

The Solution: Shift from Relief to Prevention

1. We must stop focusing only on relief efforts after a disaster and instead work to systematically reduce vulnerabilities beforehand.
2. The priority must be on:
    1. Building climate-resilient infrastructure (roads, dams, buildings that can withstand extreme weather).
    2. Implementing effective landslide mitigation projects.
    3. Creating robust and reliable early-warning systems.
3. Without this shift, the next monsoon will just repeat the same cycle of destruction and loss.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/d%C3%A9j%C3%A0-vu-on-indias-monsoon-vulnerabilities/article69984885.ece

2. How India's 'aquanauts will undertake deep sea exploration under Samudrayaan Project (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3: Science & Technology

TOPIC: Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology (for MATSYA-6000); Mobilization of Resources (related to the Blue Economy and deep-ocean minerals)

The Goal: Samudrayaan Project

1. India's Samudrayaan Project aims to send three humans (aquanauts) to a depth of 6,000 meters in the ocean by 2027.
2. Recently, two Indian aquanauts trained deep in the Atlantic Ocean on a French vessel to prepare for this mission.
3. This will make India the sixth country in the world with deep-sea exploration capabilities, joining the US, Russia, China, France, and Japan.

Why Is This Important? The Deep Sea Mission

This project is part of India's larger Deep Sea Mission, which focuses on:

Blue Economy: Harnessing unexplored ocean resources like minerals, fuels, and biodiversity for economic growth.

Mining: Developing technology to mine for Poly-Metallic Nodules, which are rich in valuable metals like nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements.

Climate Study: Improving our understanding of the ocean's role in climate change.

Technology: Developing ways to derive energy and fresh water from the ocean.

The Vehicle: MATSYA-6000

1. India is developing its own deep-sea submersible vehicle named MATSYA-6000.
2. It's being built by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).
3. It will carry a crew of three inside a 2.1-meter wide "personnel sphere".
4. This sphere will be made of a special 80mm-thick titanium alloy to withstand the immense pressure at 6,000 meters.
5. The vehicle has a 12-hour mission capacity and a 96-hour emergency life support system.

Major Challenges of Deep-Sea Exploration

Building the Vehicle: Crafting the titanium sphere is extremely difficult. Even a tiny imperfection (0.2mm deviation) could cause it to collapse under pressure.

Life Support: Oxygen and carbon dioxide levels inside the cramped sphere must be precisely controlled.

Aquanaut Health: The crew will be in a high-stress, high-pressure environment and won't have access to a washroom, limiting food and water intake.

Communication: Standard radio waves don't work underwater. Communication will rely on an indigenously developed "acoustic phone" that uses sound waves.

The Way Forward

1. The recent training mission will provide crucial data for the development of MATSYA-6000.
2. India should continue to collaborate with experienced nations to advance its capabilities.
3. Success in this mission will be a major boost to India's blue economy and scientific prestige.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/india-aquanauts-deep-sea-exploration-samudrayaan-mission-10214405/

Editorial of the Day – 30.08.2025

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1. Detoxifying India's entrance examination system (TH) -01
2. Trump targets cashless bail - How the practice works, situation in India -02

1. Detoxifying India's entrance examination system (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 2 - Social Justice

TOPIC - Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, and Human Resources.

The Core Problem

Intense Competition - Every year, nearly 70 lakh students in India compete for a limited number of undergraduate seats through exams like JEE, NEET, and CUET.

Systemic Failure - The high-stakes competition has created a broken system marked by a stressful coaching culture, financial issues at coaching centres, and tragic student suicides.

The Coaching Crisis and Its Impact

Extreme Pressure - Around 15 lakh students compete for just 18,000 IIT seats, creating a "rat race."

Expensive Industry - Coaching centres charge ₹6-7 lakh for two-year programs, with students often starting as young as 14.

Psychological Toll - The constant pressure leads to stress, depression, and alienation, depriving students of a normal adolescence.

Flawed Merit System - The system unfairly Favors those who can afford expensive coaching, create a **false hierarchy** and worsen urban-rural, gender, and regional divides. It ignores the role of luck and privilege.

Unnecessary Metrics - Distinguishing between students with 91% and 97% is pointless; a score of 70-80% in core subjects is more than enough for engineering studies.

Lessons from Other Countries

The Netherlands' Lottery System -

1. For medical school admissions, students who meet a minimum academic score enter a weighted lottery.
2. Higher grades give you a better chance, but don't guarantee a seat.
3. This reduces bias, promotes diversity, and eases pressure.

China's "Double Reduction" Policy -

4. In 2021, China banned for-profit tutoring for school subjects.
5. Coaching was effectively nationalized overnight to reduce the financial burden on families and protect student well-being.

A Proposed New Admissions System for India

Use Class 12 Boards - Make the Class 12 board examination the main benchmark for university readiness.

Set a Minimum Score - Establish a minimum eligibility threshold, for example, 80% in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics for B. Tech courses.

Introduce a Weighted Lottery -

1. Group all eligible students into categories (e.g., 90% and above, 80-90%).
2. Allocate seats through a weighted lottery, where students in the higher-scoring group have better odds.
3. Incorporate existing gender, regional, and rural reservations into the lottery system.

Other Suggestions for Equity and Diversity

Rural Reservation - Reserve 50% of IIT seats for students from rural government schools.

Ban or Nationalize Coaching - If entrance exams must continue, coaching should be banned or nationalized, with the government providing free online resources.

Promote Integration -

1. Start annual student exchange programs between different IITs.
2. Encourage professor transfers between IITs to ensure uniform academic standards.

Conclusion - The Way Forward

Liberate Students - Scrapping entrance exams for a lottery system would free students from the "coaching treadmill," allowing them to focus on holistic growth, sports, and school life.

Ensure Fairness - It would lower financial barriers and give every qualified student a fair chance, regardless of their background.

Let Youth be Youth - The goal is to stop turning children into machines chasing percentiles and allow them to have a healthy adolescence.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/detoxifying-indias-entrance-examination-system/article69990189.ece

2. Trump targets cashless bail - How the practice works, situation in India

GENERAL STUDIES 2 - Governance

TOPIC - "Structure, organization and functioning of the... Judiciary" and significant provisions of the "Indian Constitution" (specifically relating to Fundamental Rights).

The Bail System in the US

Recent News - The US President has signed an order to cut federal funding for places that use a "cashless bail" system, citing a rise in crime and the release of dangerous criminals.

Traditional Bail - Courts require the accused to pay a cash deposit as a guarantee (surety) that they will show up for their trial. If they can't pay, they stay in jail.

The Problem with Cash Bail - This system often keeps poor people, who may be innocent, in jail for minor crimes simply because they cannot afford the bail amount.

Origin of Cashless Bail - The idea gained momentum after the case of Kalief Browder, a Black teenager who spent three years in jail for allegedly stealing a backpack because his family couldn't pay the $3,000 bail. The case against him was eventually dropped, but he later died by suicide.

The Bail System in India

Legal Basis - The rules for bail are in the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023 (which replaced the old Criminal Procedure Code).

How it Works - India has several options for bail -

1. Bail Bond + Cash Deposit - The accused signs a bond promising to attend the trial and submits a cash amount. This money is returned at the end of the trial if they follow the rules.
2. Personal Recognizance Bond (PR Bond) - For those who can't pay immediately, a court can release them on a promise to furnish the money within a given time. However, these are often rejected.
3. Surety Bond - Another person (like a friend or family member) acts as a guarantor, submits the required amount, and promises the court that the accused will not flee.

Problems and Reforms in India's Bail System

The Main Issue - Thousands of undertrials remain in jail even after a court has granted them bail because they are too poor to pay the required security deposit, which can sometimes be as low as ₹5,000.

Law Commission (2017) - Stated that basing bail on a person's ability to pay is unconstitutional and discriminatory.

Supreme Court (2023) - Ruled that if a person stays in jail for more than a week after getting bail, the jail superintendent must inform the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), which will help arrange a lawyer to secure their release.

The Way Forward

Current Crisis - Over 5,000 undertrials are stuck in jail despite having been granted bail. This leads to overcrowded jails and is a financial burden on the state.

Core Principle - The Supreme Court has repeatedly said that "bail should be the rule, and jail the exception."

The Goal - Courts must find a balance between protecting a person's liberty and ensuring they are present to face trial.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/trump-cashless-bail-india-9680578-10218811/

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DAILY EDITORIALS
SEPTEMBER 2025

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 01.09.2025**
TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Renewed focus: On India-Japan ties

India-Japan Summit

- **Summit Context**: The 15th Annual Summit between Indian PM Narendra Modi and Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba focused on creating "Next-Gen" partnerships.
- **Economic Commitments**:
  - Japanese businesses increased their investment target in India to **$68 billion**.
  - Around 170 MoUs were signed between Indian and Japanese partners.
  - A key goal is to build resilient supply chains and secure critical infrastructure, especially in **semiconductor manufacturing**.
- **Major Agreements**:
  - **2035 Vision Statement**: A long-term plan covering eight areas like economic security, green technology, and mobility.
  - **Updated Security Partnership**: Includes annual NSA-level talks, enhanced cooperation in the **Quad** and **Indo-Pacific**, and discussions on UN Security Council reforms.
  - **Next-Gen Partnership**: Aims to improve grassroots ties and increase direct flights between states and prefectures.
- **Key Projects**: The partnership continues to focus on high-profile projects like India's **High-Speed Rail (Bullet Train)** and developing the semiconductor ecosystem.
- **Geopolitical Stance**:
  - The joint statement condemned North Korea's missile tests and cross-border terrorism.
  - The summit reinforced the India-Japan relationship as a stable and growing partnership amid global uncertainties, such as US trade tariffs and tensions with China.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/renewed-focus-on-india-japan-ties/article69996812.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 01.09.2025**
TOPIC: Agriculture and **Fertilizer**

The Fertilizer Situation in Simple Pointers

- **The Cause**: India received **above-normal rainfall** from the South-West monsoon, leading to excellent soil moisture.
- **The Effect**: This prompted farmers to increase the sowing area for **Kharif crops**, especially water-intensive ones like **rice and maize**.
- **The Demand**: More crops led to a surge in demand for essential fertilizers like Urea, DAP, MOP, and SSP to ensure good yields.
- **The Problem (Supply Crunch)**: The supply couldn't keep up with the high demand due to two main reasons:
  1. **Lower Domestic Production**: Production of key fertilizers like Urea and DAP declined compared to the previous year.
  2. **Import Shortfalls**: Imports, particularly from major suppliers like **China**, were constrained, worsening the deficit.

- **The Result**: A significant **demand-supply mismatch** has led to shortages, long queues of farmers, and hoarding, which further amplifies the crisis.
- **Future Concern**: With reservoirs nearly full, the upcoming **Rabi season** is also expected to see high sowing and strong fertilizer demand, meaning the crisis is likely to continue.
- **Proposed Solutions (Way Forward)**:
    - Rationalize the use of fertilizers to prevent overuse.
    - **Diversify import sources** to reduce dependency on a single country like China.
    - Promote alternative methods like **Zero Budget Natural Farming** and **Organic Farming**.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/the-scramble-for-fertilisers-10222977/#:~:text=In%20the%20case%20of%20urea,the%20same%20day%20of%202024.

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EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT **DATE: 02.09.2025**
TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Noise pollution is rising but policy is falling silent

The Problem of Urban Noise Pollution:

- **The Core Issue**: Urban noise pollution in India is a critical public health crisis, violating the **constitutional right to a dignified life (Article 21)**.
- **India vs. Europe on Policy**:
  - **India**: The National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network (NANMN) is largely ineffective. It's a passive data collector with flawed sensor placement and little to no use in policy-making or enforcement.
  - **Europe**: The European Environment Agency (EEA) actively uses noise data to shape public health policies, estimate economic costs (€100 billion/year), and implement changes in urban planning.
- **Key Problems in India**:
  - **Governance Failure**: State Pollution Control Boards work in silos, data is often not public, and there's a lack of accountability.
  - **Weak Enforcement**: The **Noise Pollution Rules, 2000** exist but are rarely enforced, leading to high decibel levels even in "silence zones" like hospitals and schools.
  - **Ecological Impact**: Noise disrupts wildlife. A 2025 study found it disturbed the sleep and song patterns of common mynas, affecting their social signaling.
- **The Social Challenge**:
  - **Civic Fatigue**: Constant noise from traffic, construction, and loudspeakers has become normalized, leading to public apathy.
  - **Invisibility**: Unlike smog, noise is an invisible pollutant, making it harder to generate public outrage despite its serious health impacts (stress, sleep loss).
- **The Way Forward**:
  - **National Acoustic Policy**: India needs a dedicated national policy for noise, similar to its Air Quality Standards.
  - **Culture of 'Sonic Empathy'**: Shift the focus from mere regulation to building a cultural sensitivity towards noise through education and sustained awareness campaigns.
  - **Link Monitoring to Action**: Decentralize NANMN, provide data to local bodies, and tie monitoring directly to penalties and enforcement.
  - **Adopt a Rights-Based Approach**: Treat the right to a peaceful acoustic environment as a fundamental right.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/noise-pollution-is-rising-but-policy-is-falling-silent/article70000282.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 02.09.2025**
TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests:

Key Takeaways from the SCO Summit

- **About SCO**: It's a major Eurasian political, economic, and security organization. Founded in 2001, it now includes **9 members**: China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics. Its anti-terror body is the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**.
- **India's "SCO" Policy Pillars**: India's engagement is based on three pillars:
    1. **S for Security**:
        - Strongly condemned **terrorism**, calling it a threat to humanity.
        - Highlighted the role of **SCO-RATS** in combating terror groups.
        - Criticized nations that use "double standards" by supporting terrorism.
    2. **C for Connectivity**:
        - Promoted connectivity for enhancing trade and trust.
        - Cited India's projects like the **Chabahar Port** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
        - Indirectly cautioned against projects that violate national **sovereignty** (a reference to China's CPEC passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir).
    3. **O for Opportunities**:
        - Mentioned India's initiatives to add new areas of cooperation like startups, digital inclusion, and youth development.
        - Proposed a "**Civilization Dialogue Forum**" to boost people-to-people connections.
- **Relevance and Way Forward**:
    - The SCO is expanding its focus to tackle organized crime, drug trafficking, and cybersecurity.
    - It aims to be a key voice for the **Global South** and promote a multilateral world order.
    - For India, the SCO is a crucial platform to engage with Central Asia and navigate regional challenges like border disputes and terrorism while maintaining a non-aligned foreign policy.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/key-takeaways-from-pm-modis-sco-summit-address-and-bilateral-talks-with-putin-10224000/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 4: ETHICS **DATE: 03.09.2025**

TOPIC: Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration

The Supreme Court to the soldier's rescue

Bureaucracy, Empathy, and Soldier's Rights

The Core Conflict: Rigid Rules vs. Human Reality

1. The central issue is the clash between the bureaucracy's inflexible, rule-bound approach and the unique, often devastating, medical and personal challenges faced by defense personnel and their families.
2. The article argues that existing rules cannot possibly foresee every tragic circumstance, making **flexibility** and **empathy** essential values for administrators to possess.

1. **Judicial Intervention as a Corrective Measure**

3. The Supreme Court's *suo motu* cognizance of the case of disabled cadets is highlighted as a necessary intervention.
4. It underscores a systemic failure where the state has neglected young volunteers who suffered life-altering injuries while training to serve the nation. The judiciary is stepping in where the executive and administrative bodies have failed.

2. **Case Study 1: The Expectant Widow (Illustrating Inflexible Rules)**

5. **The Situation**: An Air Force pilot's pregnant wife was denied a higher pension because the rules had a category for a "widow with a child" and a "widow without a child," but no provision for an "expectant widow."
6. **Bureaucratic Mindset**: Officials acknowledged the injustice but hid behind the phrase "rules are rules," suggesting a lengthy, case-by-case appeal process instead of a systemic fix.
7. **The Lesson**: This case exemplifies how a lack of foresight and empathy in rule-making can lead to cruel outcomes. The eventual amendment took years, showing the system's inertia.

3. **Case Study 2: The Injured Pilot (Illustrating Dependency on Connections)**

8. **The Situation**: An IAF pilot survived a crash in Siachen with severe injuries and was at risk of being invalidated from service.
9. **The "Solution"**: His career was saved not by an institutional mechanism, but through personal intervention. A senior officer contacted a Governor (who was an ex-serviceman), who in turn spoke to the Defence Minister.

10. **The Critical Question**: This raises the concern that a soldier's welfare should not depend on "aligned stars" or personal connections. The support system should be robust, fair, and accessible to everyone, regardless of their network.

4. **Apathy as a Systemic Flaw**
    11. The government acted swiftly to grant medical benefits to disabled cadets **only after** the Supreme Court took notice.
    12. This proves that the inaction over many years, despite numerous media reports, was due to bureaucratic indifference and apathy, not an inability to act. The judiciary's role is thus crucial in holding the administration accountable for its "heartless" attitude.
5. **The "George Fernandes Solution" as a Historical Lesson**
    13. The article recalls an instance where then-Defence Minister George Fernandes sent bureaucrats who were delaying the purchase of snow scooters to Siachen.
    14. This serves as a potent example of how forcing decision-makers to experience the ground reality can instill a sense of urgency and empathy that is otherwise lacking.
6. **Conclusion: Chanakya's Wisdom on a State's Moral Duty**
    15. The piece concludes by invoking Chanakya's ancient wisdom: a state loses its moral authority to govern the day a soldier has to demand what is rightfully theirs.
    16. This principle is applied to the modern context to argue that the state's duty is not just about salaries and pensions but also about providing empathetic and timely support for soldiers' medical and personal needs.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-supreme-court-to-the-soldiers-rescue/article70004950.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 03.09.2025**

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—significant provisions and basic structure: The entire debate revolves around the interpretation of Fundamental Rights like **Article 21A, Article 30(1), Article 21, and Article 15(5)**.:

Is it right to exempt minority schools from the ambit of RTE? Here's why SC has questioned its 2014 judgment

RTE Act vs. Minority Institutions' Rights

1. **The Core Conflict: A Clash of Fundamental Rights**
    1. The central issue is the legal and constitutional friction between two fundamental rights:

- **Article 30(1)**: The right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 21A**: The fundamental right of every child (aged 6-14) to free and compulsory education.

2. A recent two-judge Supreme Court bench has questioned the 2014 *Pramati Educational and Cultural Trust* judgment, which gave a blanket exemption to minority institutions from the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

2. **Criticism of the 2014 *Pramati* Judgment**

3. **"Disproportionate" Ruling**: The current SC bench criticized the *Pramati* judgment as a disproportionate measure. It struck down the *entire* RTE Act for minority schools based on a single provision, Section 12(1)(c), which mandates a 25% reservation for children from weaker sections.
4. **Need for Harmonious Construction**: The bench argued that the *Pramati* ruling created a stark conflict instead of finding a balance. The goal should be a "harmonious interpretation" where the rights of minorities (Article 30(1)) and the rights of children (Article 21A) can mutually co-exist without one completely overriding the other.
5. **Denial of Statutory Benefits**: By exempting these institutions entirely, the judgment denies children studying there the various benefits and minimum standards guaranteed under the RTE Act (e.g., pupil-teacher ratio, infrastructure, ban on corporal punishment).

3. **The Original *Pramati* (2014) Case Explained**

6. **Core Challenge**: The case examined the validity of the 86th Amendment (which introduced Article 21A) and the 93rd Amendment (which introduced Article 15(5) for reservations in educational institutions).
7. **The Verdict**: The Supreme Court upheld the validity of both amendments. However, it carved out an exception for minority institutions.
8. **Reasoning for Exemption**: The court reasoned that forcing minority institutions to implement the 25% reservation for children from the neighborhood (who may not belong to the same minority community) would dilute their "minority character" and effectively "abrogate" their fundamental right under Article 30(1).

4. **The Misuse of the "Minority Status" Exemption**

9. **Revealing Data**: A key reason for revisiting the issue is a report from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). It found that in minority schools, **62.5% of students are from non-minority communities**, while only 8.7% are from disadvantaged groups within the minority community.

10. **Operating as Elite Institutions**: This data suggests that many institutions are not primarily serving their own communities. Instead, they are using the minority tag as a loophole to operate as elite private schools, avoiding their social obligations under the RTE Act.
11. **A Surge in "Minority" Tags**: After the 2014 judgment, many institutions reportedly sought minority status, some with only token minority management, specifically to escape RTE compliance.

5. **Child-Centric vs. Institution-Centric Approach**
    12. The RTE Act is fundamentally **child-centric**. It places the right of the individual child at the forefront.
    13. The argument is that the individual right of a child to quality education should not be compromised by the collective right of a group to administer an institution, especially when that institution is not exclusively serving its intended community.
6. **Way Forward: Reaffirming the Right to Education**
    14. The right to education is integral to the Right to Life and Dignity under Article 21.
    15. Ensuring quality education for every child is essential for India to leverage its demographic dividend.
    16. Revisiting the blanket exemption will not only benefit children from weaker sections in general but also help disadvantaged children from within the minority communities themselves to get admission into these schools.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/minority-schools-exempt-rte-sc-question-2014-judgment-10226430/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 4: ECONOMY **DATE: 04.09.2025**

TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE: PORTS

India's recent maritime reforms need course correction

Analysis of India's Maritime Reforms (2025)

The Indian government has introduced a package of maritime reforms, including the **Indian Ports Bill, 2025**, **Merchant Shipping Act, 2025**, and **Coastal Shipping Act, 2025**, to modernize the nation's maritime framework. While aimed at progress, these reforms have raised significant concerns.

Progress and Procedural Pitfalls

- **Objective:** The primary goal is to **modernize India's maritime governance**, replacing outdated laws like the Ports Act of 1908 and aligning the sector with global best practices.
- **Expected Benefits:** The reforms are praised for promoting **ease of doing business**, enabling sustainable port development, and creating regulatory coherence, which is seen as vital for attracting foreign investment.
- **Procedural Concerns:** A major red flag is that these significant bills were passed **without adequate parliamentary debate or review by a standing committee**. This raises concerns about a lack of legislative scrutiny and consensus-building on crucial national issues.

Concerns in the Indian Ports Bill, 2025

- **Undermining Federalism:** Critics argue the Act centralizes power, severely undermining the autonomy of coastal states.
    - The **Maritime State Development Council**, chaired by the Union Minister, can issue binding directives to State governments, turning cooperative federalism into **federal subordination**.
    - State maritime boards lose their fiscal autonomy and flexibility, as they **cannot amend their frameworks without central approval**, despite being responsible for port management.
- **Regulatory and Judicial Issues:**
    - The Act grants **vague and discretionary powers** to regulatory bodies, creating heavy and unpredictable compliance burdens, especially for smaller operators.
    - It contains a flawed dispute resolution mechanism. **Clause 17 explicitly bars civil courts** from hearing port-related disputes.

- Instead, disputes are referred to internal committees run by the very authorities being challenged, creating a conflict of interest and **violating the principles of natural justice and independent judicial review**.

Concerns in the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025

- **Loopholes in Ownership Rules:** The Act significantly dilutes the ownership criteria for Indian-flagged vessels.
  - The previous **1958 law mandated full Indian ownership**.
  - The new Act allows **partial ownership by Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and even foreign entities**, with the exact thresholds left to be decided later by executive notification, not by Parliament.
- **Risks of "Flag of Convenience":** This unchecked executive power to dilute ownership safeguards could turn India into a **"flag-of-convenience" state**, where foreign owners control Indian-flagged ships to take advantage of lenient regulations, thereby compromising maritime security.
- **Burdens on Small Operators:** The provision for **mandatory registration for all vessels**, irrespective of their size or propulsion method, imposes heavy bureaucratic and financial burdens on small boat owners and fishermen.

Concerns in the Coastal Shipping Act, 2025

- **Arbitrary Licensing:** While the Act aims to reserve coastal trade for Indian vessels (cabotage), it gives the Director General of Shipping **wide and vague discretionary powers** to license foreign vessels on grounds like "national security," which could be misused.
- **Threat to Small Operators:** Mandatory voyage and cargo reporting requirements pose a significant challenge for small operators and fishing communities, who may lack the resources for such compliance. There is also **no clarity on how this data will be used or protected**.
- **Centralization of Power:** The Act centralizes authority with the Union government, echoing the federalism concerns seen in the Ports Bill and threatening the autonomy of local coastal governance.

Conclusion and Way Forward

While modernizing India's maritime laws is essential, the current reforms risk creating an unfair and centralized system. The key takeaway is that critical rules on **ownership, licensing, and state autonomy should be enshrined in the legislation itself**, not left to executive discretion. Without substantial amendments, these reforms may promote "ease of business" for a select few at the cost of federal principles, fair competition, and long-term maritime security.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-recent-maritime-reforms-need-course-correction/article70009149.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: SECURITY **DATE: 04.09.2025**

TOPIC: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

India's plan for creating theatre commands in defence, and the challenges

The Plan for Military Theatre Commands in India

A major defence reform is underway to integrate India's military forces into theatre commands. However, a recent tri-service seminar has highlighted significant differences among the Army, Navy, and Air Force regarding the final structure of these commands.

What is Theaterisation?

- **Core Concept:** Theaterisation refers to the integration of the resources of the three-armed forces—the **Army, Navy, and Air Force**—into a limited number of unified commands, known as **'theatre commands**.
- **Unified Command and Control:** Each theatre command will operate under a **single unified commander** for a specific geographical area, controlling all the assets of the three services within that theatre.
- **Current Structure:** Currently, India has **17 service-specific commands** (7 each for the Army and Air Force, and 3 for the Navy). There are only two tri-service commands: the **Andaman and Nicobar Command** and the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**, which manages the nuclear arsenal.
- **Origin of the Initiative:** The modern push for theaterisation was highlighted by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 2019 Independence Day speech**, emphasizing the need for the military to work together seamlessly.

Rationale for Creating Theatre Commands

- **Adapting to Modern Warfare:** The nature of modern warfare is increasingly **multi-domain**, involving coordinated operations across land, sea, air, cyber, and space. Theatre commands are essential to manage this complexity.
- **Ensuring Jointness and Cooperation:** The primary goal is to foster deep cooperation among the three services, enabling them to plan and execute military operations **jointly and more effectively**, rather than in separate silos.

- **Optimal Resource Utilization:** By bringing all assets under a single operational commander, the military can ensure the optimal and efficient use of its resources, avoiding duplication of efforts and assets.
- **Role of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS):** The creation of the post of **CDS** was a key step in this direction. The CDS is tasked with facilitating the restructuring of military commands and promoting "jointness" in operations, procurement, and training.

Evolution of the Theaterisation Plan

- **Initial Proposal:** The first CDS had planned to create **four theatre commands**: an Air Defence Command, a Maritime Theatre Command, and two land-based commands for the western and eastern fronts.
- **Revised Proposal:** The concept has since evolved. The new plan proposes creating **adversary-based joint theatre commands**, which would involve:
    - An integrated theatre command for the **northern and eastern borders with China**.
    - Another command for the **western borders with Pakistan**.
    - A third **maritime command** to tackle threats in the maritime domain.

Key Challenges and Concerns

- **Dismantling Existing Structures:** The reform requires dismantling the existing 17 service-specific commands, a structure that has been in place for decades, which presents significant organizational and logistical challenges.
- **Indian Air Force (IAF) Apprehensions:** The IAF has expressed strong reservations, based on two primary concerns:
    1. **Division of Scarce Assets:** The Air Force fears that its limited and valuable combat assets (like fighter jets) would be divided and distributed among different theatre commands, diluting their operational impact.
    2. **Reduction of Role:** There is an apprehension within the IAF that theaterisation might reduce its strategic role to that of a **mere support arm for the Army**, rather than an independent and decisive force.
- **Future-Readiness:** The new commands must be structured to deal with emerging forms of warfare in the **space and cyber domains** and should not add more bureaucratic layers or slow down the decision-making chain.

The Way Forward

- **Acknowledge Modern Threats:** Modern warfare requires the ability to counter multi-domain attacks, especially given the threat of a multi-front war with China and Pakistan. Theatre commands are necessary to meet this challenge.

- **Build Consensus:** The legitimate concerns of all three services, particularly the **Air Force's concerns about its assets and role**, must be carefully considered and addressed to build a consensus.
- **An Indian Model:** The final structure of the theatre commands should be **uniquely suited to India's specific security challenges** and operational requirements, rather than blindly imitating the models of advanced militaries like the United States.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/plan-for-theatre-commands-10229049/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 05.09.2025**
TOPIC: TAX REFORMS

CII calls GST 2.0 reforms a 'defining milestone in India's tax journey'

GST 2.0: A Landmark in India's Tax Journey

The 56th GST Council meeting, held on **September 3, 2025**, introduced a landmark set of reforms, termed "GST 2.0." This initiative represents a decisive shift towards a simpler, more equitable, and growth-oriented tax system, aligning with the national vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047**.

Core Reform: Simplification of the GST Structure

- **Transition to a Two-Rate System:** The reform addresses a long-standing demand from both industry and consumers by moving away from the complex multiple-slab structure (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%). The new structure is built around two main rates:
    1. A **Standard Rate of 18%**.
    2. A **Merit Rate of 5%** for essential goods and services.
- **Retention of De-merit Rate:** A **40% de-merit rate** will be retained for a select list of luxury or harmful "sin" goods.
- **Transformational Impact:** This simplification is expected to significantly **reduce compliance burdens** for businesses, enhance predictability and transparency in taxation, and make the entire GST system more **citizen-friendly** and easier to understand.

Sector-Specific Relief and Benefits for Citizens

- **Household Essentials:** The tax burden on daily-use items has been reduced.
    - Products like **soap, shampoo, toothpaste, bicycles, and kitchenware** are now in the **5% GST bracket**.
    - Key food essentials such as **UHT milk, paneer, chapati, and paratha are now exempt from GST**.
- **Insurance and Social Security:** In a major move to strengthen social security, **all life and health insurance products have been made exempt from GST**. This will make insurance more affordable and accessible, especially for senior citizens and low-income families.
- **Healthcare:** Access to modern medicine has been improved through **exemptions and rate reductions** on essential drugs, medical devices, and treatments for critical illnesses like cancer and rare diseases.
- **Agriculture Sector:** To support farmers and reduce cultivation costs, key changes have been made:
    - **Tractors, farm machinery, and implements** are now taxed at just **5%**.

    - Fertilizers and crucial inputs like **sulphuric acid and ammonia** have been moved from the 18% slab to the **5%** slab.

- **Labour-Intensive Sectors:** To boost employment and competitiveness, GST rates have been reduced for **handicrafts, marble, granite, and leather goods**.

Rate Rationalisation and Removal of Distortions

- **Correcting Inverted Duty Structures:** A significant achievement of the reform is the removal of inverted duty structures in key sectors, which had distorted value chains and hampered growth.
    - **Example (Textiles):** GST on **man-made fibre and yarn has been cut to 5%**, resolving a long-standing issue and boosting the competitiveness of the textile industry.
- **Rate Cuts in Core Sectors:**
    - **Cement:** GST has been significantly reduced from **28% to 18%**, providing a major boost to the housing and infrastructure sectors.
    - **Green Growth:** Rates have been cut for **renewable energy devices and auto components** to accelerate India's transition to a green economy.

Institutional Strengthening and Process Reforms

- **GSTAT Implementation:** The much-awaited **Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)** will be made operational by the end of the year. This will ensure **faster dispute resolution**, provide consistent rulings, and enhance trust in the tax system.
- **Other Process Reforms:** Additional measures like **provisional refunds** for inverted duty cases, **risk-based compliance checks**, and the harmonization of valuation rules have been introduced to reduce uncertainty and compliance costs for businesses.

Conclusion: A People-Centric Reform

The "GST 2.0" reforms are being rolled out in a **phased manner starting September 22, 2025**, to balance revenue stability with immediate benefits for consumers and industry. This initiative is not merely a technical adjustment but a **people-centric reform** designed to simplify the tax structure, reduce the burden on essentials, correct past distortions, and strengthen institutions, thereby laying a stronger foundation for India's growth journey.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Mangalore/cii-calls-gst-20-reforms-a-defining-milestone-in-indias-tax-journey/article70022382.ece#:~:text=India's%20tax%20journey.%E2%80%9D-,The%20reforms%20mark%20a%20decisive%20step%20towards%20a%20simpler%2C%20fairer,a%20bold%20and%20transformative%20shift.

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2 : SOCIAL JUSTICE **DATE: 05.09.2025**

TOPIC: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Who are particularly vulnerable tribal groups, which the govt wants to be counted separately in the Census?

Enumerating Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

In a significant policy move, the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has requested the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India to conduct a **separate enumeration of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** for the first time in the upcoming census. The goal is to collect precise data on PVTG households and their distinct socio-economic conditions to better implement targeted welfare schemes like **PM-JANMAN**.

Who Are PVTGs?

- **Origin of the Concept:** The classification of PVTGs originated from the **Dhebar Commission (1960-61)**. The commission identified that certain tribal communities were "more vulnerable" than others due to significant disparities in their socio-economic conditions.
- **Identification Criteria:** PVTGs are identified from among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on specific characteristics:
    - Declining or stagnant population.
    - Geographical isolation in remote areas.
    - Reliance on pre-agrarian practices like hunting and gathering.
    - Extreme economic backwardness and very low literacy levels.
- **Current Status:** At present, there are **75 identified PVTGs** in India, spread across 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Status of Census Enumeration and Population

- **Current Practice:** PVTGs have **never been listed as a separate category** in any census. They are currently counted under the broader Scheduled Tribes (ST) category, which makes it difficult to get specific data on their status.
- **Data Limitations:** The Census office releases consolidated data only for the main ST groups listed under Article 342 of the Constitution, not for sub-groups like PVTGs.
- **Population Estimates:** According to recent government estimates, the total PVTG population is around **47.5 lakhs**.
    - The state with the highest PVTG population is **Madhya Pradesh** (13.22 lakh), followed by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

- The **Baiga community** of Madhya Pradesh is the largest PVTG by population.
- Some groups, like the **Sentinelese** and **Shompens** in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, have critically low populations, with fewer than 1,000 individuals.

The PM-JANMAN Yojana

- **Objective:** Launched in November 2023, the **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)** is a flagship initiative aimed at ensuring the **saturation of basic facilities** and services for the 75 PVTG communities.
- **Key Features:**
  - **Budget:** It has an outlay of approximately **₹24,000 crore** for a three-year period (until 2026).
  - **Implementation:** The scheme uses a **convergent approach**, bringing together multiple central ministries like Tribal Affairs, Health, Education, and Rural Development to work in synergy.
  - **Major Interventions:** The focus is on providing essential services, including:
    - Housing under **PM-AWAS**.
    - Clean drinking water through the **Jal Jeevan Mission**.
    - Road and telecom connectivity.
    - Education via Anganwadi centers and **Eklavya Model Residential Schools**.
    - Healthcare through **Mobile Medical Units**.
    - Livelihood support and skill development.

The Way Forward

- PVTGs are recognized as the most deprived and marginalized groups among all tribal communities in India.
- The government's move to **enumerate PVTGs separately in the census** is a critical and welcome step. This will provide the granular, reliable data needed for the efficient and effective implementation of targeted welfare schemes, ensuring that benefits reach the most vulnerable.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/particularly-vulnerable-tribal-groups-pvtg-census-10229611/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE **DATE: 06.09.2025**

TOPIC: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Governors as Chancellors: On the submission by the Kerala Governor

The Central Conflict: Governors vs. State Governments

- A significant power struggle has emerged between State Governors (acting as Chancellors) and elected State governments regarding the administration and leadership of state universities.
- This friction raises fundamental questions about **federalism**, **democratic accountability**, and the **autonomy of higher educational institutions**.
- The conflict is not isolated, with prominent examples seen in **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Punjab**.

The Governor's Stance and UGC Regulations

- **Kerala Governor's Submission:** The immediate trigger for the current debate is the submission by Kerala's Governor to the Supreme Court, arguing that the Chief Minister has **no legitimate role** in the appointment process of Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs).
- **Basis of the Argument (2018 UGC Rules):** The Governor's position is based on the 2018 University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations. These rules mandate that V-C search committees must comprise eminent individuals from higher education who are not connected to the university. The Governor interprets this to **implicitly exclude political figures like the Chief Minister**.
- **Strengthening the Governor's Position (Draft 2025 UGC Regulations):** Proposed new UGC regulations are expected to further marginalize the role of State governments, placing the V-C appointment process almost entirely under the **Chancellor's (Governor's) purview**.

Historical Context of the Governor's Role as Chancellor

- **Colonial Origins:** The position of Governor as Chancellor is a **relic of the colonial era**, originally designed for administrative control by the British regime.
- **Post-Independence Rationale:** The role was retained after Independence with the intention of creating a buffer against political interference. The Chancellor was envisioned as a symbolic, apolitical **"father figure"** to safeguard university independence.
- **Legal Basis (Not Constitutional):** Crucially, the Governor's authority as Chancellor is derived from **State-specific University Acts**, not from a direct constitutional mandate. This means state legislatures create and can potentially alter this role.

State Resistance and the Need for Meritocracy

- **Legislative Countermeasures:** In response to perceived overreach and interference, state governments are actively pushing back. For instance, **Punjab and West Bengal have passed legislation** to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor.
- **The Core Principle at Stake:** The debate highlights that the post of a V-C is fundamentally academic and administrative. The ideal candidate must be a **distinguished academician** with proven **vision, leadership qualities, and managerial skills**.
- **Avoiding Political Patronage:** A primary concern is that V-C appointments must not be reduced to a tool for political patronage, whether exercised by the **Union government (through the Governor) or the State government**.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

- **Balancing Act:** The situation demands a delicate balance between **institutional autonomy** (freedom from political control) and **democratic accountability** (the legitimate role of an elected government).
- **Re-evaluating the Governor's Role:** The historical role of the Governor as an unchecked arbiter in education is being questioned as an anachronism in a modern federal democracy.
- **The Ultimate Goal:** The primary objective must be to ensure that universities are led by **visionary and academically accomplished leaders**. Their selection should be based on a transparent, merit-based process, not political convenience, to uphold the integrity of India's higher education system.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/governors-as-chancellors-on-the-submission-by-the-kerala-governor/article70016206.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE **DATE: 06.09.2025**

TOPIC: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation:

What Rajasthan's coaching centre Bill says, why it matters so much

Context and Rationale for the Bill

- **Student Mental Health Crisis:** The primary driver for the legislation is the alarming rate of student deaths in Rajasthan's coaching hubs. Over the last five years, **88 students died**, with **78 of these deaths being by suicide**, predominantly in Kota, the "coaching capital."

- **Judicial and Parliamentary Intervention:** The Rajasthan High Court had commissioned a study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) to investigate student stress. Furthermore, a Parliamentary Standing Committee highlighted the **complete lack of a national regulatory framework** to govern the rapidly growing coaching industry.
- **Widespread Malpractices:** The bill aims to address numerous issues plaguing the sector, including reports of **financial fraud**, misleading advertisements, and the prevalence of **drug abuse and severe mental health struggles** among students.
- **Stated Aims of the Bill:** The legislation is designed to register, control, and regulate coaching centers to curb their excessive commercialization and create a **healthy, supportive, and secure environment** for students preparing for competitive exams.

KeyProvisions of the Bill

- **Regulatory Structure:**
    - **State-Level Authority:** It establishes a state-level regulatory body comprising senior education and police officials, a psychiatrist, and representatives from coaching centers and parents' associations.
    - **District-Level Committees:** It mandates the formation of district-level committees, led by the District Magistrate, to handle the registration of centers, ensure compliance with the law, and oversee grievance redressal cells.
- **Registration and Infrastructure:**
    - **Mandatory Registration:** All coaching centers with **more than 100 students** are required to register within three months of the Act's enforcement.
    - **Minimum Standards:** The bill sets minimum requirements for infrastructure, such as **at least 1 square meter of space per student**, and for faculty, who must possess a **minimum qualification of a graduation degree**.
- **Operational Guidelines and Student Welfare:**
    - **Curbing Misleading Advertisements:** It explicitly prohibits coaching centers from making **false promises or guaranteeing good ranks or marks**.
    - **Stress Reduction Measures:** Centers are required to provide **weekdays off** for both students and teachers to prevent burnout.
    - **Transparency and Support:** It is now compulsory for centers to have a **counseling system** and maintain an updated website detailing tutor qualifications, hostel facilities, fee structures, and authentic success rates.
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:**

- **Fines and Deregistration:** Violations of the Act will result in a fine of **₹50,000 for the first offense** and **₹2 lakh for subsequent violations**. Repeated non-compliance may lead to the **cancellation of the center's registration**.

Criticisms and Shortcomings of the Bill Kritik

- **Gaps in Student Welfare:** A major criticism is that the bill **does not make psychological or career counseling mandatory**, which was a key recommendation in central guidelines. It also fails to specify a **minimum age for student enrollment**.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** The regulatory committees are heavily dominated by state officials, sparking fears of increased **red-tapism and an "inspector raj"** that could hinder the functioning of coaching centers.
- **Potential Economic Impact:** There are concerns that the stringent regulations could disproportionately harm **smaller coaching institutes** and might even compel larger centers to relocate, which would adversely affect the local economy of coaching hubs like Kota.

The Way Forward

- **A Palliative, Not a Cure:** The bill is widely considered a necessary **"first-aid" measure** but not a comprehensive solution to the deeper problems within the Indian education system.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** The fundamental issues are the systemic emphasis on **rote learning in schools** and the significant **discrepancy between the school curriculum and the syllabus of competitive exams**.
- **Systemic Reforms Needed:** For a lasting solution, there is a need to effectively implement the vision of the **New Education Policy (NEP)**. The government must also engage in broad consultations with all stakeholders to tackle the root causes of student distress and suicide.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/rajasthan-coaching-centre-bill-kota-engg-medical-10232718/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 08.09.2025**
TOPIC: External sector and FDI

A complex turn in India's FDI story

The Illusion of High FDI: A Divergence in Flows

- **Headline vs. Reality:** While gross FDI inflows appear robust, reaching **$81 billion in FY 2024-25**, this figure masks a serious underlying issue: a massive surge in the amount of money foreign investors is pulling out of the country.
- **Rapid Rise in Disinvestment:** Post-pandemic, while gross FDI inflows grew at a slow **0.3%** annually, **disinvestments and repatriations** by foreign firms surged at an alarming **18.9%** annual rate.
- **Shrinking Net FDI:** In a recent period, against **$308.5 billion in gross FDI**, foreign investors withdrew **$153.9 billion**. This has caused net FDI inflows to decline sharply.
- **Negligible Retained Capital:** The situation is even more critical when considering that Indian firms are also investing heavily abroad. After adjusting for both foreign disinvestment and outward FDI by Indian firms, the **net retained capital** in the economy fell to a near-zero figure of just **$0.4 billion**, exposing a major systemic gap.

Key Trends and Underlying Challenges

- **Shift to Short-Term Profit-Seeking:** Disinvestment now accounts for over **63% of total FDI activity**. This indicates a fundamental shift away from long-term, strategic industrial projects towards **short-term, profit-seeking ventures**, often routed through specific countries for tax arbitrage.
- **Sectoral Shift Away from Manufacturing:** The manufacturing sector, crucial for job creation and industrial growth, has seen its share of FDI drop to just **12%** due to massive outflows. Investment is now increasingly flowing into **services and rent-seeking sectors** like financial services and energy distribution.
- **Changing Sources of FDI:** A growing portion of FDI is channeled through financial centers like **Singapore and Mauritius** for tax-efficient strategies, while direct investment from traditional industrial partners like the **US, Germany, and UK** is declining.
- **Surge in Outward FDI:** Indian firms are increasingly investing overseas, with outflows growing from **$13 billion in FY 2011-12 to $29.2 billion in FY 2024-25**. This reflects a search for more stable markets, strategic resources, and favorable tax regimes abroad.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

- **Macroeconomic Risks:** The sharp decline in net FDI poses significant risks to the economy. It affects **capital availability for domestic projects**, puts pressure on the **Balance of Payments (BoP)**, weakens **currency stability**, and ultimately reduces the flexibility of the RBI's monetary policy.

- **Need for Systemic Reforms:** India must urgently prioritize deep-rooted reforms that create a stable environment and reward **long-term investment commitments** over short-term speculative capital.

- **Key Areas for Action:** Critical measures include **simplifying complex regulations, ensuring policy consistency and predictability, making significant investments in infrastructure**, and enhancing **education and skill-building** to create a high-value workforce.

The Path to Becoming a True Investment Hub

- **Focus on Quality Over Quantity:** The government and policymakers must shift their focus from celebrating headline **gross FDI figures** to analyzing the **quality, durability, and strategic alignment** of the capital flowing into the country.

- **Attract Committed Capital:** The primary goal should be to attract and retain investment that builds **domestic industrial capability** and aligns with national priorities, such as **advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and high technology**.

- **Create a Trustworthy Ecosystem:** Building a resilient investment hub requires a foundation of **streamlined regulations, world-class infrastructure, unwavering policy stability**, and renewed **trust in legal and administrative institutions**.

- **Invest in Human Capital:** A highly skilled workforce is the most critical enabler for attracting high-value, technology-intensive investments that can drive sustainable long-term growth.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-complex-turn-in-indias-fdi-story/article70022990.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 08.09.2025**
TOPIC: India's GDP growth rates and the challenges to sustaining this momentum.

A complex turn in India's FDI story

The Central Paradox: High Growth, Low Investment

- Despite being the world's fastest-growing major economy, India is experiencing a paradoxical **decline in net foreign capital inflows**.

- Standard economic theory suggests that a high-growth, capital-scarce economy like India should attract significant foreign investment due to higher expected returns.

- However, official Balance of Payments (BoP) data shows that foreign investors are not participating in India's growth story to the extent they have in the past.

The Data Behind the Paradox

- **Exceptional GDP Growth:**

    - India's economy grew at an average rate of **8.2%** from 2021 to 2024, far outpacing other economies like China (5.5%) and the European Union (2.8%).
    - This momentum continued into 2025, with a year-on-year GDP growth of **7.8%** in the April-June quarter.

- **Shrinking Capital Inflows:**
    - Net foreign capital inflows for 2024-25 stood at **$18.3 billion**, the lowest level since the 2008-09 global financial crisis.
    - This is a sharp fall from the peak of **$80.1 billion** recorded in 2020-21.

- **A Closer Look at Recent Flows (2024-25):**
    - Net foreign investment in the fiscal year was a meager **$4.5 billion**.
    - **Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)** data reveals a crucial shift: there was a massive **outflow of $15.7 billion from equity markets**. This was more than offset by a **$19 billion inflow into government bonds and other debt instruments**.
    - **External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs)** have seen a revival, with a net inflow of **$15.8 billion**, reversing the trend of outflows from the previous two years.

Reasons for Declining Foreign Investment

- **Exit of "Mature" Capital:** A significant portion of FDI in the last decade came from **Private Equity (PE) and Venture Capital (VC)** funds. These investors are now exiting by selling their stakes in companies that have matured.
- **High Market Valuations:** The primary driver for these exits is the **attractive and high valuations in the Indian stock market**. This allows foreign investors to monetize their positions and realize substantial profits.
- **Role of Domestic Investors:** The shares being sold by foreign investors are being absorbed by **more bullish domestic investors**, who are confident about the Indian market's prospects, thus facilitating the profitable exits for FPIs.

Implications for India's Economy

- **Stress on the Balance of Payments (BoP):**
    - India consistently runs a large **merchandise trade deficit** (imports > exports), which stood at **$287.2 billion** in 2024-25.
    - This deficit is typically financed by two sources: **surpluses from "invisibles"** (like IT services exports and private remittances) and **net capital inflows**.
    - With capital inflows weakening, it becomes more challenging to finance the overall **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**.

- **External Vulnerabilities:**

        - The threat of **US tariffs** on Indian exports could worsen the trade deficit, increasing the need for foreign capital precisely when it is declining.

- **Pressure on the Rupee:**

    - The combination of capital outflows and worries over global trade has put significant pressure on the currency, causing the **Rupee to hit record lows** against the US dollar.

The Way Forward

- **Improve Business Climate:** To attract and retain long-term investment, India must push for **next-generation reforms** that improve the **ease of doing business**, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and enhance the transparency of business laws.

- **Boost Corporate Earnings:** Policy measures like **GST rate cuts** are intended to boost domestic consumption, which in turn improves corporate earnings—a key factor for foreign investors.

- **Manage Global Uncertainty:** India needs to proactively **negotiate favorable trade deals** with its major partners to mitigate the impact of external shocks like protectionist tariffs.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/why-foreign-investors-are-not-bullish-on-india-10236408/**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 09.09.2025**

TOPIC: India and its neighborhood- relations

Iran and India, ancient civilisations and new horizons

The Crisis of the Western-Led Global Order

- The current global system, long dominated by Western powers like the U.S., is undergoing a profound transformation, widely seen as a **period of crisis**.
- Symptoms of this crisis include frequent **violations of international law**, the unchecked use of military force, **destructive trade wars**, the deliberate weakening of global institutions, and widespread **media manipulation**.
- Traditional instruments of Western dominance—such as **financial control**, a monopoly on science and technology, and the imposition of specific human rights standards—are rapidly **losing their effectiveness**.

The Rise of the Global South and the Role of Ancient Civilisations

- In response, nations of the **Global South** are actively refusing to remain subjects of domination and discrimination.
- They are charting a new developmental path by focusing on **local models, indigenous science and technology**, and strengthening their own defense and security capabilities.
- Ancient civilisations like **Iran and India** have a unique historical role, having shaped global culture for millennia not through conquest, but through the enduring influence of their **governance, philosophy, literature, and art**.

Shared Values and Modern Resilience of Iran and India

- Both nations are guided by a deep-rooted civilisational ethos that values **peace, spirituality, respect for diversity**, and the triumph of good over evil.
- This legacy is reflected in their modern history of resistance: India through its **anti-colonial struggle** and leadership in the **Non-Aligned Movement**, and Iran through the **nationalization of its oil industry** and the Islamic Revolution.
- Both countries have demonstrated remarkable resilience, with Iran enduring **"economic terrorism"** and **"cognitive warfare,"** and India withstanding **unjust pressures**, all while preserving their independence and identity.

Key Issues Championed by the Global South

- **The Palestinian Struggle:** This is presented as the central concern of the Global South, as it is seen to expose the **hypocrisy, supremacism, and brutality** of the Western-led order. The Palestinian resistance is framed as a defense of the right of all Global South nations to resist domination.
- **The Right to Development:** Iran's defense of its right to **peaceful nuclear energy** is portrayed as a broader defense of the entire Global South's **right to development** and technological advancement, free from external control.

Multilateral Initiatives Shaping the New Order

- **BRICS:** This grouping is a key platform for challenging Western economic dominance. It offers an independent, **participatory, and democratic** framework for cooperation, especially in the face of unilateral sanctions and trade wars.
- **INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor):** This project is viewed as more than just a trade route. It is a **"civilisational bridge"** designed to link Eurasia, the Caucasus, India, and Africa, fostering regional stability and bypassing traditional choke points.

A Counter-Narrative to U.S. Interventions

- **In West Asia:** The text argues that the U.S. and its allies have actively sought to prevent the emergence of an indigenous regional security architecture, primarily through their unwavering support for Israel, which has fueled instability across the region.
- **In South Asia:** The U.S. is accused of playing a role in **creating and expanding terrorist groups**, often using the "fight against terrorism" as a pretext for military interventions that serve its own strategic interests.

The Vision for a Just and Equitable World

- The ultimate goal is to forge a new global order founded on **justice, shared interests, and respect for human dignity**.
- This new model would prioritize **participation over domination**, **equality over superiority**, and **self-determination over subjugation**.
- With their deep civilisational wisdom, commitment to strategic independence, and constructive partnership, **Iran and India are positioned as natural leaders** to guide humanity toward this more humane and equitable future.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/iran-and-india-ancient-civilisations-and-new-horizons/article70027027.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 09.09.2025**

TOPIC: Tax Reforms.

GST 2.0 will fuel economic activity

The New GST Rate Structure

- **Simplification of Slabs:** The previous four-slab structure for consumer goods (5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%) has been streamlined into two primary slabs: **5% and 18%**.
- **New Luxury and Sin Tax:** A special rate of **40%** has been introduced for a select few luxury and "sin" goods (like tobacco and soft drinks), replacing the former 28% plus cess system. This move is designed to reinforce the principle of **progressive taxation**, where higher consumption bears a greater tax burden.
- **Mass Tax Reduction:** The majority of goods from the now-eliminated 12% bracket have been moved down to the **5% slab**. Overall, about 90% of the goods considered by the GST Council have seen tax reductions.
- **Tax Exemptions for Essentials:** To make daily life more affordable, **52 essential items** have been made completely exempt from GST.
- **Key Rate Increase for Industry:** The rate on industrial inputs like **coal and lignite** has been increased from 5% to **18%**. However, the compensation cess on these items has been removed, a change aimed at benefiting struggling power distribution companies.

Revenue Implications: A Short-Term Loss for Long-Term Gain

- **Immediate Revenue Shortfall:** The tax restructuring is projected to cause a short-term revenue loss of **₹48,000 crore**, with the effective tax rate across all goods dropping slightly from 11.64% to 11.43%.
- **Long-Term Growth Strategy:** The government is viewing this not as a loss, but as a long-term investment. The policy is based on the classic economic principle of the **"Laffer Curve,"** which suggests that lower, simpler tax rates can ultimately lead to higher overall revenue.
- **Mechanism for Growth:** The expected long-term revenue increase is predicated on two factors:
    1. **Increased Economic Activity:** Lower prices passed on to consumers are expected to boost demand and consumption.
    2. **Higher Tax Compliance:** A simpler system reduces the compliance burden, encouraging more businesses to enter the formal economy and pay taxes voluntarily.

- **Role of Demand Elasticity:** The revenue impact will also depend on consumer behavior. For "sin" goods in the 40% slab, demand is often **inelastic** (doesn't decrease much with price hikes), which could secure a steady revenue stream from this category.

Non-Tax Reforms to Boost Compliance and Trade

- **Operational GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT):** The much-awaited GSTAT has been made operational. This gives businesses a **dedicated, streamlined platform for appeals**, ending years of procedural uncertainty and delays.
- **Boosting Small Exporters:** The threshold limit on low-value export consignments has been removed. This allows small Indian businesses and intermediaries to easily claim **export benefits**, making their goods more competitive in the global market.
- **Simplified Scheme for Small Businesses:** A **voluntary simplified registration scheme** has been introduced for low-risk businesses with a monthly output tax liability under ₹2.5 lakh, making it easier for them to join the formal tax structure.
- **Social Goals via Taxation:** The new rates are also designed to influence consumer behavior, particularly among the youth. By increasing taxes on items like **ultra-processed foods, social media services, and online gaming**, the policy aims to discourage their consumption.

The Way Forward: Ensuring Smooth Implementation

- **Learning from Global Precedent:** Studies by the **OECD and IMF** confirm that countries adopting simpler tax regimes often see a short-term revenue dip followed by **sustained long-term economic growth** driven by better compliance and increased activity.
- **Avoiding Disruption:** The successful implementation of these changes is critical. Even small technical glitches or communication gaps can have a **cascading negative effect** on the entire business ecosystem.
- **Key Implementation Steps:** A smooth transition requires a coordinated effort, including **robust training for tax officials**, the swift resolution of any technical issues on the GST portal, and proactive, clear **communication with businesses** about the changes.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/gst-2-0-will-fuel-economic-activity-10238341/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 10.09.2025**

TOPIC: Powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies: ECI

Election Commission directs Bihar CEO to accept Aadhaar for SIR

The Supreme Court's Crucial Intervention

- In a significant course correction, the Supreme Court directed the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to accept Aadhaar as a valid document for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.
- This timely intervention safeguards the **fundamental right to vote**, ensuring that procedural rules do not lead to the mass disenfranchisement of lakhs of eligible citizens.
- The ruling was a direct response to the ECI's flawed process, which had already resulted in **65 lakh electors** being struck off the draft roll in Bihar.

Exposing Flaws in the ECI's Logic

- **ECI's Initial Stance:** The ECI had argued that Aadhaar was inadmissible because it was merely **proof of residency, not of citizenship**.
- **The Court's Rebuttal:** The Supreme Court highlighted a glaring **inconsistency** in this reasoning. It pointed out that nine of the other 11 documents accepted by the ECI (such as bank passbooks and ration cards) are also not conclusive proof of citizenship.
- **Illogical Exclusion:** The Court found it unjustified to exclude Aadhaar—a document held by nearly **90% of Bihar's population**—while accepting other, less prevalent documents that suffer from the same "flaw."
- **Conditional Acceptance:** The Court has allowed the use of Aadhaar for verification, subject to the ECI's process of confirming its authenticity.

Evidence of a Hasty and Flawed Process

- Statistical analysis of the ECI's draft roll revealed significant anomalies, indicating that the revision process was rushed and improperly executed.
- **Key Anomalies Found:**
    - A **disproportionate removal of women voters** from the rolls.
    - Unusually and implausibly **high death rates** being recorded in certain areas.
    - Questionable "permanent shifts" being cited for **migrant workers and newly married women**, groups that are often temporarily absent from their registered address but remain eligible to vote there.

The Significance and Wider Implications of the Ruling

- **Immediate Impact:** The ruling immediately works to **restore the voting rights** of the 65-lakh people, particularly the poor and marginalized, who were unfairly excluded. It also simplifies the verification process for existing voters.
- **A National Precedent:** This decision sets a crucial **precedent that extends beyond Bihar**, influencing how future electoral roll revisions will be conducted across India.
- **A Message to the ECI:** The verdict reaffirms that the primary goal of electoral roll revision must be **accuracy and inclusivity, not speed**. It calls on the ECI to adopt a more **diligent, humane, and thorough approach**, including proper house-to-house verification.
- **Strengthening Democracy:** By aligning electoral practice with the reality of India's current identity verification system, the ruling ensures that the nation's electoral roll remains accurate, inclusive, and truly representative of its citizenry.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/elections/bihar-assembly/day-after-sc-order-election-commission-directs-bihar-ceo-to-accept-aadhaar-as-12th-document-in-voter-roll-revision/article70030249.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 10.09.2025**

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—amendments, significant provisions and basic structure: The topic is about a proposed **constitutional amendment** and its potential conflict with the **Basic Structure doctrine** (specifically, parliamentary democracy, rule of law, and judicial review).

Bill on removal of ministers — bad in law, liable to misuse

Core Provision of the Bill

- The bill introduces a mechanism to remove a **Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or minister** from office if they remain in judicial or police custody for **30 days** on charges that carry a potential punishment of five years or more.
- This represents a fundamental departure from existing law, as it lowers the threshold for removal from a **post-conviction** stage (as per the Representation of the People's Act) to mere **pre-trial detention**.

How the Bill Undermines Existing Legal Safeguards

- **Contradicts Current Law:** Currently, legislators can only be disqualified after they have been convicted by a court of law. The existing framework has numerous safeguards to prevent the casual arrest of high-ranking elected officials, thereby protecting the people's mandate.
- **Creates a "Constitutional Shortcut":** The bill establishes a pathway to remove ministers without a judicial trial. This violates the spirit of the Supreme Court's judgment in the **A.R. Antulay case (1998)**, which struck down legal shortcuts that bypass the due process rights of an accused under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- **Weakens Collective Responsibility:** The bill gives the Prime Minister or Chief Minister the sole power to advise the removal of a minister under its provisions. This undermines the constitutional principle of **collective responsibility**, reducing the legal sanctity of the entire council of ministers to the discretion of a single individual.

The Risk of Arbitrary Power and Misuse

- **The "30-Day" Loophole:** The 30-day custody period is not a fixed limit. Investigative agencies can potentially prolong detention indefinitely, especially under stringent laws like the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** where securing bail is exceptionally difficult.
- **Shift of Power to Unelected Officials:** The bill effectively shifts the decisive power to dislodge an elected government from the judiciary and the legislature to **unelected officials in investigative agencies**. This creates a significant risk of misuse by the ruling party at the Centre against opposition-led state governments.
- **Ineffectiveness of Reappointment:** While the bill allows for reappointment once custody ends, this provision fails to restore the dignity and public standing of a leader who has been removed from office without being proven guilty.

Violation of the Constitution's Basic Structure

- **Erosion of Parliamentary Democracy:** The bill undermines the core principle that accountability in a democracy flows from **elections, parliamentary scrutiny, and public opinion**, not from pre-emptive disqualifications based on pre-trial detention.
- **Dilution of Judicial Review:** Although a removal order under the bill could be challenged in court, this judicial review is **"post-partum"**—it happens *after* the elected leader has already been removed and the people's mandate has been effectively nullified.
- **Against the Rule of Law:** By linking a severe consequence like removal from office to detention rather than conviction, the bill goes against the **rule of law**, a cornerstone of the Constitution's basic structure.

The Way Forward: Strengthening Democracy, Not Weakening It

- **Role of the JPC:** The Joint Parliamentary Committee, to which the bill has been referred, must conduct extensive consultations with legal experts, political parties, and other stakeholders to align the bill with fundamental constitutional principles.
- **Focus on Speedy Trials:** Instead of creating new avenues for disqualification, the government and judiciary should focus on mechanisms to ensure **speedy trials** for cases involving politicians.
- **Empower the Electorate:** The most democratic solution is to enhance transparency in **candidate disclosures**, empowering voters to make informed decisions about who they elect to office.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/bill-on-removal-of-ministers-bad-in-law-liable-to-misuse-10240299/**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 11.09.2025**

TOPIC: India and its neighbourhood- relations

Generational rage: On the upheaval in Nepal

The Violent Upheaval of September 9, 2025

- On **September 9, 2025**, Nepal was engulfed by violent protests where demonstrators attacked and torched key state institutions, including the **Parliament building, the Supreme Court, and political residences**.
- The immediate trigger for the chaos was a government crackdown a day earlier that resulted in the deaths of **19 young demonstrators**.
- A major concern is that the nature of the protests has shifted from democratic dissent to **"violent nihilism,"** a destructive rage that endangers the country's fragile democratic gains without offering a constructive alternative.

The Deep-Rooted Causes of the "Gen Z Protests"

- The current unrest is the culmination of decades of public frustration with **chronic political dysfunction** and failed governance.
- The promises of a **"Naya Nepal" (New Nepal)**, made after the **Jan Andolan II** movement overthrew the monarchy in 2005, have remained unfulfilled.
- **Political Instability:** Since the 1990s, Nepal has seen **13 heads of government across 30 different tenures**, with mainstream parties consistently prioritizing power-sharing deals over respecting electoral mandates.
- **Economic Failure:** This political chaos has led to severe economic consequences, including an over-reliance on **remittances**, soaring **youth unemployment**, and a failure to diversify the economy. Nepal remains a UN-designated **least developed country**.

The Rise of New (But Untested) Political Forces

- Widespread disillusionment, particularly among the youth, has fueled the rise of **alternative political movements** and figures.
- Key emerging actors include the **Rashtriya Swatantra Party** and popular independents like Kathmandu's Mayor, **Balendra Shah**.
- While these new forces signify a public hunger for change, their commitment to democratic processes is sometimes questionable. For instance, Mr. Shah's call to **dissolve Parliament outright**, rather than demanding new elections, raises concerns about democratic maturity.

- There is a significant danger that Nepal could follow the path of countries like **Bangladesh**, where democratic institutions have seen severe backsliding.

The Path Forward: Averting Democratic Collapse

- **Immediate Priority:** The first and most urgent need is to restore **peace and stability**. The Nepali Army may be required to provide a secure environment for civilian democratic actors to function.
- **A Clear Warning:** The analysis emphasizes that **destroying state and civil institutions is not a form of democratic renewal** but a path to ruin.
- **Long-Term Solution:** To address the root causes of the crisis, Nepal must pursue meaningful **constitutional reforms** that fulfill the promises made during the Constituent Assembly.
- **A Proposed Reform:** One potential change to consider is a shift to a **presidential system** with a directly elected president who is accountable to an elected Parliament. This could offer greater stability and direct accountability than the current parliamentary system.
- **The Ultimate Risk:** Without decisive action to restore peace and enact reforms, the current wave of violent nihilism could completely **erode the foundations of democracy in Nepal**.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/generational-rage-on-the-upheaval-in-nepal/article70034293.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice & Governance **DATE: 11.09.2025**

TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to… Education, Human Resources

Himachal Pradesh declared to be 'fully literate': what does this mean?

Defining "Fully Literate" in the Modern Context

- **Recent Achievement:** States and Union Territories like **Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Ladakh, Mizoram, and Tripura** have recently been declared **'fully literate'** after achieving a literacy rate of over 95%.
- **Current Definition:** The Ministry of Education now defines literacy as the **"ability to read, write and compute with comprehension."** This is a functional definition that also incorporates essential life skills such as **digital and financial literacy**.
- **Alignment with National Goals:** This push aligns with both the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and India's **New Education Policy (NEP), 2020**, which strongly advocates for adult education initiatives to achieve 100% literacy.

The ULLAS Program: The Engine of Full Literacy

- **The Scheme:** The **ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All)** program, launched in 2022, is the primary government initiative responsible for this achievement.
- **The Goal:** Its mission is to achieve **100% literacy by 2030** for all individuals **aged 15 and above** who did not have the opportunity to attend school.
- **The Curriculum:** ULLAS focuses on two key areas:
    1. **Foundational Skills:** Teaching basic reading, writing, and simple arithmetic (addition, subtraction, etc.) equivalent to a **Class 3 level**.
    2. **Practical Life Skills:** Imparting crucial daily skills like reading a calendar and clock, using currency notes, writing cheques, and making **digital transactions**.
- **The Method:** The training is conducted by **student and community volunteers** using mobile apps or offline materials.

How States Achieve "Fully Literate" Status

- **Identification:** The process begins with state governments conducting **door-to-door surveys** to create a comprehensive list of all adults who are not literate.
- **Training and Assessment:** These identified individuals are then enrolled in the ULLAS program. After their training, they must take and pass the **Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)**, a 150-mark exam conducted in their chosen language.
- **The Declaration:** A state is officially declared 'fully literate' only when **all the adults it had identified as non-literate successfully pass the FLNAT**. They then receive a foundational literacy certificate from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

A Note on Historical Literacy Measurement

- **Contrast with the Census:** This new, test-based achievement is different from the traditional literacy rate measured by the Census.
- **Census (2011) Definition:** The Census defined a literate person as anyone **aged 7 and above** who could read and write with understanding in any language. This was typically based on **self-reporting** by households, not a formal test.
- **Past Data:** The 2011 Census recorded India's adult literacy rate at **69.3%**, which later surveys showed had risen to around 77.5% by 2023-24.

The Way Forward: Beyond Foundational Literacy

- **A Crucial First Step:** Achieving 'fully literate' status based on foundational skills is a monumental and necessary first step in national development.

- **The Next Challenge:** The current definition, while practical, focuses on basic knowledge. To ensure holistic development and leverage this newly literate population, the focus must now shift towards achieving **100% employment**.
- **Broadening the Definition:** The way forward is to expand the concept of literacy to include **skill development and vocational learning**, transforming literate citizens into a skilled, employable workforce.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/himachal-pradesh-fully-literate-10242199/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 12.09.2025**

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Reckless escalation: On Israel's attack on Qatar

Israel's Reckless Escalation in Qatar

- On **September 9**, Israel launched an unprecedented airstrike in **Qatar**, targeting senior Hamas leaders. This marked a dangerous escalation of the West Asian conflict.
- The attack represents a new and alarming precedent, as it targeted individuals within a **sovereign third country** that is a key **mediator** in the Gaza conflict.
- Qatar is a crucial U.S. ally and hosts America's **largest military base** in the region, making the Israeli strike a direct challenge to regional stability.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly claimed **"full responsibility,"** stating the strike hit a house where Hamas leaders were reportedly discussing a ceasefire proposal.

Global Condemnation and U.S. Displeasure

- The strike was met with **widespread global criticism and condemnation** for its violation of Qatari sovereignty and its timing.
- In a rare move, even Israel's staunchest ally, the **United States**, expressed its displeasure. The White House reportedly gave assurances to Qatar that such an attack would not be repeated.
- This near-universal condemnation reflects a growing **international unease** with Israel's unchecked military aggression and its destabilizing impact on the wider region.

A Direct Threat to Peace and Regional Stability

- For years, Qatar has hosted Hamas's political leadership with the **tacit approval of the U.S.**, precisely to maintain a channel for diplomacy and facilitate negotiations.
- By attacking negotiators on the mediator's soil, Israel has signaled a clear **unwillingness to pursue a peaceful resolution** to the Gaza conflict, effectively sabotaging the fragile ceasefire talks.
- This aggressive act severely undermines the prospects of **Arab-Israel normalization**, making it politically untenable for countries like Saudi Arabia to engage with Israel.

Broader Implications for India and the World

- Israel's actions risk expanding the Gaza war into the **Persian Gulf**, a region that is a critical global **energy hub**.

- This poses a direct threat to India's core interests, as **millions of Indian expatriates** live and work in the Gulf, and the nation's energy security is heavily dependent on the region's stability.
- While Prime Minister Modi condemned the violation of Qatar's sovereignty, India **avoided directly naming Israel**. The incident highlights the need for India to adopt a stronger, more vocal stance against such regional aggression.
- The situation calls for **coordinated diplomatic efforts** from India and other global powers to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in West Asia.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/reckless-escalation-on-israels-attack-on-qatar/article70038003.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HEALTH **DATE: 12.09.2025**

TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

With GLP-1 drugs in the Indian market, what to look out for

Semaglutide: From Diabetes Drug to Weight-Loss Phenomenon

- **The Drug:** Semaglutide is a medication belonging to the class of **GLP-1 receptor antagonists**. It was originally developed and approved for treating **diabetes**.
- **Mechanism of Action:** It works by mimicking a natural hormone to **slow down digestion**. This helps patients feel full for longer periods, thereby reducing overall calorie intake.
- **Repurposing by Industry:** The weight-loss industry has begun marketing injectable Semaglutide as a cornerstone of **weight-management programs**, usually combined with diet and exercise plans.
- **Market Potential:** The market for weight-loss drugs is projected to reach **$100 billion by 2030**. Demand for Semaglutide is expected to skyrocket after its **patent expires in 2026**, which will allow for the production of cheaper generic versions.

The Benefits and Risks of Using Semaglutide

Positive Health Effects

- Leads to significant **weight loss** and improved **blood sugar control**.
- Reduces the risk of major **cardiovascular events**, improves fatty liver disease, and lowers inflammation markers.
- Can help restore regular menstrual cycles and ovulation in women with **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**, potentially improving fertility when combined with lifestyle changes.

Negative Effects and Concerns

- **Common Side Effects:** Includes **nausea, vomiting, constipation**, and a significant loss of appetite.
- **Serious Health Risks:** Can lead to severe conditions such as **gall bladder disease, pancreatitis, and kidney issues**.
- **Other Concerns:** There is a risk of losing **muscle and lean mass** (not just fat) and experiencing **rapid weight regain** after discontinuing the drug.

Cost Comparison

- Weight loss using Semaglutide is expensive, costing approximately **₹13,000 - ₹16,000 per kilogram lost**.
- Weight loss through structured diet and exercise costs around **₹5,000 - ₹6,000 per kilogram lost** and has the added benefit of building sustainable, long-term healthy habits.

The Public Health Dilemma: A Magic Bullet or a Costly Distraction?

- **Shift in Focus:** An over-reliance on this expensive, imported drug risks diverting government resources and public attention away from more cost-effective and sustainable public health campaigns focused on **diet, exercise, and preventive nutrition**.
- **Equity and Access:** The high cost could worsen the **urban-rural and rich-poor divide** in healthcare. Wealthier urban populations could access the drug, while lower-income and rural groups remain underserved in basic obesity and diabetes care.
- **Medicalization of a Lifestyle Issue:** The most significant risk is reframing obesity from a **lifestyle or behavioral issue** to a purely **drug-dependent condition**. This could discourage community-based health strategies and undermine personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The Way Forward: A Balanced and Integrated Approach

- **Selective and Targeted Use:** Semaglutide should not be a first-line treatment for all. Its use should be targeted for high-risk patients with **coexisting obesity and diabetes**.
- **Integration, Not Replacement:** The drug should be **integrated into public health programs** as a tool to be used alongside—not in place of—fundamental lifestyle interventions.
- **Price Control:** To ensure equitable access for those who need it most, the drug should be brought under a **price control regime** to make it more affordable.
- **The Holistic Goal:** The most effective strategy is to use the drug in conjunction with sustainable lifestyle changes to tackle India's **double burden of malnutrition and rising obesity**.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/glp-1-drugs-indian-market-what-to-look-out-for-10244659/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 13.09.2025**

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Scam space: On social media platforms, online fraud

The Anatomy of a Modern Digital Scam

- **The Threat:** The rapid advancement of **AI-generated deepfakes** combined with the complexities of **cryptocurrency** has created a potent new form of digital fraud that poses a serious threat to the economy and individual investors.
- **A Case in Point:** A recent case in Hyderabad illustrates the danger, where a retired doctor lost **₹20 lakh** to a fraudulent investment scheme. The scam was promoted using a convincing deepfake video of India's **Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman**, which appeared on the victim's Instagram feed.
- **Exploiting Vulnerabilities:** These scams are effective because they exploit a combination of weaknesses in the digital ecosystem:
    - **Low Technical Literacy:** Many users, despite high smartphone penetration, lack the awareness to distinguish between authentic and manipulated content.
    - **Regulatory Gaps:** The largely unregulated nature of cryptocurrency trading provides a fertile ground for fraudulent schemes.
    - **Lure of Quick Profits:** Scammers entice victims with promises of high, guaranteed returns and often show fabricated gains in fake app interfaces to build trust.
- **Operational Complexity:** These scams are notoriously difficult to police as they often operate through **foreign platforms** and use complex crypto wallet chains, allowing the perpetrators to disappear without a trace.

The Role and Responsibility of Social Media Platforms

- **A Passive Approach:** Social media platforms like Instagram currently adopt a **reactive stance**. While they provide advisories and user-reporting tools, they do not engage in the **proactive detection** of fraudulent content.
- **The Consequence of Inaction:** This focus on user self-protection allows scams to circulate widely, entrapping numerous victims before a sufficient number of reports trigger a takedown.
- **Challenges and Excuses:** Platforms often cite the immense **scale of global content** and the difficulty for automated systems to detect sophisticated deepfakes. However, a reluctance to implement intrusive monitoring is also linked to protecting user engagement and advertising profits.

- **A Systemic Failure:** By treating these scams as isolated incidents to be flagged by users, rather than a **systemic vulnerability** that requires a proactive, platform-level solution, these companies are failing to adequately protect their users.

A Three-Pronged Strategy for Mitigation

A comprehensive solution requires coordinated action from all stakeholders:

1. **Government Action and Regulation:**
   - Governments must establish clear **standards for registration, financial disclosure, and operation** for all investment and cryptocurrency platforms.
   - They need to strengthen **cross-border cooperation** with international law enforcement to track and prosecute these global scams.
2. **Enhancing Public Literacy:**
   - Digital and financial literacy must be treated as a **critical public policy priority**.
   - Continuous public awareness campaigns should be integrated into **educational institutions** and media outreach to equip citizens with the skills to identify and avoid such scams.
3. **Mandatory Platform Accountability:**
   - The responsibility must shift from the user to the platform. Social media companies should be held legally accountable for the content they host and be required to **proactively detect and remove fraudulent content**.
   - This requires significant investment in advanced **monitoring and detection systems** capable of identifying deepfakes and scam advertisements before they can cause widespread harm.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/scam-space-on-social-media-platforms-online-fraud/article70041246.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 13.09.2025**

TOPIC: Infrastructure: The project is a prime example of developing critical infrastructure, specifically **Ports** and **Airports**, to boost economic growth and trade.

Great Nicobar Project: A crucial peg in the Viksit Bharat vision

The Great Nicobar Mega-Development Project: An Overview

- **The Project:** The government has proposed a massive **₹81,000 crore mega-development project** for **Great Nicobar Island**, the largest island in the Nicobar archipelago.
- **Key Components:** This ambitious project, conceived by **NITI Aayog**, includes the development of:

    - An **International Container Transshipment Terminal**.
    - An international **Greenfield Airport**.
    - A large-scale **solar power plant**.
    - Two **Greenfield cities**.
- **The Ambition:** The project aims to leverage Great Nicobar's strategic location to develop a hub that can compete with major international port cities like **Singapore**.

The Strategic and Economic Imperative

- **Geostrategic Location:** Great Nicobar is critically located near the **Malacca Strait**, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and a vital maritime choke point. Its southernmost tip, **Indira Point**, is just 145 km from Indonesia.
- **Economic Lifeline:** The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is indispensable for India, as it facilitates **80% of its external trade** and **100% of its energy imports**. Developing maritime infrastructure is therefore essential for economic security.
- **Countering Geopolitical Rivals:** The IOR has become a key arena for the geopolitical contest between global powers like the **U.S. and China**. This project strengthens India's presence and operational capabilities in this crucial region.
- **Maritime Security:** The enhanced infrastructure is vital for tackling a wide array of security challenges, including **piracy, sea-borne terrorism, illegal fishing, and human trafficking**, as well as for managing humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Grave Environmental and Social Concerns

- **Massive Deforestation:** The project necessitates the diversion of approximately **130 km² of pristine tropical rainforest**, which could lead to the felling of an estimated **8 to 10 lakh trees**.
- **Destruction of Coastal Ecosystems:** There are major concerns about the destruction of vital **mangrove belts**, which act as natural shields against tsunamis and cyclones.
- **Threat to Indigenous Tribes:** The project poses a significant threat to the traditional lands, resources, and way of life of the indigenous **Shompen** (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group - PVTG) and **Nicobarese** tribes.
- **Impact on Biodiversity:** Key protected areas, such as the **Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary** (a globally important nesting site for Leatherback sea turtles), have been denotified or will be severely impacted, threatening numerous endemic and protected species.

Government's Stated Mitigation Measures

- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** The government states that a comprehensive EIA was conducted by involving multiple reputed institutions like IITs and the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).

- **Compensatory Afforestation:** To compensate for the felled trees, the government plans to carry out **compensatory afforestation** in the distant and ecologically distinct **Aravali mountain range** in Haryana.
- **Tribal and Local Population:** The official stance is that **tribal habitats will not be disturbed** and that comprehensive development plans are in place for the villages that need to be relocated.
- **Wildlife Conservation:** New conservation plans are reportedly being prepared to protect key local species like the Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodiles, and the surrounding coral reefs.

The Way Forward: A Call for Balance

- **The Core Challenge:** The project's success and legitimacy hinge on the ability to strike a delicate **balance between its strategic and economic objectives and its immense ecological and social costs**.
- **Sustainable and Inclusive Approach:** The path forward must be guided by the principles of **sustainable development**, with the strict implementation of robust **environmental safeguards**.
- **Community Participation:** Ensuring meaningful **participation and consent** from the local and indigenous communities, especially the Shompen and Nicobarese, is critical for the project's long-term success and for mitigating social conflict.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/great-nicobar-project-a-crucial-peg-in-the-viksit-bharat-vision-10246663/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT **DATE: 15.09.2025**

TOPIC: CONSERVATION

Sliver of hope: On survey of saltwater crocodiles, conservation

Context: A Conservation Success Story

- **Recent Survey Findings:** A recent survey conducted in the **Sundarban Biosphere Reserve** has revealed a significant increase in the saltwater crocodile population. This success is not just in numbers but also in the **demographic diversity**, indicating a healthy and breeding population with a good mix of juveniles, sub-adults, and adults.
- **Symbol of a Policy Shift:** This achievement marks a crucial turning point in India's conservation policy, moving from an almost exclusive focus on **"charismatic megafauna"** (like tigers and elephants) to a more inclusive approach that values other critical species.

Evolution of Conservation Policy and Methods

- **Initial Bias:** The early implementation of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, was heavily skewed towards protecting iconic and publicly popular animals, often leaving less-known species like crocodiles with limited targeted action.
- **Targeted Interventions:** The recovery of crocodiles was driven by specific, site-based initiatives. The **Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project**, a captive breeding and release program, was instrumental in reviving the population in the Sundarbans.
- **A Proven Model:** India's conservation strategy, which combines **blanket legal protection** under the Wildlife Act with dedicated **captive breeding and release programs**, has proven to be highly effective for species recovery.
- **Existing Legal Gaps:** Despite this success, current wildlife laws are largely **reactive**. They lack proactive provisions to address modern challenges such as **climate change**, increasing **habitat fragmentation**, and ecological shifts like rising water **salinity**.

The Ecological Importance of Crocodiles

- **Apex Predators & Ecosystem Engineers:** As apex predators, crocodiles play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. They regulate the populations of their prey species and act as scavengers by clearing carcasses, which helps in keeping the waterways clean and preventing the spread of disease.
- **Indicators of Mangrove Health:** The thriving crocodile population serves as a **bio-indicator**, signaling that the Sundarbans' mangrove ecosystem remains healthy and functional despite severe pressures from human activities, frequent cyclones, and rising sea levels.

- **Ecosystem Resilience:** The high survival rate of juvenile crocodiles suggests that their breeding habitats are still viable. A stable age structure within the population enhances the overall **resilience of the mangrove network**, indicating a robust ecosystem.

Lessons for a Broader Conservation Vision

- **Protecting Non-Charismatic Species:** The crocodile's recovery is a powerful lesson that even species lacking popular appeal can be successfully conserved with **sustained legal protection** and well-designed, targeted programs.
- **Beyond Legal Schedules:** While listing species in the Schedules of the Wildlife Act is crucial, it must be supplemented with **proactive, species-specific recovery plans** to address unique threats and needs.
- **Effective Communication:** Conservation outreach must evolve to highlight the ecological importance of neglected species, building public support and awareness beyond just the iconic animals.
- **Integrating Climate Change Adaptation:**
    - Climate change must be a central element of future conservation planning.
    - While crocodiles are relatively tolerant of salinity changes, many other species, particularly **amphibians and freshwater reptiles**, are not.
    - Future strategies must include identifying **"climate refugia"** (areas that can offer stable conditions) and implementing measures like **assisted breeding** for vulnerable species.

Conclusion: Towards an Inclusive Future

The success of the Sundarban crocodile conservation effort demonstrates that a combination of **sustained investment, strong legal safeguards, and site-specific action** yields lasting results. This case study provides a blueprint for a richer, more inclusive biodiversity management strategy in India—one that integrates **climate change adaptation**, develops proactive recovery plans for all types of species, and engages the public in protecting the entire web of life, not just its most famous strands.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/sliver-of-hope-on-survey-of-saltwater-crocodiles-conservation/article70048575.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 15.09.2025**

TOPIC: Provisions related to the roles and responsibilities of the President (**Article 143 - Advisory Jurisdiction**) and the Governor (**Article 163 - Aid and Advice of Council of Ministers, Article 200 - Assent to Bills**).

Issues in SC hearings on timeline for the President and Governors to assent to Bills

Core Issue: Presidential Reference on Assent to Bills

- **Context:** President Droupadi Murmu has sought the Supreme Court's advisory opinion under **Article 143(1)** of the Constitution. This action, known as a **Presidential Reference**, asks the court to clarify the constitutional powers of the President and Governors regarding granting assent to Bills passed by legislatures.
- **Trigger:** The reference was prompted by the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in **April 2024**. In that case, the court, using its extraordinary powers under **Article 142**, declared that the delay by Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi in assenting to 10 Bills was unconstitutional and established timelines for such actions.
- **Fundamental Questions:** The case scrutinizes the delicate **balance of power** between the Union and states, the principle of **separation of powers** between the judiciary and the executive, and the nature of India's **quasi-federal structure**.

Nature and Legality of the Reference

- **State's Argument - Circumventing Judicial Process:**
    - The states argue that the reference is an attempt to **re-litigate a matter already settled** by the court's April judgment.
    - They contend it's a "backdoor appeal" that bypasses the established legal routes for challenging a Supreme Court verdict, which are a **review petition (Article 137)** or a **curative petition**.
    - A review petition must be heard by the same judges who delivered the original verdict. By using Article 143, the Centre is effectively seeking a review by a different bench, which the opposition argues subverts the **integrity of the court** and the principle of **stare decisis** (adhering to precedent).
- **Centre's Justification - Seeking Clarity:**
    - The Union Government maintains that the reference is necessary to **clarify significant constitutional doubts** and ambiguities that have arisen from the April ruling.
    - It argues the matter is of immense **public importance**, thus justifying the use of Article 143(1), and is not an appeal against the previous judgment.

The Constitutional Role of the Governor

- **Primacy of the Elected Government:**
    - **Article 163** of the Constitution mandates that the Governor must act on the **aid and advice of the state's Council of Ministers**.

    - This provision is the bedrock of parliamentary democracy and federalism, ensuring that the will of the elected government, representing the people, is respected. The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld this principle.
- **The "Not a Mere Postman" Argument:**
    - The Centre argues the Governor is not merely a "rubber stamp" or "postman." The phrase "ordinarily bound" by aid and advice implies that in exceptional circumstances, the Governor can exercise discretion.
    - **Data Point:** This power is used sparingly. Between 1970 and 2025, out of approximately 17,000 Bills presented, Governors have withheld assent in only about 20 cases.
    - **Example of Justified Discretion:** In 2004, the Punjab Governor withheld assent to a Bill that unilaterally terminated a tripartite river-water sharing treaty. The Supreme Court later declared that law unconstitutional, vindicating the Governor's action.

The Governor's Veto Power and Timelines

- **The Pocket Veto Dilemma:**
    - The Constitution does not specify a timeline for the Governor to grant assent, leading to the possibility of an indefinite delay, effectively a **"pocket veto."**
    - The Supreme Court has explicitly ruled that a Governor cannot use a pocket veto to stall legislation from an elected government.
- **Colonial vs. Constitutional Discretion:**
    - The Centre drew a parallel to the **Government of India Act, 1935**, where the Governor's withholding of assent was an **absolute veto**.
    - The states countered this by arguing that Governors are not **"Viceroys of the British Government"** and that such sweeping colonial-era discretions were deliberately omitted from the Indian Constitution.
- **Judicial Enforcement of Timelines:**
    - **Constituent Assembly's Intent:** The framers of the Constitution considered and dropped a proposed six-week limit for assent, instead opting for the phrase **"as soon as possible."** This was done to foster dialogue and resolve deadlocks between the Governor and the state government.
    - **Separation of Powers:** The Centre argues that by setting a fixed deadline, the Supreme Court's April ruling encroaches upon the Parliament's exclusive power to amend the Constitution.
    - **Judicial Review, Not Amendment:** The states contend that "as soon as possible" implies a constitutional duty of urgency. They argue the court's timeline doesn't amend the

Constitution but merely defines the point at which unreasonable delay becomes subject to **judicial review**.

States' Right to Seek Redressal (Article 32)

- **Centre's Objection:** The Centre argues that **Article 32** is a mechanism for citizens to enforce their **fundamental rights**, and a state, not being a citizen, cannot invoke it. Furthermore, they claim Governors do not represent the Central government in a capacity that would make them respondents in a writ petition filed by a state.
- **State's Counter:** The states argue that the Governor serves as a **constitutional link between the Union and the state**. In this capacity, the Governor acts as an agent of the central government, making it appropriate for the state to seek judicial remedy against their actions under Article 32.

The Way Forward

The Supreme Court's advisory opinion will be a pivotal moment for Indian federalism. The outcome is expected to affirm that while the President and Governors possess constitutional discretion and are not mere rubber stamps, this power cannot be used arbitrarily to undermine the democratic will of elected legislatures. The judgment will likely solidify the principle of **"reasonable time"** for granting assent, thereby strengthening both democratic processes and the federal balance of power.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/sc-presidential-reference-10250235/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 1: INDIAN SOCIETY **DATE: 16.09.2025**

TOPIC: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

India's economic ambitions need better gender data

Introduction: The Economic Imperative for Gender Inclusion

- **The Unseen Engine of Growth:** India's ambition to become a **$30 trillion economy by 2047** is fundamentally linked to the economic participation of its female population. Currently, women contribute a mere **18% to the national GDP**, a figure significantly lower than the global average.
- **The Scale of the Challenge:** The core issue is not a lack of potential but a lack of inclusion. An estimated **196 million employable women** are currently outside the formal workforce. While the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has shown an encouraging rise to **41.7%**, a closer look reveals that only **18%** of these women are engaged in formal, secure jobs.
- **The Core Problem:** The challenge is twofold: first, creating meaningful economic opportunities, and second, making women's contributions and barriers **visible, measurable, and actionable** for policymakers. Without robust data, half the population remains invisible in economic planning, making inclusive growth an impossible goal.

Uttar Pradesh's WEE Index: A District-Level Diagnostic Tool

- **A Pioneering Initiative:** Uttar Pradesh has launched India's first **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index**, a granular, district-level tool designed to diagnose and address the systemic barriers women face.
- **The Five Economic Levers Tracked:** The index moves beyond simple participation metrics to provide a multi-dimensional view of women's economic lives by tracking five critical pillars:
    1. **Employment:** Measures not just the rate of employment but also the quality, formality, and wage parity of jobs held by women.
    2. **Education and Skilling:** Tracks enrolment in higher education and vocational training programs, focusing on alignment with market-demanded skills.
    3. **Entrepreneurship:** Assesses the number of women-owned enterprises, their access to credit and markets, and their scale of operations.
    4. **Livelihood and Mobility:** Examines women's engagement in local livelihood opportunities (like Self-Help Groups) and their physical mobility, which is crucial for accessing economic opportunities.

5. **Safety and Inclusive Infrastructure:** Measures the availability of safe public spaces, reliable transport, and gender-inclusive infrastructure (e.g., public restrooms, hostels), which are foundational for women to participate in the economy.

- **The Power of Gender-Disaggregated Data:** India has numerous indices for economic and social development, but very few break down the data by gender. The WEE Index addresses this critical gap. Without gender-specific data:
    - **Gaps Remain Hidden:** Systemic problems affecting women are not identified.
    - **Reforms Are Ineffective:** Policies are designed based on generic data and fail to address the unique challenges women face.
    - **Exclusion Becomes Entrenched:** The cycle of invisibility and exclusion continues.

From Data to Action: Practical Applications

- **Case Study: Transforming the Uttar Pradesh Transport Sector:**
    - **The Insight:** Data from the index revealed a minuscule percentage of women employed as bus drivers and conductors.
    - **The Action:** This data-driven insight prompted immediate, targeted interventions. The transport department redesigned its **recruitment strategies** to be more inclusive and addressed a major infrastructure gap by mandating the construction of **women's restrooms** in all bus terminals.
    - **The Result:** These changes, though seemingly modest, were catalytic, proving that gender-specific data is the essential first step to meaningful reform.
- **Moving Beyond Participation Rates to Identify Structural Barriers:**
    - The index uncovers deeper, systemic issues. For instance, data shows that while women constitute over **50% of enrolments in skilling programs**, they represent only a tiny fraction of registered entrepreneurs. Furthermore, their **access to formal credit** is disproportionately low.
    - **The Insight:** This reveals the problem isn't a lack of willingness or participation from women, but a **structural bottleneck in the financial and enterprise support systems** that prevents them from translating their skills into viable businesses.

Integrating a Gender Lens Across All Governance

- **A Universal Mandate:** Gender-disaggregated data cannot be an afterthought; it must become a **universal and normative** practice. Every Management Information System (MIS) in every government department—from MSMEs and transport to housing and energy—must include gender breakdowns as a default.

- **Empowering Local Governments:** The goal is to build capacity at the district and block levels. Local officials must be trained to **collect, analyze, and use this data** to design and implement targeted **Gender Action Plans**.
- **From Headcounts to High-Quality Metrics:** The focus must shift from basic counts (how many women are enrolled/employed) to tracking more sophisticated metrics like **job retention rates, promotion to leadership roles, post-maternity re-entry rates, and the quality of employment**.
- **Gender Budgeting as a Core Principle:** This data-centric approach is the foundation of effective gender budgeting. The principle is simple: **"You cannot budget for what you do not measure."** A gender lens must be applied not just to women-specific welfare schemes but to every rupee spent on infrastructure, education, and energy to ensure equitable outcomes.

A Replicable Framework for National Growth

- **A Blueprint for Other States:** Uttar Pradesh's WEE Index provides a **replicable and scalable framework** that other states can adopt. States like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha, which have ambitious trillion-dollar economic targets, cannot achieve them without unlocking their "gender dividend."
- **Conclusion: A New Paradigm for an Old Problem:** India's gender gap is a long-standing challenge, but the response to it must fundamentally evolve. The WEE Index represents a paradigm shift—from a welfare-based approach to a data-driven, economic empowerment model. It is the crucial starting block that makes the invisible visible, providing a clear roadmap to move women from the margins to the mainstream of India's economic growth story.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-economic-ambitions-need-better-gender-data/article70052746.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT **DATE: 16.09.2025**

TOPIC: Conservation, and Sub-topic: Biodiversity, Wildlife Conservation, and Species Reintroduction Programs.

How Madhya Pradesh is planning for a cheetah mating programme in Gandhi Sagar

Rationale for Establishing a Second Population

- **De-risking the Project:** The primary goal is to mitigate the risks associated with having the entire reintroduced population in a single location, **Kuno National Park**. A single site is vulnerable to catastrophic events like disease outbreaks or natural disasters, which could wipe out the entire population.

- **Ensuring Genetic Viability:** A second, geographically separate population is essential to create a **meta-population**. This allows for a wider genetic pool, reducing the long-term risks of **inbreeding** and enhancing the species' resilience and adaptability.
- **Expanding Carrying Capacity:** Kuno National Park has a finite carrying capacity. As the cheetah population grows, establishing new sites is crucial to accommodate them and allow for natural dispersal and territory formation.
- **Site Selection - Gandhi Sagar:** The **Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary** was identified after a thorough assessment by the NTCA and WII. Its suitability is based on:
    - **Habitat:** It offers extensive grassland and open forest habitats, which are ideal for cheetahs.
    - **Prey Base:** The sanctuary has a viable prey population (like chital, sambar, and nilgai), which is being further augmented before the cheetahs' arrival.

Cheetah Reproduction and Life Cycle

- **Sexual Maturity:** Female cheetahs can begin to conceive around the age of **2.5 years**. Males typically begin mating later, between **4 and 8 years**, once they are strong enough to establish and defend their territory.
- **Mating Behavior:** Cheetahs are **polygamous**, with both males and females having multiple partners. A receptive female advertises her status through urine marking and specific behaviors like rolling and rubbing, attracting males in the vicinity.
- **Gestation and Cub Rearing:**
    - The gestation period lasts for about **three months (90-95 days)**.
    - A female gives birth to a litter of up to **six cubs** in a secluded, safe location like dense bushes or a rocky crevice.
    - The mother is the sole caregiver, staying with her cubs for the first few months to provide food, water, and critical protection from predators.

Key Conservation Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

- **High Cub Mortality:** A major threat to the program's success is the naturally high mortality rate of cheetah cubs.
    - **The Threat:** Predators like **leopards and hyenas** are the primary cause of cub deaths. Mothers often lose entire litters despite their best efforts.
    - **The Strategy:** Before translocation, authorities are actively managing the predator density in Gandhi Sagar and ensuring the prey base is abundant enough to divert predators' attention away from cheetah cubs.

- **Human-Animal Conflict:** The sanctuary is surrounded by agricultural and pastoral communities, creating potential for conflict.
    - **The Threat:** Cheetahs may prey on livestock, leading to retaliatory killings and negative perceptions among local communities.
    - **The Strategy:** A multi-pronged approach is being implemented:
        1. **Creation of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs):** These act as buffer areas around the sanctuary to minimize negative interactions.
        2. **Community Engagement:** Extensive awareness programs are being conducted to educate villagers about cheetah behavior and the importance of coexistence.
        3. **Prompt Compensation:** A robust mechanism for providing fair and timely compensation for any livestock losses is being put in place.

Monitoring and Ecological Significance

- **Scientific Monitoring:** The relocated cheetahs will be under constant surveillance to track their progress.
    - **Tools:** This will be done using advanced technology like **satellite radio collars**, an extensive network of **camera traps**, and dedicated ground patrolling teams.
    - **Parameters:** Experts will closely monitor the cheetahs' adaptation, hunting success, movement patterns, reproductive behavior, and overall health.
- **Restoring Ecological Balance:** The initiative is not just about saving a species but also about restoring a vital ecological function. Cheetahs are **keystone predators** in grassland ecosystems, playing a crucial role in controlling herbivore populations and maintaining the health and balance of the entire habitat.

Way Forward

The success of establishing this second population hinges on a **collaborative and adaptive management approach**. It requires continuous engagement between conservation authorities (Forest Department, NTCA, WII), independent scientists, academics, and, most importantly, local community volunteers. A successful translocation to Gandhi Sagar will be a major milestone, solidifying the long-term survival prospects of cheetahs in India and reinforcing the country's leadership in global conservation efforts.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/madhya-pradesh-cheetah-mating-gandhi-sagar-kuno-10245508/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 17.09.2025**

TOPIC: Role of Governor, Centre-State Relations, and Separation of Powers.

Constitutional clarity: On hearings on the Presidential Reference

Introduction: Reaffirming Constitutional Principles

- **Context:** The hearings on the Presidential Reference, initiated after the Supreme Court's landmark **April 8, 2025 judgment**, served as a platform to re-examine and solidify the constitutional powers of Governors and the President in assenting to State Bills.
- **Core Objective:** A five-judge Constitution Bench addressed 14 specific questions, with the overarching goal of reinforcing the principle that **indefinite delays by Governors are unconstitutional** and fundamentally undermine democratic governance and the federal structure.

The Heart of the Matter: Gubernatorial Delay as a Threat to Democracy

- **Echoing the April Judgment:** The proceedings consistently upheld the core finding of the April 2025 ruling: Governors do not possess unlimited discretion to withhold assent indefinitely. Their actions must align with constitutional intent, which respects the will of an elected legislature.
- **Judicial Stance on Inaction:** Chief Justice of India **B.R. Gavai** articulated the judiciary's role powerfully, questioning if the Court should remain **"powerless"** while a Governor's inaction effectively paralyzes a state's legislative function. This framed the issue not as a mere procedural delay but as a direct challenge to democratic functioning.

Key Arguments and Judicial Scrutiny

- **Rejecting "Constitutional Silence" as Discretion:**
  - **The Argument:** The Centre contended that since **Articles 200 and 201** do not specify a timeline for assent, it implies that Governors have unlimited discretion (a "pocket veto").
  - **The Court's Rejection:** The Bench firmly dismissed this interpretation. It asserted that constitutional silence cannot be read as a grant of arbitrary power. Instead, it must be interpreted within the broader framework of responsible governance and federalism, implying that action must be taken within a **reasonable time**.
- **Challenging the "Check on Hasty Legislation" Narrative:**
  - **The Argument:** The Solicitor-General positioned the Governor as a necessary **"check on hasty legislation"** passed by state assemblies.
  - **The Court's Counter:** This view was seen as fundamentally conflicting with democratic principles. **Justice Vikram Nath** explicitly stated that Governors **"cannot sit over the**

wisdom of the legislature indefinitely," reinforcing that the legislative mandate comes from the people, not the nominated head of state.

Federalism, State Autonomy, and Selective Application

- **The Political Dimension:** Counsel for Kerala pointed out a critical pattern: prolonged delays in assent have been a significant issue almost exclusively in **Opposition-ruled states**. This suggested that the problem stems not from constitutional ambiguity but from the **selective and politically motivated use** of the Governor's office.
- **Inconsistency in Judicial Review:** The Bench highlighted a legal paradox. The judiciary can review the imposition of **President's Rule (Article 356)**, a far more drastic measure. It questioned why similar scrutiny should not apply to a Governor's inaction under **Article 200**, which can similarly cripple a state's governance and autonomy.
- **Upholding the Federal Balance:** The hearings underscored that the framework established in the April judgment is constitutionally sound, as it preserves **cooperative federalism** and respects the legislative autonomy of states.

The Centre's Legal Strategy and Constitutional Boundaries

- **The Choice of Article 143:** The Centre's decision to seek an advisory opinion via a **Presidential Reference (Article 143)**, instead of using standard judicial remedies like a review or curative petition, raised questions about its intent.
- **Advisory vs. Binding Precedent:** Legal scholars emphasize that an advisory opinion under Article 143 is **non-binding**. It cannot override a binding judgment delivered under **Article 141**, which is considered the law of the land. This suggests the reference may have been a political tool rather than a genuine quest for legal clarity.
- **A Call for Constitutional Propriety:** The Court's final opinion is expected to guide the Centre to respect established constitutional boundaries and avoid actions that disrupt the delicate federal balance.

Conclusion: A Victory for Democratic Governance

The hearings have powerfully reaffirmed the April 2025 judgment as a cornerstone of India's federal structure. By rejecting the notion of indefinite gubernatorial discretion and emphasizing the primacy of the elected legislature, the Supreme Court has protected the core of democratic governance. The clear message is that the Centre must operate within these constitutional limits to preserve the spirit of **cooperative federalism**.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/constitutional-clarity-on-hearings-on-the-presidential-reference/article70057096.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: DISASTER MANAGEMENT **DATE: 17.09.2025**

TOPIC: study of natural disasters like **flash floods, cloudbursts, and landslides** in the Himalayan region.

Topography, climate change: Behind the heavy rain in Uttarakhand, Himachal

The Interplay of Topography, Geology, and Climate Change

The recent devastating rainfall events in the Himalayas are not random occurrences but the result of a dangerous convergence of the region's inherent natural vulnerabilities with accelerating human-induced pressures.

1. Natural Drivers of High Rainfall & Vulnerability

- **The Orographic Effect:** The Himalayas act as a colossal natural barrier to the moisture-laden Southwest monsoon winds. This process, known as **orographic lift**, forces the winds to rise, cool, and condense, resulting in intense, concentrated rainfall on the windward slopes. This is different from the more spread-out rainfall seen in the plains.
- **Fragile Geology:** The Himalayas are geologically young and tectonically active. The terrain is composed of **unstable, fragile rock formations** and loose soil. This inherent instability makes the steep slopes highly susceptible to **landslides**, which are easily triggered when intense rainfall saturates the ground, increasing its weight and reducing friction.

2. The Climate Change Multiplier

Climate change is not just a future threat; it is actively amplifying the region's vulnerabilities in several ways:

- **Shift in Rainfall Patterns:** The traditional pattern of steady, distributed monsoon rains is being replaced by **short, erratic, and extremely intense bursts**. These cloudburst-like events overwhelm the natural drainage capacity of the mountain terrain, leading to immediate and massive surface runoff and flash floods.
- **Interaction of Weather Systems:** Global warming is altering large-scale atmospheric circulation.
    - **Western Disturbances:** These winter weather systems, originating in the Mediterranean, are shifting southward and interacting with the summer monsoon. This unusual convergence creates highly unstable and complex weather conditions, making rainfall prediction difficult and leading to extreme precipitation events.
    - **Bay of Bengal Systems:** Low-pressure systems from the Bay of Bengal are now traveling further north than their normal track, pumping excessive moisture directly into the Himalayan region.

- **Influence of Arctic Warming:** The rapid melting of Arctic sea ice has a cascading effect (**teleconnection**) on global weather. It can disrupt atmospheric patterns like the jet stream, further increasing the variability and intensity of the Indian monsoon.

3. The Role of Anthropogenic Stressors

While natural factors make the Himalayas vulnerable, unplanned human activities have drastically reduced the region's resilience and magnified the scale of disasters.

- **Destabilizing Infrastructure Projects:**
  - **Roads:** Haphazard road construction, often using the "cut and fill" method, weakens the fragile slopes by removing their base support.
  - **Dams and Tunnels:** Blasting and excavation for hydropower projects create fractures in the rock, further destabilizing the terrain.
- **Unplanned Urbanization:** Haphazard construction along riverbanks and on steep slopes obstructs natural water channels, forcing floodwaters into human settlements.
- **Deforestation:** The removal of forest cover strips the soil of its natural binder. This leads to increased soil erosion and reduces the land's capacity to absorb rainwater, thereby increasing runoff and the risk of landslides.

The Way Forward: A Strategy for Resilience

Addressing this escalating crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that respects the region's ecological fragility.

- **Sustainable Development:** All infrastructure projects must be preceded by rigorous **geological and environmental impact assessments**. There must be a shift towards promoting **regulated tourism and sustainable construction** practices.
- **Climate-Resilient Policies:** Future urban planning, land-use policies, and infrastructure design must explicitly incorporate climate change projections to build long-term resilience.
- **Strengthened Early Warning Systems:** Investment in advanced weather forecasting technologies like Doppler radars, coupled with a network of landslide monitoring systems, is crucial for providing timely alerts.
- **Enhanced Disaster Preparedness:** Building the capacity of local communities and disaster response forces is essential to minimize loss of life and property when disasters strike.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/topography-climate-change-behind-heavy-rains-in-himalayas-10254105/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 18.09.2025**

TOPIC: Role of Governor, Centre-State Relations, and Separation of Powers.

Letter and spirit: On Supreme Court and Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025 judgment

Introduction: A Judgment of Constitutional Balance

The Supreme Court's judgment on the **Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025**, delivered on September 15, 2025, is a significant ruling that navigates the complex intersection of **religious autonomy, state regulation, and constitutional law**. Instead of delivering a blanket verdict, the Court adopted a nuanced, middle-path approach by selectively **staying** some controversial provisions while **upholding** others, thereby preserving the Act's core while addressing the most contentious concerns.

The Core Dispute: Regulation vs. Interference

- **Government's Position:** The Union Government defended the amendments as a necessary administrative reform to enhance **transparency, curb corruption, and prevent the widespread misuse and encroachment** of valuable waqf properties across the country.
- **Critics' Position:** Opponents, including political parties and various Muslim community organizations, argued that the Act was an act of **arbitrary state interference** in the religious affairs of a minority community, designed to undermine their autonomy in managing their institutions.

Provisions Stayed by the Court: Protecting Autonomy and Due Process

The Court placed a temporary hold on provisions that were deemed prima facie arbitrary or in conflict with foundational constitutional principles.

- **Requirement of a Five-Year 'Practising' Muslim:** The Court stayed the rule that only a person who has been a practising Muslim for at least five years can dedicate property as waqf. This was likely done because the term 'practising' is subjective, vague, and nearly impossible to prove or disprove legally, making the provision ripe for arbitrary application.
- **Adjudicatory Powers of the District Collector:** The provision empowering the District Collector, an executive officer, to decide on waqf property disputes was stayed. This was a crucial intervention to protect the **doctrine of separation of powers**, as such quasi-judicial functions are typically reserved for specialized bodies like Waqf Tribunals or the judiciary.
- **Representation of Non-Muslims:** While the amendment allowed for non-Muslim members, the Court **capped their numbers** (4 in the Central Council, 3 in State Boards). This decision strikes a balance between promoting inclusivity and ensuring that the administrative bodies retain their essential minority character, with management primarily in the hands of the community they serve.

Provisions Upheld by the Court: Ensuring Public Interest and Legality

The Court affirmed amendments that were seen as necessary to prevent misuse and align the law with broader constitutional principles.

- **Abolition of 'Waqf-by-User':** The Court upheld the removal of a provision that allowed property to be declared as waqf based merely on long-term use for religious or charitable purposes, even without a formal deed. This measure is aimed at preventing **frivolous and unsubstantiated claims** on public and private lands.
- **Protection of Existing Rights:** Critically, the Court ensured this change would apply only **prospectively**. This means all properties already registered under the "waqf-by-user" clause before April 8, 2025, are protected, preventing widespread legal chaos.
- **Exclusion of Protected Monuments and Tribal Lands:** The judgment affirmed that properties designated as **protected monuments** under the ASI or those belonging to **Scheduled Tribes** cannot be claimed as waqf. This upholds the primacy of national heritage preservation laws and constitutional safeguards for tribal land rights over religious claims.

Broader Constitutional Implications

- **Balancing Religious Freedom and State Oversight:** The verdict reinforces the principle that while religious autonomy is a fundamental right, it is not absolute. The state has a legitimate interest in regulating the administration of religious endowments to ensure transparency and prevent corruption, especially when vast resources are involved.
- **Presumption of Constitutionality:** In refusing to freeze the entire Act, the Court applied the established legal doctrine of **presumption of constitutionality**, which holds that a law passed by Parliament is considered valid unless proven otherwise.
- **A Call for Political Consensus:** The judgment implicitly sends a strong message to the executive. In a diverse democracy, laws that deeply impact a particular community should not be pushed through with a partisan majority. They require a process of **consultation, dialogue, and confidence-building** to achieve wider acceptance and legitimacy.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/letter-and-spirit-on-supreme-court-and-waqf-amendment-act-2025-judgment/article70060505.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 1: ART & CULTURE **DATE: 18.09.2025**

TOPIC: Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times

Tracing history of Sarnath: from Buddha's first sermon to emblem of Indian republic

The Dual Identity of Sarnath: A Sacred Past, A Secular Present

Sarnath holds a unique dual significance in the Indian imagination. It is revered globally as a sacred pilgrimage site where Buddhism was born, and simultaneously cherished domestically as the source of the national emblem of the modern Indian Republic. Its recent nomination to the **UNESCO World Heritage List** and the move to correctly credit its initial discoverer, **Babu Jagat Singh**, highlight its enduring importance.

The Birthplace of Buddhism

- **The First Sermon (Dhammachakrapravartana):** In the 6th century BCE, after attaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, Gautama Buddha chose the deer park at Sarnath (then known as **Mrigadava** or **Rishipatna**) to deliver his first sermon. This pivotal event set in motion the "Wheel of Dharma."
- **Foundation of Buddhist Doctrine:** It was here that the Buddha first articulated his core teachings to his first five disciples, laying down the foundational principles of Buddhism:
    - **The Four Noble Truths:** The truth of suffering (Dukkha), its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation.
    - **The Eightfold Path:** The practical guide to achieving enlightenment, comprising right understanding, right intent, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- **Establishment of the Sangha:** This first sermon marked the formal beginning of the **Buddhist Sangha** (the community of monks), making Sarnath the birthplace of institutional Buddhism.

A Center of Royal Patronage and Artistic Excellence

- **The Mauryan Era:** In the 3rd century BCE, Emperor **Ashoka**, after embracing Buddhism, visited Sarnath and erected several monuments. The most iconic of these was a highly polished sandstone pillar topped by the magnificent **Ashokan Lion Capital**. This sculpture of four lions facing the four cardinal directions, originally crowned by a large Dharma Chakra (Wheel of Law), symbolized the universal spread of the Buddha's teachings.
- **The Gupta and Kushana Periods:** Sarnath continued to flourish for centuries under the patronage of later dynasties like the Kushanas and Guptas. They expanded the site, building new monasteries and refurbishing existing stupas, most notably the grand **Dhamekh Stupa**.
- **An International Hub of Learning:** During this golden age, Sarnath became a world-renowned center for Buddhist art, culture, and philosophy, attracting scholars and pilgrims from across Asia, including the famous Chinese travelers **Faxian** and **Xuanzang**, whose writings documented its splendor.

The Period of Decline and Oblivion

- **Gradual Decline:** From the late medieval period, the rise of Brahmanical Hinduism and a decline in royal patronage led to the gradual deterioration of Buddhist institutions.
- **The Final Blow:** The widespread destruction during the **Turkish invasions of the 12th century**, particularly by the forces of Qutub-ud-din Aibak, was the death knell for Sarnath. The monasteries were razed, monks were dispersed, and the sacred monuments were left to decay.
- **Centuries of Neglect:** After this destruction, Sarnath was abandoned and eventually buried under layers of soil, its glorious history forgotten and its location lost to time.

Rediscovery and Rebirth as a National Symbol

- **The Rediscovery:** The site was first accidentally unearthed in **1787-88 by Babu Jagat Singh**, the Diwan of the Raja of Benares, whose workers were sourcing bricks. Systematic archaeological work began in the 19th century under **Alexander Cunningham**, the first Director-General of the ASI.
- **The Crowning Discovery:** The most significant finding was the unearthing of the almost perfectly preserved **Ashokan Lion Capital** in 1905 by archaeologist Friedrich Oertel.
- **Adoption as the National Emblem:** In 1950, the newly independent Republic of India adopted this Lion Capital as its **official state emblem**. The wheel at its base was placed in the center of the national flag, and the motto **"Satyameva Jayate"** (Truth Alone Triumphs), from the Mundaka Upanishad, was inscribed below it. This act permanently linked Sarnath's ancient spiritual heritage with the secular, democratic identity of modern India.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/tracing-history-sarnath-from-buddhas-first-sermon-to-emblem-of-indian-republic-10255804/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT **DATE: 19.09.2025**

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies**.**

Holistic approach: On dealing with North India's stubble burning

An all-round strategy is necessary for India to effectively manage stubble burning, as punitive measures like prosecuting farmers are insufficient to address the deep-rooted socio-economic and administrative challenges contributing to North India's air pollution crisis.

Context: The Stubble Burning Crisis

Supreme Court's Stance: The Supreme Court of India has indicated it may consider the prosecution of farmers who practice stubble burning to clear their fields for the next (Rabi) crop season.

Core Issue: Stubble burning is a primary contributor to the severe air pollution that engulfs northern India, particularly Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, during the post-monsoon months of October and November.

Causes of Severe Air Pollution in North India

Meteorological Factors: Adverse weather conditions, including low wind speed and temperature inversion following the monsoon, trap pollutants close to the ground, leading to the formation of a thick smog layer.

Multiple Pollution Sources: The crisis is not caused by a single factor but is a cumulative result of emissions from various sources:

Vehicular and Industrial Emissions: A constant source of pollutants like Particulate Matter (PM2.5), NOx, and SOx.

Open Garbage Burning: Unregulated burning of municipal solid waste releases toxic fumes.

Agricultural Waste: The large-scale burning of paddy residue (stubble) in a short window of time releases massive amounts of smoke and particulate matter into the atmosphere.

Government Interventions and Institutional Failures

Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):

Mandate: The CAQM was established as a statutory body to ensure better coordination and a unified approach among the states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to tackle air pollution.

Acknowledgement: Its creation recognized that air pollution is a transboundary problem that cannot be solved by any single state in isolation.

Shortcomings of the CAQM:

Lack of Independence: The commission has failed to operate independently, often succumbing to political pressure from state governments and public opposition.

Case Study (Vehicle Ban): The CAQM ordered a ban on end-of-life petrol and diesel vehicles in the NCR. However, following political backlash, the order was first postponed and then diluted to apply only to areas outside Delhi's municipal limits, showcasing its weak enforcement capability.

Failure on Stubble Burning: The CAQM could not effectively convince the judiciary of the complex nature of the problem, which stems from:

Stubborn Agricultural Practices: Long-standing methods used by farmers.

Weak State Enforcement: Inability of states like Punjab and Haryana to enforce bans.

Adverse Agricultural Economics: High debt and lack of economically viable alternatives leave farmers with no choice but to burn stubble.

Lack of Transparency: The commission has been accused of withholding critical information. For instance, it did not challenge Punjab's misleading claims of a reduction in farm fires when the data indicated a rise in such incidents.

Way Forward: A Holistic Strategy

Instead of resorting to drastic and often counter-productive punitive measures like jailing farmers, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is required.

Effective Legal Framework: The principle of "polluter pays" should be applied consistently, ensuring that no section of society, whether farmers or industries, is considered above the law.

Farmer-Centric Solutions:

Better Incentives: Provide financial support, subsidies on happy seeders and other machinery, and a viable market for crop residue (e.g., for bio-energy plants) to make alternatives to burning more attractive.

Addressing Economic Distress: Tackle the root cause of the issue by addressing farm debt and improving the overall economic condition of farmers.

Strict and Unbiased Enforcement: Existing environmental laws must be enforced strictly and uniformly across all states without political interference.

Transparency and Accountability:

Transparent Reporting: Ensure accurate and real-time data on farm fires and pollution sources is publicly available.

Realistic Targets: Set achievable and scientifically-backed targets for reducing pollution.

Systemic Changes: The focus must shift from short-term, reactive "carrot-and-stick" policies to long-term, sustainable systemic solutions that integrate agricultural, economic, and environmental policies.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/holistic-approach-on-dealing-with-north-indias-stubble-burning/article70065958.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 19.09.2025**

TOPIC: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of other countries on India's interests; India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence pact: What it means for the two countries

Background and Rationale for the Agreement

Immediate Trigger: The pact was signed in the aftermath of an **Israeli military strike in Qatar**, which created a sense of urgency among Arab and Muslim nations.

Strategic Shift: This is the first major defense pact signed by a key Arab nation with a **nuclear-armed state (Pakistan)**, signaling a shift in regional security alignments.

Security Vacuum: A **decreasing US military presence** in the Arabian Peninsula has led to perceptions of weakened security guarantees for Gulf states against regional rivals like Israel and Iran.

Mutual Defense Clause: The agreement contains a crucial provision stating that an **aggression against one country will be considered an aggression against both**, establishing a framework for joint deterrence.

The Historical Saudi-Pakistan Relationship

Early Military Cooperation (1960s): The foundation was laid when Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia to provide training and protection.

Key Security Interventions: Pakistani Special Forces played a critical role in helping Saudi authorities retake the **Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979**.

Formalizing Ties (1982): The **Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement** institutionalized the relationship, allowing for Pakistani troop deployment, training, and advisory support on Saudi soil.

Defense Trade: Saudi Arabia has historically been a key buyer of Pakistani arms, and Pakistan has been instrumental in training the Royal Saudi Air Force.

Economic Lifeline: Saudi Arabia has consistently provided crucial financial support to Pakistan, especially during economic crises and after international sanctions were imposed due to its nuclear program. This includes oil at concessional rates and direct cash deposits.

People-to-People Ties: A large Pakistani diaspora in Saudi Arabia sends significant remittances, making it a vital economic partner.

Significance of the Pact for Pakistan

Economic Relief: In the face of high external debt and IMF dependency, this pact is expected to yield **economic dividends**, including Saudi investment in Pakistan's defense industry.

Strategic Leverage: It strengthens Pakistan's position in the **West Asian security architecture** and enhances its role as a key security provider in the Muslim world.

Military Modernization: The agreement opens doors for **joint ventures and technology transfers**, helping Pakistan upgrade its military capabilities despite budgetary constraints.

Political and Diplomatic Prestige: A formal defense alliance with a regional powerhouse like Saudi Arabia enhances Pakistan's international standing.

Significance of the Pact for Saudi Arabia

Diversifying Security Partnerships: The pact helps Saudi Arabia reduce its traditional **over-dependence on the US** for security by gaining a reliable and professional military partner.

Countering Regional Threats: Pakistan's combat experience is highly valued by Riyadh for addressing regional instability, particularly tensions with Iran and the conflict in Yemen.

Alignment with Vision 2030: The goal of creating a secure environment for economic diversification under **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030** is supported by strengthening defense capabilities with trusted allies.

Maintaining Regional Balance: The pact allows Saudi Arabia to maintain its strong, traditional ties with Pakistan while simultaneously developing its strategic partnership with India.

Saudi Arabia-India Relations and India's Response

Strong Economic Ties: India is Saudi Arabia's **second-largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade standing at nearly **$43 billion** in FY 2023-24. Saudi Arabia is a critical source of energy imports for India.

Strategic Partnership: The relationship was elevated to a **"Strategic Partnership"** in 2010, and high-level engagements have been frequent.

Diplomatic Neutrality: Saudi Arabia has often acted as a balanced mediator during India-Pakistan tensions and has refrained from taking sides, strengthening its role as a regional peace broker.

Large Indian Diaspora: A robust community of **2.7 million Indians** in Saudi Arabia contributes significantly to both economies.

India's Cautious Stance: India has responded cautiously, stating it will carefully study the pact's implications for its national security and regional stability.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/saudi-arabia-pakistan-defence-pact-significance-10257728/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS **DATE: 20.09.2025**

TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Shifting sands: On the defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan

Introduction: A New Security Chapter in West Asia

- A **mutual defence agreement** has been signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, marking a significant development in the region's security dynamics.
- This pact formalizes a long history of military cooperation and financial support, signaling a strategic recalibration amid **waning U.S. security guarantees** and ongoing regional turbulence.

Strategic Significance of the Agreement

- **Core Principle:** The pact is founded on the principle that **"any aggression against one is aggression against both,"** creating a formal military alliance.
- **Institutionalizing a Historic Partnership:** It solidifies a deep-rooted, symbiotic relationship between two key Islamic nations:
    - **Saudi Arabia:** The custodian of Islam's holiest mosques, wielding immense religious and political influence in the Muslim world.
    - **Pakistan:** The Islamic world's only declared **nuclear power**, providing a significant military and deterrent capability.
- **Past Cooperation:** The agreement builds on decades of informal ties, which included:
    - Pakistan providing military training and personnel to Saudi armed forces.
    - Saudi Arabia offering extensive financial assistance to Pakistan, including purported support for its nuclear program.

The Shifting Regional Security Landscape

- **Immediate Context:** The agreement was announced shortly after an Israeli bombing in Qatar, highlighting the increasing volatility and unpredictability of the region.
- **Erosion of U.S. Credibility:** A primary driver for this pact is the declining confidence in the U.S. as a reliable security guarantor.
    - **2019 Saudi Oil Attack:** The muted U.S. response to the attack on Saudi oil facilities by Iranian-backed forces was a turning point, making Riyadh question the U.S. commitment to its security.
    - **Israel's Strike on Qatar:** The recent Israeli strike on Qatar, which hosts America's largest military base in the region, further accelerated this realignment, demonstrating the limits of U.S. influence.

- **End of an Era:** The pact reflects the breakdown of the old **U.S.-centric security framework** that has dominated West Asia for decades, forcing regional powers to seek alternative alliances.

Strategic Realignments and Broader Implications

- **Faltering of the Abraham Accords:**
    - The Accords were intended to unite Arab monarchies and Israel against their common adversary, Iran, with Saudi participation being the ultimate goal.
    - However, Hamas's 2023 attack and Israel's subsequent war in Gaza derailed the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- **A Signal to Washington and Tel Aviv:** With this pact, Saudi Arabia is clearly signaling its intent to **diversify its alliances** and reduce its strategic dependence on the United States.
- **Benefits for Pakistan:**
    - It gains critical **financial support** from Riyadh, which is vital for its struggling economy.
    - It elevates its geopolitical status by positioning itself as a formal **security provider** in the strategically important Gulf region.

India's Concerns and Policy Imperatives

- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** The timing of the pact, following a recent India-Pakistan conflict (May), makes it a matter of significant concern for New Delhi.
- **Divergence in Strategy:** The agreement highlights a growing divergence between India's recent **pro-Israel tilt** and the "hedging" strategy of Arab monarchies, who are now balancing their relationships with multiple powers.
- **Key Risks for Regional Stability:**
    - **Ambiguity of Scope:** It remains unclear whether the pact extends a de facto **nuclear umbrella** to Saudi Arabia or mandates automatic reciprocal defence in any conflict.
    - **Danger of Entrapment:** The alliance carries the risk of pulling its members into wider conflicts. Pakistan could be dragged into a West Asian crisis (e.g., involving Iran), while Saudi Arabia could become entangled in a South Asian conflict between India and Pakistan.
- **Recommendations for India's Foreign Policy:**
    - India must **avoid doubling down on an isolated Israel** and recognize the shifting dynamics in the Arab world.
    - It is imperative for India to maintain a **strategic balance** in its West Asia policy, engaging with all key actors.
    - The primary focus of Indian policy should be on fostering long-term **regional stability** to protect its energy, trade, and diaspora interests.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shifting-sands-on-the-defence-agreement-between-saudi-arabia-pakistan/article70070190.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 20.09.2025**
TOPIC: Bilateral agreements involving India (specifically India-Pakistan relations).

Indus Waters Treaty: A document past its time

Introduction: A Treaty Facing a Relevance Crisis

- The **Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)**, a landmark 1960 water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan, is increasingly viewed as a document ill-equipped to handle 21st-century challenges.
- Once celebrated as a triumph of water diplomacy, its relevance is now being severely tested by modern realities such as **climate change, heightened political hostility, and new environmental crises** like siltation.
- The recent **Pahalgam terror attack** has further strained relations, leading India to keep the treaty's cooperative mechanisms **in abeyance**, underscoring the fragility of the agreement in the current geopolitical climate.

Historical Context and Original Significance

- **A Unique Diplomatic Achievement:** Signed 65 years ago in 1960 with the **World Bank's mediation**, the IWT was a pragmatic solution to a complex trans-boundary water dispute.
- **The Division of Rivers:** The treaty created a clear allocation of the Indus River system's six rivers:
    - **Western Rivers (to Pakistan):** The Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab were allocated for Pakistan's unrestricted use.
    - **Eastern Rivers (to India):** The Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej were allocated exclusively to India.
- **A Symbol of Necessity and Peace:**
    - For India, control over the eastern rivers was crucial for irrigation in **Punjab and Rajasthan**. For Pakistan, access to the western rivers was a matter of national survival, essential for its agriculture and preventing food insecurity.
    - For decades, the IWT was hailed as one of the world's most successful water-sharing agreements, having survived **multiple wars and persistent political hostility**, forcing a baseline of cooperation between the two neighbors.

Emerging Challenges Undermining the Treaty

The treaty's framework, designed for a different era, is unable to address the following modern challenges:

- **1. Political Hostility and Terrorism:**

    - Continuous terror attacks have eroded the spirit of cooperation that is essential for any shared resource management.
    - India's decision to hold the treaty's mechanisms in abeyance post the Pahalgam attack has rendered the idea of joint management practically hollow.

- **2. The Unaddressed Reality of Climate Change:**
    - **Accelerated Glacier Melt:** The shrinking of glaciers in the Hindu-Kush and Himalayan ecosystems is projected to increase water flow in the upper Indus basin initially, potentially leading to major shifts in the river's course and long-term water scarcity.
    - **Erratic Weather Patterns:** The downstream monsoon has become highly unpredictable, resulting in extreme events like the recent devastating floods that submerged vast farmlands in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab. These floods are no longer rare disasters but a **"new hydrological reality"** that the treaty's clauses cannot manage.
- **3. The Crisis of Siltation:**
    - The treaty is completely silent on **siltation**, a major contemporary problem.
    - Excessive silt is **choking reservoirs**, drastically shrinking their water storage capacity, and raising riverbeds, which in turn makes floods far more destructive.
    - While silt is a hazard in this context, it is also a valuable natural resource that could be used for enriching soil or in construction. The lack of a coherent **silt management strategy** is a major failure.

The Mismatch: Treaty's Focus vs. Modern Needs

- **Original Focus:** The IWT was forged with a narrow focus on **irrigation projects, building dams, and volumetric water sharing**.
- **Modern Imperatives:** Today's challenges require a much broader and more dynamic approach centered on:
    - Building **resilience to climate extremes**.
    - Developing joint **disaster preparedness** and management protocols.
    - Ensuring the **sustainability of the fragile Himalayan ecosystem**.
    - Strengthening the existing mechanism for sharing **trans-boundary hydrological data** to create effective, real-time flood warning systems

The Way Forward

- **Renegotiate and Modernize the Treaty:** The 65th anniversary of the IWT presents an opportunity to begin the process of renegotiating the treaty to make it robust and resilient enough to withstand the shocks of the 21st century.

- **Adopt a National Siltation Policy:** India must move beyond ad-hoc dredging and formulate a comprehensive national policy on silt management. This would help reduce flood intensity, expand water storage, and utilize silt as a productive resource.
- **Broaden the Treaty's Scope:** A modernized treaty must be more holistic, incorporating clear provisions on **climate change adaptation, joint flood management, ecosystem health, and robust data sharing** for disaster mitigation.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indus-waters-treaty-a-document-past-its-time-10260227/**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE **DATE: 22.09.2025**

TOPIC: Government Policies and Interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Uranium unrest: On uranium mining in Meghalaya

Introduction: The Core Conflict

- The Union government's decision to press forward with **uranium mining in Meghalaya** has reignited a long-standing conflict between national resource strategies and the constitutional rights of indigenous communities.
- The primary point of contention is the government's use of an **executive order (Office Memorandum)** to bypass mandatory **public consultations**, a move that threatens to undermine democratic and environmental safeguards.
- This issue mirrors past negative experiences in places like **Jharkhand**, where tribal communities have disproportionately borne the environmental, health, and livelihood costs of resource extraction without having a meaningful say in the decision-making process.

The Centre's Push and Bypassing of Safeguards

- **Decades of Local Resistance:** The government's insistence on mining disregards decades of consistent and strong opposition from the local **Khasi tribal groups**, who have resisted mining projects at **Domiasiat and Wahkaji** since the 1980s.
- **Exemption via Office Memorandum (OM):** The Union Environment Ministry has issued an OM that exempts mining of **atomic, critical, and strategic minerals** from the crucial stage of public consultation required under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification.
- **Weakening Democratic Processes:**
    - Local organizations have warned that this move severely weakens procedural safeguards designed to protect communities and the environment.
    - The **Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council** has been urged to invoke its special powers under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution to defend tribal rights against this executive overreach.
    - Since OMs are executive instruments that do not require legislative scrutiny, they risk reducing constitutionally protected communities to **passive bystanders** in decisions that profoundly affect their land and lives.

Lessons from Past Uranium Mining in Jharkhand

- **The Singhbhum Experience:** The operations of the **Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL)** in Singhbhum, Jharkhand, serve as a cautionary tale.
- **Marginalization of Local Voices:** Expansion proposals in the region triggered widespread protests over severe issues, including:

    - Fears of **radiation exposure** and related health crises.
    - The loss of traditional lands and **livelihoods**.
    - A systemic disregard for objections raised by affected villagers.
- **Procedural Flaws:** Protesters alleged that official notices for public hearings were often issued in unfamiliar languages, effectively sidelining genuine local participation and making the consultation process a mere formality.
- **The "Resource Frontier" Perception:** These experiences reinforce the tribal perception that their lands are treated as a **"resource frontier"**—an area to be exploited for the benefit of the nation, while the local inhabitants are left to deal with the irreversible consequences.

The Imperative of Democratic Consent

- **Respecting Local Refusal:** The Centre's current approach signals a worrying shift where local opposition is no longer seen as a valid reason to halt or reconsider a project, no matter how polluting or ecologically damaging.
- **The Principle of FPIC:** Global best practices and human rights norms are built on the principle of **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**. This mandates that indigenous communities must give their consent *before* any project affecting their ancestral lands or resources can be initiated.
- **The Need to Explore Alternatives:** If genuine consent cannot be obtained, the state is obligated to explore alternatives rather than resorting to coercion. These alternatives could include:
    - Exploring other uranium deposits in areas where communities might consent.
    - Investing in substitutes or alternative power-generation strategies to reduce reliance on uranium.

The Way Forward: Upholding Constitutional Guarantees

- **Legal and Constitutional Remedies:**
    - Affected communities have the right to challenge the OM's constitutional validity in court.
    - They can invoke protections under the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** and cite powerful legal precedents like the **Supreme Court's Niyamgiri judgment (2013)**, which upheld the right of a tribal community to veto a mining project on their sacred land.
- **Immediate Withdrawal of the OM:** The Environment Ministry should revoke the OM. By exempting a wide range of minerals from public consultation, it undermines the integrity of mining governance across the entire country, not just in Meghalaya.
- **Prioritizing Dialogue Over Coercion:** Should protests intensify, the government must engage in genuine and respectful **dialogue**. Coercive measures may secure short-term compliance but will inevitably fuel long-term resentment, conflict, and alienation.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/uranium-unrest-on-uranium-mining-in-meghalaya/article70077165.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION **DATE: 22.09.2025**
TOPIC: Indian Constitution—significant provisions (especially related to secularism and fundamental rights like Article 25).

Why SC order on Anand Marriage Act won't end old debate

Introduction: A Step Towards Recognition, But Not a Complete Solution

- A recent Supreme Court judgment has directed all states and Union Territories to frame rules for the registration of Sikh marriages under the **Anand Marriage Act, 1909**.
- This order is a significant step towards affirming the distinct religious identity of the Sikh community, which for decades has had to register its marriages under the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**.
- However, the judgment is not a panacea; it addresses only the issue of registration and does not resolve the larger legal lacunae, leaving Sikhs without a comprehensive, codified personal law for matrimonial matters.

The Anand Marriage Act, 1909: Historical Context and Limitations

- **The Anand Karaj Ceremony:**
    - Meaning "blissful union," **Anand Karaj** is the traditional Sikh marriage ceremony prescribed in the Guru Granth Sahib.
    - It involves the couple circumambulating the **Guru Granth Sahib** four times while sacred hymns (laavan), composed by the fourth Sikh Guru, Ram Das, are recited.
- **Colonial Era Enactment:** The original Act was enacted in 1909, largely due to the efforts of the **Singh Sabha movement**, which sought legal recognition for this distinct Sikh ceremony.
- **Limited Scope of the Original Act:** The 1909 Act was extremely limited in its scope. It only provided **legal validity to the ceremony itself** but did not include any provisions for:
    - Marriage registration.
    - Matters of divorce, succession, inheritance, maintenance, or child custody.

The 2012 Amendment: A Symbolic Victory with Flawed Implementation

- **Addressing a Long-Standing Demand:** To address the demand for a separate registration process, Parliament passed the **Anand Marriage (Amendment) Act in 2012**.
- **Key Provision:** The amendment inserted **Section 6** into the Act, which empowered state governments and UT administrations to frame and notify their own rules for registering Sikh marriages.
- **The Implementation Gap:**
    - While a symbolic victory for Sikh identity, the amendment's effectiveness was severely hampered by **poor implementation**.

- Only a handful of states and UTs, such as Punjab and Delhi, actually framed and notified the required rules.
- Consequently, Sikhs in the majority of Indian states were still compelled to register their marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act, defeating the purpose of the amendment.

The Supreme Court's Recent Order: Enforcing Uniform Implementation

- **The Directive:** A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sanjay Karol has now mandated the remaining **17 states and eight UTs** to frame and notify the rules for registering marriages under the Anand Marriage Act.
- **Rationale of the Court:** The Supreme Court emphasized that marriage registration is a **crucial legal safeguard** that provides official proof of marriage for vital purposes like inheritance, insurance, and child custody.
- **Significance of the Judgment:** This order is a landmark because it seeks to ensure that the statutory right provided by the 2012 amendment is **uniformly available** to all Sikh citizens across the country, not just in select jurisdictions.

Persisting Legal Complications: A Registration Law is Not a Personal Law

The Supreme Court's order, while positive, does not resolve the core legal challenges faced by the Sikh community.

- **1. A Registration Law, not a Matrimonial Code:** The fundamental limitation is that the Anand Marriage Act is **only a registration law**. It is completely silent on critical aspects of family law, including:
    - Divorce and separation.
    - Maintenance and alimony.
    - Succession and inheritance rights.
    - Child custody and adoption.
- **2. Continued Reliance on the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:** For all the above-mentioned matters, Sikh couples will still be governed by the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act. This creates a confusing and inconsistent **dual legal framework**.
- **3. The Demand for a Comprehensive Sikh Personal Law:**
    - Leading Sikh organizations, such as the **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)**, argue that this partial solution is insufficient.
    - They continue to advocate for a **comprehensive, codified Sikh personal law**, similar to the separate legal frameworks that exist for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis, to fully and respectfully recognize their distinct religious identity.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/why-sc-order-on-anand-marriage-act-wont-end-old-debate-10261997/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 23.09.2025 TOPIC:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Consumption conundrum: On the Indian economy's predicament

Introduction: A Critical Juncture for the Indian Economy

- The Indian economy, which relies on four main engines of growth—**household consumption, private investment, government expenditure, and net exports**—is currently at a pivotal moment.
- While **government spending** has been the primary driver of growth in recent years, emerging constraints are shifting the focus towards **household consumption** as the key to future economic momentum.
- Recognizing this, the government is actively prioritizing policies aimed at **stimulating domestic demand**, such as tax reforms and GST rationalization, to enhance the disposable incomes of households.

Analysis of Growth Engines and Emerging Constraints

The traditional drivers of India's GDP growth are facing individual challenges, leaving household consumption as the most viable path forward.

- **1. Government Expenditure:**
  - This has been the **strongest engine** recently, powered by a significant infrastructure push (capital expenditure) and financial support to states.
  - However, the high growth pace of 30–35% in government capex is **not sustainable** in the long term due to fiscal limits and competing priorities like defence and other developmental schemes.
- **2. Private Investment:**
  - Private sector investment remains **weak and sluggish**. A critical indicator, **capacity utilization**, has stayed below the 80% threshold since 2011.
  - This indicates that industries are not using their existing production capacity to the fullest, which disincentivizes them from making new investments in expansion.
- **3. Net Exports:**
  - This engine is hampered by significant **global trade uncertainty** and the threat of protectionist measures like potential **U.S. tariffs**.

    - Weakened external demand reduces the potential for export-led growth in the near future.
- **4. Household Consumption:**
    - With the other three engines facing significant constraints, **household consumption** emerges as the most critical and dependable driver for sustaining India's economic growth.

Policy Measures to Boost Consumption

The government is employing a two-pronged strategy to increase consumer spending: **raising disposable incomes** and **lowering the prices** of goods and services.

- **GST Reforms (September 2025):** Recent rationalization has significantly lowered the tax burden on everyday items.
    - **For Rural Households: 75%** of their typical monthly expenditure now falls under the nil or 5% GST slab, a major increase from 56% previously.
    - **For Urban Households: Two-thirds** of their monthly spending is now in the lowest tax slabs, up from 50% before the reforms, effectively lowering prices.
- **Income-Tax Cuts (Budget 2025):**
    - While the budget's tax cuts successfully increased the **disposable income** available to households, they did not lead to a corresponding surge in spending.
    - This is because most households exhibited a preference for **savings over consumption**, indicating cautious consumer sentiment and a need for more than just tax cuts to change spending habits.
- **The Challenge of Wage Growth:**
    - Directly increasing wages would be the most effective way to boost incomes, but this remains a major challenge.
    - Structural issues like a large **oversupply of labour** and a persistent **skills deficit** prevent significant wage increases across the economy.

The Present Predicament and Path to High Growth

- **Consumption as the Mainstay:** Household consumption is currently the only **reliable and insulated** growth engine, as it is less vulnerable to global shocks compared to exports and foreign investment.
- **The Problem of Inertia:** The primary challenge with consumption is its **high inertia**—it is slow to react and requires a sustained and significant fiscal push to gain momentum.

- **The Link to Investment:** Without a strong revival in household demand, private investment will not pick up, as businesses will not expand if they don't see a growing market for their products. This makes the national target of achieving **8%+ GDP growth** very difficult.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/consumption-conundrum-on-the-indian-economys-predicament/article70080624.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT **DATE: 23.09.2025**

TOPIC: Noise pollution

Too loud to ignore: Why Indians should care about noise pollution in cities

Introduction: The Silent Urban Health Crisis

- Noise pollution, defined as unwanted or harmful sound, is escalating into a significant but frequently overlooked **urban health crisis** in India.
- Driven by rapid urbanization, increasing vehicle density, and a booming construction sector, noise levels in Indian cities consistently exceed permissible limits, yet the issue remains a low priority in urban governance and public health planning.
- Although legally classified as an **air pollutant** under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**, its intangible nature makes it less perceptible but equally damaging as other forms of pollution.

Understanding Noise Pollution and its Health Implications

- **Definition and Standards:**
  - It is unwanted sound that disrupts human or animal life. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** identifies it as a major environmental pollutant.
  - While WHO recommends a residential daytime limit of **55 decibels (dB)**, a standard mirrored by India's **Noise Pollution Rules, 2000**, traffic noise in major Indian cities often surpasses **70 dB**.
- **Profound Health Impacts:** The effects of noise pollution extend far beyond mere annoyance.
  - **Auditory Issues:** Prolonged exposure can cause **tinnitus** (ringing in the ears) and **permanent hearing loss**.
  - **A Chronic Stressor:** The body perceives loud noise as a threat, triggering a chronic stress response that leads to severe non-auditory health problems.

- **Cardiovascular and Other Diseases:** Numerous studies have linked high noise levels to **hypertension, heart disease, sleep disturbances, and impaired cognitive development in children**.
- **Reduced Quality of Life:** It also contributes to reduced productivity, exacerbates mental health conditions, and diminishes the overall quality of urban life.

Three Key Failures in Tackling Noise Pollution in India

- **1. Weak Monitoring and Enforcement:**
  - Unlike air pollution, which is increasingly monitored using advanced technologies, the measurement of noise data is **sporadic, reactive, and incomplete**.
  - Enforcement mechanisms are weak, and responsibility is scattered across multiple authorities, resulting in a lack of accountability and effective action.
- **2. Structural and Cultural Barriers:**
  - There is a significant **lack of public awareness** regarding the serious health risks of noise. Unlike visible smog, noise is often not even perceived as a harmful pollutant.
  - Cultural norms, including the use of loudspeakers for religious processions and noisy celebrations, mean that many citizens both tolerate and actively participate in creating noise pollution.
- **3. Fragmented Governance:**
  - The governance of noise pollution control in India follows a **piecemeal approach**.
  - Jurisdiction is fragmented among **Pollution Control Boards, municipalities, and the police**, with each body having partial responsibility, limited resources, and weak incentives to enforce regulations effectively.

The Path Ahead: A Multi-Pronged Approach

Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive and integrated strategy.

- **Robust Monitoring:** Implement **real-time decibel mapping** systems and develop mobile applications for public reporting to create a comprehensive, city-wide noise database.
- **Stricter Enforcement:** Enforce existing noise regulations vigorously and introduce **graduated penalties** for repeated violations to create a strong deterrent.
- **Integration into Urban Planning:** Urban planning must proactively incorporate noise mitigation measures, such as designing **buffer zones around residential areas, creating green belts, and mandating soundproofing** in sensitive buildings like schools and hospitals.
- **Technological Solutions:** Promote the adoption of quieter technologies, including **electric vehicles, modern construction machinery, sound-absorbing materials**, and intelligent traffic management systems.

- **Public Awareness:** Launch sustained public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the health risks and encourage a cultural shift towards respecting community sound norms.

The Equity Dimension of Noise Pollution Control

- **A Right, Not a Privilege:** The **right to a quiet environment** must be treated as a fundamental component of public health, not a luxury available only to the affluent.
- **Protecting the Vulnerable:** Interventions must be framed with equity in mind, as the most vulnerable urban populations are often the most exposed to high noise levels and lack the means (e.g., soundproof homes, air purifiers) to protect themselves.
- **Political Will and Policy Integration:** Strong political will is needed to integrate noise pollution control measures into **clean air agendas, embed them in urban planning, and make them a priority for public health**, thereby reclaiming the basic human right to quiet.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-health/explained-too-loud-to-ignore-why-indians-should-care-about-noise-pollution-in-cities-10265691/#:~:text=Traffic%20corridors%20in%20Indian%20cities,and%20residents%20of%20informal%20settlements.**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 24.09.2025 TOPIC:** Government Budgeting (specifically, taxation and fiscal policy)

Introduction: A Transformative Step in India's Tax System

- On September 3, 2025, the 56th GST Council meeting approved a landmark set of reforms, now being termed **"GST 2.0"**, aimed at fundamentally simplifying India's indirect tax framework.
- This overhaul is the culmination of consistent advocacy from industry bodies like the **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)**, which highlighted long-standing issues such as complex rate structures, classification disputes, and high compliance burdens, especially for **MSMEs**.
- The reform addresses critical concerns previously raised in the **Economic Survey**, marking a monumental step towards a more efficient and user-friendly tax system with far-reaching implications for all sectors of the economy.

Key Features of the GST 2.0 Reforms

The new framework introduces significant changes to both the tax structure and compliance procedures.

- **1. Revised Three-Tier Tax Structure:**
    - The old, complex four-slab system (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%) has been collapsed into a simpler three-tier structure:
        - **~5%:** For essential, mass-consumption goods.
        - **18%:** A standard rate applicable to most goods and services.
        - **40%:** A new, higher demerit rate for luxury items and sin goods.
- **2. Procedural Simplifications:** The reforms aim to reduce friction and ease the compliance burden for businesses.
    - **Easier Stock Adjustments:** Businesses can now manage stock adjustments due to rate changes **without the cumbersome process of relabelling** products.
    - **Clearer Classification Norms:** Simplified guidelines have been introduced to minimize ambiguity and reduce litigation over which tax rate applies to a particular product.
    - **Faster Refunds:** The process for claiming refunds has been streamlined to improve the liquidity and cash flow for businesses.
    - **Simplified Compliance for Small Firms:** Special, less cumbersome compliance procedures have been put in place for MSMEs.

Impact on Various Stakeholders

The reforms are designed to create a positive ripple effect across the economy, benefiting consumers, businesses, and the government.

- **Benefits for Consumers:**
    - **Direct Price Reductions:** A vast range of daily-use items, including household goods and small appliances previously taxed at 12% or 18%, will now fall into the 5% or lower slabs, leading to tangible price drops.
    - **Widespread Relief:** According to the Finance Minister, **99% of all goods and services** will now be taxed at 18% or less, significantly boosting household purchasing power.
    - **Inflation Moderation:** The reduction in taxes on mass-consumption items is expected to help **moderate inflation**.
- **Benefits for Industry and MSMEs:**
    - **Reduced Costs and Litigation:** The new structure lowers input costs and the clearer classification norms will reduce legal disputes with tax authorities.
    - **Relief from Inverted Duty Structures:** Key sectors like FMCG, textiles, cement, and farm equipment will get major relief from the problem of **inverted duties** (where tax on inputs is higher than on the final product).
    - **Improved Business Environment:** A lighter compliance burden, better margins, and improved liquidity will create a more favorable environment for businesses, especially MSMEs, to thrive.
- **Wider Economic Impact:**
    - **Consumption-Led Growth:** The reforms are expected to provide a significant **boost to consumption**, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where consumers are highly price-sensitive.
    - **Boost to GDP:** Analysts project that the resulting surge in demand could add **over one percentage point** to India's GDP growth.
    - **Fiscal Implications:** While the government anticipates a **short-term revenue loss**, it is expected to be offset in the medium to long term by:
        - Higher tax compliance.
        - Increased economic activity and formalization.
        - Overall fiscal buoyancy from a more efficient tax system.

Ensuring Effective Implementation of GST 2.0

The success of these reforms hinges on seamless execution and collaborative effort.

- **Passing on Benefits to Consumers:** A primary challenge is to ensure that the tax cuts are fully passed on to the end consumers and are not absorbed by intermediaries in the supply chain.
- **Administrative Readiness:** The entire tax ecosystem, including the **GST Network (GSTN)**, state revenue departments, and related authorities, must be agile and aligned to ensure a smooth transition.

- **Handholding MSMEs:** A special focus is required to build capacity among smaller firms and MSMEs, which often lack advanced accounting support, to help them navigate the changes.
- **Strong Feedback Mechanisms:** Robust and responsive feedback loops are essential to quickly address any transitional challenges related to unsold stocks, classification confusion, or packaging adjustments.
- **The Foundation of Trust:** The ultimate success of GST 2.0 depends on a foundation of **trust and partnership between the government, industry, and consumers**.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/getting-gst-20-to-run-like-a-well-oiled-machine/article70085502.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE **DATE: 24.09.2025**

TOPIC: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Modi government has made healthcare an instrument for economic transformation

Introduction: A Fundamental Paradigm Shift in Healthcare Policy

- **From Welfare to Economic Pillar:** India's approach to healthcare has undergone a fundamental transformation. It has shifted from being viewed traditionally as a **welfare measure** (to mitigate the effects of illness) to being recognized as a strategic **pillar of economic growth and human capital development**.
- **The Core Philosophy:** The new approach, championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, strategically links good health to **workforce productivity, income generation, and overall national development**, moving it from a peripheral concern to a central tenet of economic strategy.

Healthcare as an Instrument of Economic Growth

- **Boosting Household Finances:** Healthy households spend less on medical expenses, which reduces their financial vulnerability and increases their **disposable income**. This, in turn, boosts consumption and savings, which are critical drivers of the economy.
- **Enhancing Workforce Productivity:** A healthier population leads to a more reliable and productive workforce. **Preventive healthcare** reduces illness-related absenteeism and ensures that citizens can participate fully and effectively in economic activities.
- **Investment in Human Capital:** In this new paradigm, investing in public health is viewed as a direct investment in the nation's **human capital** and long-term economic productivity.

Key Government Initiatives and their Economic Linkages

- **1. Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY):**

- **Mechanism:** It is the world's largest publicly funded health insurance scheme, providing coverage to over **50 crore vulnerable citizens** for secondary and tertiary care.
- **Economic Impact:** By shielding families from catastrophic **out-of-pocket medical expenses**, the scheme prevents them from falling back into poverty due to illness. It also stimulates the healthcare market by empaneling hospitals and encouraging private investment in infrastructure, especially in underserved areas.

- **2. POSHAN Abhiyan:**
  - **Mechanism:** Launched in 2018, this mission focuses on improving **maternal and child nutrition** through supplementary food, health check-ups, and behavioral change campaigns.
  - **Economic Impact:** By addressing malnutrition and supporting early childhood cognitive development, the scheme lays the foundation for a healthier, more capable future generation, thereby enhancing the nation's **long-term human capital**.
- **3. Jan Aushadhi Kendra:**
  - **Mechanism:** A network of over **16,000 pharmacies** providing quality generic medicines at heavily discounted prices.
  - **Economic Impact:** This initiative ensures the affordability of medicines, allowing households to divert their savings from expensive branded drugs towards other essential needs like **food, education, or small-scale business investments**.
- **4. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao & Swachh Bharat Mission:**
  - **Mechanism:** These initiatives target the broader **social determinants of health**. 'Beti Bachao' promotes girl child education and improves sex ratios, while 'Swachh Bharat' ensures better sanitation and hygiene.
  - **Economic Impact:** A UNICEF report highlights that improved sanitation under the Swachh Bharat Mission has helped rural families save approximately **₹50,000 annually** by reducing illness and associated medical costs.
- **5. Digital Health and Telemedicine:**
  - **Mechanism:** Initiatives like **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs** and other digital platforms enable tele-consultations, electronic medical records, and remote screening.
  - **Economic Impact:** These tools make healthcare more **accessible and efficient**, particularly for rural populations, by reducing travel costs and time, and strengthening the focus on preventive care.

Sustaining the Transformation: Reforms in Medical Education

- **Addressing Supply-Side Gaps:** To ensure a sufficient supply of skilled professionals for this healthcare expansion, India has massively scaled up its medical education infrastructure.
- **Rapid Expansion:** The number of medical colleges has more than doubled from **317 to 780**, resulting in India now producing over **118,000 doctors annually**, the highest number globally.

Vision for 2047 and the Broader Economic Rationale

- **From Vulnerability to Empowerment:** The reforms aim to shift the burden away from the high **out-of-pocket expenditure** that has historically crippled Indian households.
- **Public Finance as a Catalyst:** Government spending in healthcare also acts as **seed capital**, stimulating private entrepreneurship in hospitals, laboratories, and health-tech startups, which creates jobs and deepens service penetration.
- **A Healthier, More Productive Nation:** The long-term vision for 2047 is that a healthier population will enjoy higher life expectancy, greater productivity, and improved incomes, creating a virtuous cycle where health and economic prosperity reinforce each other.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/modi-government-has-made-healthcare-an-instrument-for-economic-transformation-10267424/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 1: INDIAN SOCIETY **DATE: 25.09.2025 TOPIC:** Challenges of urban infrastructure (drainage, waste management), impact of climate change on urban centers, urban flooding as a critical urban problem.

Follow the rains, not the calendar, to fight floods

1. The Core Problem: A Mismatch Between Planning and Reality

- **Outdated Climate Paradigm:** Indian cities continue to base their monsoon preparedness on historical, predictable climate patterns, which are no longer relevant.
- **Traditional Preparedness:** Municipal activities, such as de-silting drains and setting up emergency drills, are rigidly tied to a fixed calendar (e.g., pre-June), failing to adapt to the monsoon's shifting timeline.
- **The New Reality:** Climate change has resulted in untimely, erratic, and extremely high-intensity rainfall events that overwhelm urban infrastructure designed for a different era.
- **Widespread Impact:** Recent events in Punjab, Delhi, Gurugram, and Kolkata demonstrate that this is a pan-India problem, not limited to a few coastal cities.

2. Characteristics of Changing Monsoon Patterns in Urban India

- **Increased Intensity over Short Durations:** The nature of rainfall has shifted from prolonged, moderate showers to short, intense cloudbursts (e.g., 50 mm in one hour). This provides cities with very little time to react and causes flash flooding.
- **Higher Frequency of Heavy Rainfall:** Data indicates a significant rise in the number of heavy rainfall days, with 64% of tehsils now experiencing 1 to 15 more such days, especially in states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat.
- **Shift in Monsoon Timelines:** Rainfall events are occurring outside the traditional monsoon calendar, with significant pre-monsoon showers (e.g., Mumbai in May) catching unprepared civic bodies off-guard.
- **Escalating Economic and Human Cost:** Urban floods have become the leading cause of life and property loss among natural disasters, with a single event estimated to cost around ₹8,700 crore.

3. Key Measures for Building Urban Flood Resilience

- **Integrate Sub-Daily Rainfall Data into Planning:**
    - **Move Beyond Averages:** Urban planners must stop using long-term seasonal averages and instead incorporate high-resolution, short-duration (sub-daily) rainfall data into infrastructure design.

    - **Real-Time Operations:** This data should be used to operate drainage systems dynamically and issue precise, real-time public alerts.
    - **Example in Practice:** The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) plans to upgrade its drains to handle rainfall intensity of up to 120 mm per hour, reflecting this data-driven approach.
- **Align Stormwater and Waste Management Systems:**
    - **Recognize the Interlinkage:** Unmanaged solid waste, particularly plastics and construction debris, is a primary cause of choked drains, which severely exacerbates flooding.
    - **Coordinated Action:** Stormwater management and sanitation departments must work in synergy. Rainfall alerts should automatically trigger joint sanitation drives and inspections of drainage networks.
    - **Example in Practice:** Vijayawada's coordinated monsoon teams, involving drainage, sanitation, and planning departments, have been effective in reducing waterlogging.
- **Update and Modernize Urban Drainage Infrastructure:**
    - **Revise Design Standards:** The Intensity-Duration-Frequency (IDF) curves, which are critical for designing drainage systems, must be updated every 5-10 years to reflect the latest rainfall patterns.
    - **Holistic Design:** Drainage planning should be based on micro-catchment hydrology and local topography, ensuring stormwater drains are separate from sewage networks to prevent overflows.
    - **Example in Practice:** BMC's proposal for a new, comprehensive drainage master plan aims to expand the city's overall stormwater capacity based on current climate realities.
- **Foster a Mindset Shift: From Calendar to Reality:**
    - **Focus on Intensity, Not Volume:** The critical understanding must be that cities flood not because of the total amount of seasonal rain, but because of extreme hourly rainfall that overwhelms the system.
    - **Adaptive Preparedness:** Preparedness must become flexible and data-driven, responding to meteorological forecasts rather than a fixed seasonal schedule.

4. Conclusion: The Way Forward

- Urban flooding is no longer just a consequence of high rainfall volume but a direct result of short, intense, and unpredictable downpours.
- To build resilient cities, India must transition from a reactive, calendar-based approach to a proactive, data-driven strategy.

- This involves coordinated governance between departments, updating infrastructure design with current climate science, and fundamentally realigning urban planning to "follow the rains, not the calendar."

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/follow-the-rains-not-the-calendar-to-fight-floods/article70088641.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE **DATE: 25.09.2025**

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Why does Ladakh want to be part of the Sixth Schedule?

1. Core Demands Driving the Protests

- **Statehood for Ladakh:** The primary demand is the elevation of Ladakh from a Union Territory without a legislature to a full-fledged state, which would grant it its own legislative assembly and greater political autonomy.
- **Inclusion in the Sixth Schedule:** Protesters are demanding constitutional safeguards under **Article 244** of the Constitution. This is aimed at protecting Ladakh's unique tribal identity, culture, land rights, and fragile ecology from external pressures and potential exploitation.
- **Purpose of Sixth Schedule:** This constitutional provision allows for the creation of **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** with powers to legislate on matters like land, forests, local governance, and employment, ensuring self-rule for tribal populations.

2. Background and Key Actors in the Agitation

- The protests are being organized by a coalition of local interest groups, primarily the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)**, which represents the Buddhist-majority Leh district.
- Climate activist **Sonam Wangchuk** has emerged as a prominent face of the movement, using a **35-day fast** to draw national attention to Ladakh's demands.
- The agitation has gained significant momentum, unifying different sections of Ladakhi society under a common cause, which recently escalated from peaceful protests to violent unrest in Leh.

3. The Centre's Stance and the Widening Trust Deficit

- **Reluctance to Grant Demands:** The Union Government has so far been unwilling to grant either statehood or Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh.
- **Alternative Proposals:** As a counter-offer, the Centre has proposed measures like **domicile-based job reservations** and strengthening local administrative bodies. However, these are seen

as inadequate by local groups who believe only constitutional safeguards can truly protect their interests.

- **Breakdown in Dialogue:** Formal talks have been stalled for months, creating an impasse. The trust gap has widened due to the Centre's perceived unwillingness to engage with key leaders like Sonam Wangchuk, who was excluded from the delegation for the upcoming talks on October 6.
- **Conditional Negotiations:** Dialogue was only scheduled to resume after the Leh Apex Body replaced Wangchuk with former MP **Thupstan Chhewang** as its chairperson, indicating the Centre's discomfort with Wangchuk's role.

4. Escalating Tensions and Setbacks for Protest Leaders

- The recent protests in Leh marked a significant escalation, turning violent with incidents like the burning of a police vehicle.
- Sonam Wangchuk has consistently appealed for peace and urged the youth to avoid violence, despite growing frustrations over unemployment and land alienation.
- The Ladakh administration's recent cancellation of a **1,000-kanal land allotment** to Wangchuk's Himalayan Institute of Alternatives is perceived by him and his supporters as a retaliatory measure for his activism. This action has further fueled local anger and suspicion.

5. The Leh-Kargil Unity: A Significant Development

- The demands have found resonance across Ladakh, bridging the traditional regional and religious divide between Leh and Kargil.
- The **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)**, representing the Muslim-majority Kargil district, has extended full support to the agitation, echoing the calls for statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion.
- This solidarity, demonstrated by the KDA's call for a *bandh* in Kargil, presents a united front and strengthens the movement's overall political weight. It signals that the concerns are pan-Ladakhi, not confined to one community or district.

6. Way Forward: A Need for Meaningful Dialogue

- The unrest in Ladakh is not merely a law-and-order issue but a manifestation of deep-seated fears regarding the erosion of cultural identity, ecological degradation, and political marginalization.
- Given Ladakh's strategic importance as a sensitive border region, prolonged instability poses a risk to national security.

- The path to resolution lies in **sincere and meaningful dialogue** between the Centre and Ladakh's representatives, backed by concrete assurances that address the core concerns of the Ladakhi people. Failure to do so risks further escalation and alienation.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ladakh-sixth-schedule-10275252/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 26.09.2025**
TOPIC: India and its Neighbourhood-Relations.

The Saudi-Pakistan deal upends India's strategic thought

1. The Core of the Agreement: A New Strategic Alliance

A **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement** has been formalized between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, signaling a significant deepening of their security relationship.

The pact's most critical clause establishes a collective security principle: **"any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both."** This elevates their partnership from a transactional one to a formal military alliance.

This development directly challenges India's regional security calculations and has created significant apprehension in New Delhi's strategic circles.

2. The Immediate Context: A Setback for Indian Diplomacy

The agreement was announced following a period of heightened India-Pakistan tensions, including a major terror attack in **Pahalgam (April 2025)** and India's retaliatory **"Operation Sindoor."**

India had launched a major diplomatic initiative to **isolate Pakistan** on the global stage. The Saudi-Pakistan pact is a clear indicator that this effort has not succeeded and, in fact, marks a significant diplomatic achievement for Islamabad.

Despite high-level engagement, including visits by Prime Minister Modi to Riyadh and the Saudi Foreign Minister to New Delhi, India's influence was insufficient to prevent the formalization of the pact.

3. Drivers Behind the Saudi-Pakistan Rapprochement

For Saudi Arabia:

Search for Strategic Autonomy: Riyadh is actively pursuing a foreign policy of **multipolarity and multialignment**, reducing its traditional dependence on the US, which it increasingly views as an unreliable partner.

Valued Military Expertise: Saudi Arabia has historically valued the Pakistani military for its combat experience (primarily against India) to enhance its own domestic and regional security, especially after refusing to join the Yemen conflict in 2015 strained ties.

Regional Instability: The shifting geopolitics in West Asia, particularly after the **Hamas attack (Oct 2023)** and the **Israel-Iran "12-day war,"** has compelled Riyadh to solidify traditional alliances.

For Pakistan:

Leveraging Nuclear Status: As the only declared Islamic nuclear power, Pakistan's nuclear capability continues to provide significant strategic dividends, enhancing its influence from Washington to Riyadh. This pact is seen as implicitly linked to the "Islamic bomb" concept.

Countering Indian Influence: The deal serves the dual purpose of strengthening its own security and directly challenging New Delhi's strategic calculus in the region.

Overcoming Isolation: It represents a major success for Pakistan in breaking free from India's attempts at diplomatic quarantine.

4. The Fundamental Resilience of the Saudi-Pakistan Relationship

The analysis points to a **misconception in Indian strategic thought** that it could create an institutional wedge between Pakistan and key Arab states.

The bilateral relationship is not merely transactional; it is deeply rooted in shared **Islam, ideology, and theological principles (specifically Sunnism)**, making it fundamentally resilient to external pressures.

India's interests, while important, remain peripheral to Riyadh's core security considerations, which are intrinsically linked with Pakistan.

5. Key Strategic Implications and Challenges for India

Erosion of Strategic Space: The pact complicates India's two-front challenge. An Indian conflict with Pakistan could now potentially draw in Saudi Arabia, at least diplomatically or logistically, if not militarily.

The Nuclear Overhang: It brings the challenge of the **"Islamic bomb"** back into focus, raising concerns about potential nuclear cooperation or proliferation that could destabilize West Asia and directly impact Indian security.

Limits of Multialignment: The deal demonstrates a key challenge in India's own foreign policy. While India pursues multialignment, its major partners (like Saudi Arabia) are doing the same, which can lead them to take positions directly contrary to India's core strategic interests.

A Call for Strategic Re-evaluation: The development exposes a **disconnect between India's culturally risk-averse strategic thinking** and the rapidly evolving, disruptive global reality. A passive, "fence-sitting" approach is shown to be inadequate.

6. The Concluding Message: An Imperative for Decisive Action

The world is undergoing a profound geopolitical reshaping and will not wait for what India perceives as **"its time."**

Pakistan and its military have proven adept at leveraging disruptions in the global order to their strategic advantage.

India must move beyond its idealistic or pacifist roles and **embrace the risks associated with the exercise and mobilization of power.**

It is imperative for Indian leadership to make accurate strategic calculations and act with **decisive resolve** to shape the rules of the new international order, as another opportunity may not arise this century.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-saudi-pakistan-deal-upends-indias-strategic-thought/article70093765.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HEALTH **DATE: 26.09.2025**
TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

It's OK to use paracetamol in pregnancy. Here's what the science says about the link with autism

1. The Context: Misinformation vs. Medical Consensus misinformation

Recent claims by a high-profile public figure have reignited unsubstantiated fears linking the use of **paracetamol (acetaminophen)** during pregnancy to **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** in children.

This has created confusion and anxiety among expectant mothers regarding a commonly used and medically approved drug.

The global medical and scientific community, including the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, has firmly refuted these claims, emphasizing that they are not supported by robust scientific evidence.

2. The Scientific Consensus on Paracetamol's Safety

Safest Option: Paracetamol is globally recognized as one of the **safest and most essential medications** for managing pain and fever during pregnancy.

Essential for Maternal Health: Effectively treating fever is crucial, as high maternal fever, if left untreated, can pose significant risks to fetal development.

Long-Term Safety Record: The drug has been used by millions of pregnant women for decades worldwide with no established causal link to neurodevelopmental disorders.

Global Endorsement: Leading health authorities continue to recommend its use in prescribed doses, reinforcing its status as a safe and necessary medication.

3. Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Complex Developmental Condition: ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior, with symptoms typically appearing in early childhood.

Multi-Factorial Causes: Scientists agree that the causes of autism are complex and involve an interplay of **genetic, biological, and environmental factors.**

No Single Cause Identified: Crucially, no single drug, medication, or specific environmental exposure has been scientifically proven to be a direct cause of autism.

Rising Diagnosis Rates: The increase in global autism rates is largely attributed to **greater public awareness, improved diagnostic methods, and a broader definition of the spectrum**, rather than a new environmental or medical trigger.

4. The Critical Flaw in the Argument: Association is Not Causation

Some observational studies have noted a statistical **"association"** between prolonged or high-dose paracetamol use in pregnancy and a slightly higher incidence of conditions like ADHD or autism.

Confounding Factors: Experts stress that this association is likely influenced by **confounding variables**. For example, the underlying illness (like a severe infection) that necessitated the use of paracetamol could be the actual contributing factor, not the medication itself.

Lack of Causal Evidence: No high-quality, controlled scientific study has ever established a direct **cause-and-effect relationship** between responsible paracetamol use and the development of autism.

5. The Dangers of Avoiding Necessary Medication

Avoiding safe and recommended medications due to unfounded fears can lead to greater harm.

Untreated maternal infections (e.g., influenza) and high fevers can significantly increase the risk of developmental complications in the fetus.

Therefore, the risk of not treating a genuine medical issue in a pregnant woman is far greater than the unproven risk associated with taking paracetamol.

6. Way Forward: Prioritizing Evidence-Based Care

The public and policymakers should rely on **evidence-based science** rather than anecdotal claims or misinformation, especially in matters of public health.

Paracetamol remains the safest recommended option for pain and fever management during pregnancy.

The focus should remain on ensuring maternal safety, promoting responsible medication use, and investing in **early identification and intervention strategies** to support children with autism and other developmental challenges.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/its-ok-to-use-paracetamol-in-pregnancy-science-link-with-autism-10268557/**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 27.09.2025 TOPIC:** INFRASTRUCTURE

Upgrading shipyards: On strengthening India's shipbuilding infrastructure

1. The New Government Initiative: A ₹69,725 Crore Shipbuilding Package

- The Government of India has announced a comprehensive **₹69,725 crore package** to rejuvenate the nation's shipbuilding and maritime industry, replacing an earlier, largely unsuccessful 2015 policy.
- **Primary Goal:** The central aim is to significantly expand India's merchant shipbuilding capacity to **4.5 million Gross Tonnage (GT)**, addressing the current negligible capacity for large commercial vessels.
- **Core Objectives:**
    - **Modernize Shipyards:** Upgrade existing shipyards with state-of-the-art technology, advanced management practices, and expanded infrastructure.
    - **Develop Ancillary Ecosystems:** Promote the creation of new shipyards within industrial clusters that include dedicated factories for shipbuilding components, thereby strengthening the domestic supply chain.
    - **Support Shipowners:** Provide robust financial support and incentives to encourage Indian shipowners to place orders for new vessels with domestic shipyards.

2. Persistent Challenges in Indian Shipbuilding

- **Technological and Infrastructural Deficiencies:**
    - Most Indian shipyards lack the necessary length and high-capacity cranes (1,000+ tonnes) required for modern prefabrication and modular construction techniques.
    - There is insufficient space for assembly-line processes, which are standard in leading shipbuilding nations.
- **Weak Ancillary Industry:** The domestic supply chain for essential ship components is underdeveloped and fragmented, leading to significant bottlenecks, import dependence, and delays.
- **Extended Construction Timelines:** Due to these constraints, the typical construction time for a ship in India is **2-3 years**. This long gestation period locks up capital and makes Indian shipyards uncompetitive.
- **Lack of Investor Confidence:** The combination of long delays and high costs has historically discouraged Indian shipowners from ordering new builds domestically, even when subsidies were available.

3. Indian Shipbuilding vs. Global Best Practices: A Comparative Analysis

Feature	Indian Shipyards (Current State)	Global Leaders (S. Korea, Japan, China)
Construction Method	Traditional, piece-by-piece construction within the dry dock.	**Prefabrication & Assembly Line:** Large ship blocks are built separately and then assembled in the dry dock.
Infrastructure	Limited dock length and crane capacity (often below 100 tonnes).	Extensive dry docks with high-capacity cranes (**1,000+ tonnes**) for moving large prefabricated sections.
Construction Time	**2–3 years** from first steel to sea trials.	**Approx. 1 year.** Keel-laying to making the ship waterborne takes only **3–4 months.**
Ancillary Ecosystem	Weak and fragmented, causing supply chain bottlenecks.	Strong, integrated, and co-located ancillary clusters ensuring timely supply of components.
Capital Efficiency	Low, due to long construction periods and delayed returns on investment.	High, due to rapid turnover and efficient assembly-line production.

4. A Strategic Roadmap for India's Shipbuilding Success

- **Adopt an Incremental Approach:** India should begin by focusing on building capabilities for smaller vessels (**500 GT and above**) and gradually scale up to larger merchant ships as expertise and infrastructure improve.
- **Provide Long-Term Demand Assurance (Crucial Step):**
    - Financial incentives like infrastructure status are insufficient on their own. The most critical factor is providing **demand visibility** to shipowners.
    - This can be achieved through **guaranteed offtake contracts** and **long-term time charters**, especially for public sector undertakings (PSUs) importing coal or crude oil.
- **Integrate with National Strategic Projects:**
    - India missed a key opportunity to link its **green fuel hub projects** (e.g., in Kakinada and Kochi) with the shipbuilding sector by mandating the construction of green-fuel-powered ships.
    - Future policies must integrate shipbuilding with national energy, trade, and environmental goals to create a self-sustaining demand cycle.
- **Implement a Holistic Ecosystem Approach:**
    - The success of the new package depends on the simultaneous development of three pillars:
        1. **Modernized Shipyards** with advanced technology.
        2. A **Trained and Skilled Workforce**.
        3. **Guaranteed Offtake Agreements** to ensure financial viability for shipowners.

5. Conclusion: Beyond Financial Packages

The success of India's ambitious shipbuilding plan cannot be guaranteed by financial outlays alone. The core challenge lies in execution. For India to become a competitive global player, it must move beyond subsidies and focus on creating a structurally sound ecosystem. This requires **modernizing shipyard infrastructure to reduce construction time, developing a robust ancillary industry, and, most importantly, ensuring long-term contracts that give shipowners the confidence to invest in 'Made in India' vessels.** Without this integrated strategy, the risk of repeating past failures remains high.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/upgrading-shipyards-on-strengthening-indias-shipbuilding-infrastructure/article70098292.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 27.09.2025**
TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

India needs a plan

1. The Geopolitical Shift: China's Renunciation of SDT

- China has officially announced at the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** that it will no longer seek benefits under the **"Special and Differential Treatment" (SDT)** provisions.
- **What is SDT?** SDT provisions are a cornerstone of the WTO framework, allowing developing countries preferential treatment, such as longer periods to implement agreements and the flexibility to maintain certain trade protections and subsidies.
- **China's Signal:** By foregoing SDT, China is projecting its status as a mature global economic superpower. This move implicitly challenges other major developing nations, particularly India, to reconsider their own long-standing reliance on these trade concessions.

2. India's Vulnerability: Over-reliance on a Protective Shield

- Historically, India has heavily depended on SDT provisions to protect its nascent and vulnerable domestic sectors from the full force of global competition.
- China's decision creates diplomatic pressure and weakens the collective bargaining position of developing countries, making it harder for India to justify its continued use of SDT in future WTO negotiations.
- This development necessitates a fundamental reassessment of India's trade policy, moving from a defensive, protectionist stance to a more proactive and competitive one.

3. Sector-Specific Exposure and Risks for India

- **Agricultural Sector:**
    - This sector is **highly exposed** as millions of small and marginal farmers are shielded by subsidies and trade barriers (e.g., high tariffs on imports).
    - A forced reduction in these protections could lead to **depressed rural incomes**, increased **volatility in food prices**, and a potential rise in **malnutrition**, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations.
    - Ongoing WTO disputes, such as those concerning India's sugar subsidies, highlight the country's precarious position if it fails to adapt its policies.
- **Pharmaceuticals and Digital Services:**
    - Sectors like pharmaceuticals, e-commerce, and digital services also rely on regulatory safeguards and state support.
    - Phasing out protections could undermine domestic firms, especially Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), by exposing them to intense competition from large foreign corporations.

4. A Recommended Multi-Pronged Strategy for India

- **1. Domestic Modernization and Regulatory Reform:**
    - India must enhance the competitiveness of its domestic industries by strengthening regulatory frameworks and institutions.
    - This includes bolstering platforms like the **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** to empower MSMEs in digital trade and investing in technology to drive productivity.
- **2. Calibrated and Phased Subsidy Reduction:**
    - Rather than an abrupt removal of protections, India should adopt a **phased and gradual approach** to subsidy rationalization.
    - This allows domestic industries and vulnerable populations time to adjust to the new competitive landscape.
    - **In agriculture,** this could involve pairing subsidy reductions with targeted support mechanisms like **crop insurance, Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT),** and investment in rural infrastructure (e.g., cold storage, supply chains).
- **3. Proactive and Strategic WTO Engagement:**
    - India needs to shift from a purely defensive posture to one of **active and pragmatic negotiation** within the WTO.
    - The goal should be to find a middle ground that balances the need for market access with critical national priorities like **food security, public health, and sustainable development.**
- **4. Long-Term Vision for Self-Reliance and Competitiveness:**

- Tactical trade negotiations must be part of a broader **long-term industrial and digital policy.**
- This vision should focus on boosting domestic capabilities through sustained investments in **innovation, research & development, and export diversification.**
- The ultimate aim is to reduce India's dependence on preferential treatment and build an economy that can compete on its own strengths.

5. Way Forward: A Wake-Up Call for Action

- China's decision is a critical **"wake-up call"** for India, signaling the end of an era where developing countries could indefinitely rely on protective trade measures.
- India must urgently formulate a **comprehensive, forward-looking plan** that integrates domestic reforms with strategic global engagement.
- By doing so, India can not only protect its vulnerable sectors but also enhance its overall trade resilience, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in a more competitive global environment.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-needs-a-plan-10273739/

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY **DATE: 29.09.2025 TOPIC:** Food Processing and Related Industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

What an empty plate of food should symbolise

1. The Scale and Impact of India's Post-Harvest Losses

- **A Silent Crisis:** The **International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (IDAFLW)**, observed on September 29, highlights the critical issue of food loss, which undermines both food and climate security.
- **Massive Economic Toll:** India incurs an annual economic loss of **₹1.5 trillion** due to post-harvest losses, which is equivalent to approximately **3.7% of its agricultural GDP**.
- **High Vulnerability in Perishables:** The losses are most severe for high-value perishable goods, with **fruits and vegetables** experiencing losses between **10–15%**. Even staple grains like **paddy (4.8%)** and **wheat (4.2%)** suffer significant losses.
- **Compounded Resource Wastage:** Every tonne of food lost represents a squandering of embedded resources, including nutrition, water, energy, and human labor, thereby intensifying the climate crisis.

2. Key Findings from National and Global Studies

- **Systematic Monitoring:** India has aligned its National Indicator Framework with **SDG Target 12.3.1 (Global Food Loss and Waste)**, enabling systematic tracking and enhancing accountability.
- **Significant GHG Emissions:** A collaborative study by the **FAO and NIFTEM** revealed that food loss from just 30 key commodities generates over **33 million tonnes of CO_2-equivalent emissions** annually.
    - Losses in **cereals (especially paddy)** are a major contributor, accounting for over **10 million tonnes of CO_2e** due to rice cultivation's high methane intensity.
    - Losses in **livestock products** are particularly damaging due to the resource-intensive nature of their production.
- **India vs. High-Income Countries:** A key distinction in the pattern of food wastage is:
    - **In India:** The majority of food loss occurs early in the supply chain—during **handling, processing, and distribution**—due to infrastructure gaps.
    - **In High-Income Countries:** Waste is predominantly a **consumer-level problem**, where purchased food is discarded.

3. A Multi-Pronged Approach to Mitigating Food Loss

- **1. Strengthening Infrastructure:**

    - The primary cause of post-harvest loss in India is weak and fragmented infrastructure.
    - **Cold Chains** are critical for reducing spoilage in perishables. This includes pre-cooling facilities, refrigerated transport, and modern storage units.
    - Government initiatives like the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY)** are focused on creating modern food logistics and processing infrastructure.
- **2. Deploying Affordable Technology:**
    - **For Smallholders:** Low-cost solutions like **solar-powered cold storage, perishable crates, and moisture-proof grain silos** can empower small and marginal farmers to significantly reduce spoilage at the farm gate.
- **3. Leveraging Digital Tools:**
    - Modern technologies like **IoT sensors** and **AI-driven forecasting** can optimize storage conditions, transportation routes, and distribution networks, thereby minimizing bottlenecks and waste.
    - The **FAO's Food Loss App (FLAPP)** is a digital tool that enables tracking of losses across the value chain, helping identify hotspots for intervention.
- **4. Adopting a Circular Economy Model:**
    - **Redirecting Surplus:** At the retail and consumption level, surplus edible food should be redirected to **food banks, community kitchens,** and charitable organizations.
    - **Waste-to-Wealth:** Unavoidable food waste can be converted into valuable resources such as **compost, animal feed, or bioenergy**, closing the loop and reducing landfill burden.

4. Shared Responsibility: A Collective Call to Action 🤝

- **Government's Role:**
    - Integrate food loss reduction targets into national **climate action plans (e.g., NDCs)**.
    - Invest in building resilient supply chain infrastructure and provide policy support (subsidies, credit guarantees) for adopting loss-reduction technologies.
- **Business and Private Sector's Role:**
    - Adopt **circular economy models** to minimize waste and create value from by-products.
    - Invest in and scale up innovative solutions for storage, transport, and distribution.
- **Civil Society and Academia's Role:**
    - Conduct research to map food loss hotspots and identify evidence-based solutions.
    - Run public awareness campaigns to educate consumers about mindful consumption.

- **Consumer's Role:**
    - Make conscious purchasing and consumption choices to avoid household food waste.
    - Actively support and participate in food redistribution programs.

5. Conclusion: The True Symbol of an Empty Plate

The challenge of food loss in India is substantial, but it is not insurmountable. A combination of **modern infrastructure, accessible technology, circular economy principles, and collective action** from all stakeholders can create a more efficient and sustainable food system. The IDAFLW serves as a crucial reminder that saving food is synonymous with conserving resources, protecting livelihoods, and strengthening our fight against climate change. An empty plate should be a symbol of a meal enjoyed and nourishment received, not of resources squandered from farm to fork.

Source: **https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/what-an-empty-plate-of-food-should-symbolise/article70106079.ece#:~:text=Saving%20food%20means%20saving%20the,meal%20enjoyed%2C%20not%20resources%20squandered.**

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 30.09.2025 TOPIC:** Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

South-South and Triangular Cooperation is more than a diplomatic phrase

1. Foundations and Core Principles of SSTC

- **Historical Roots:** The framework for SSTC was established by the **Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) in 1978**, which laid the groundwork for technical cooperation among developing nations of the Global South. The **UN Day for SSTC** is celebrated on September 12 to commemorate this milestone.
- **Guiding Values:** SSTC is built on the principles of **solidarity, mutual respect, and shared learning**, distinguishing it from traditional North-South donor-recipient aid models.
- **A Complementary Framework:** It is not a replacement for but a critical **supplement to conventional aid**, offering a more agile and contextually relevant approach to development, especially in a world facing geopolitical tensions and shrinking development funds.
- **Unique Advantages:** SSTC is highly valued for its **cost-effectiveness, replicability, and higher returns on investment**, as solutions are often developed in similar socio-economic contexts, making them easier to adapt.

2. India's Leadership and Contributions to the Global South

- **Philosophical Underpinning:** India's engagement in SSTC is driven by its ancient philosophy of **"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"** (the world is one family), positioning it as a voice for sovereignty, inclusion, and mutual respect.
- **Key Diplomatic Initiatives:**
    - Hosted the **Voice of the Global South Summits** to consolidate the perspectives and priorities of developing nations.
    - Successfully championed the inclusion of the **African Union** as a permanent member of the G-20 during its presidency.
- **Institutional Mechanisms for Development Partnership:**
    - Established the **Development Partnership Administration** to streamline its development assistance.
    - Expanded the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** programme to over 160 countries, offering capacity-building and skill development.

    - Launched the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund**, which has financed over 75 projects in 56 developing countries, with a focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- **Sharing Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** India is actively promoting its successful digital solutions like **Aadhaar and UPI** as replicable models for other developing countries to enhance financial inclusion and governance.
- **Collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP):**
    - A six-decade partnership has yielded innovative and scalable solutions for food security.
    - Initiatives like **Annapurti (Grain ATM)**, optimization of the Public Distribution System (PDS), and the national rice fortification project have not only strengthened India's own food safety net but also offer valuable models for other nations.

3. The Expanding Role and Global Support for SSTC

- **Triangular Cooperation:** This model enhances SSTC by connecting developing nations, traditional donors (from the Global North), and emerging donors. It facilitates the sharing of best practices, unlocks additional resources, and fosters greater trust and accountability.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** Effective and sustainable development requires partnerships that go beyond governments to include **civil society, the private sector, and grassroots communities.**
- **Growing Global Momentum:**
    - The **UN Fund for South-South Cooperation** has received contributions from over 47 governments, with its projects benefiting 155 nations.
    - In 2024, the WFP mobilized **$10.9 million** from Global South countries and the private sector specifically for SSTC projects aimed at achieving **SDG 2: Zero Hunger.**

4. Conclusion: A Pathway to a Fairer Future

- SSTC is more than a diplomatic phrase; it is a **powerful and practical tool for transformation**, especially with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development deadline approaching.
- It provides a **lifeline for billions** by offering frugal, innovative, and replicable solutions to complex challenges like food insecurity, climate change, and inequality.
- By fostering a renewed spirit of partnership that values the contributions of all nations, SSTC offers a clear roadmap toward a **more equitable, sustainable, and resilient global future.**

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/sstc-is-more-than-a-diplomatic-phrase/article70109816.ece

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 1: GEOGRAPHY **DATE: 30.09.2025**

TOPIC: Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent)

India wins second mineral exploration contract in the Indian Ocean: What is this, why it matters

1. Context: India's Milestone in Deep-Sea Exploration

- India has achieved a significant milestone by becoming the **first country** to secure two separate exploration contracts with the **International Seabed Authority (ISA)** for **Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS)** in the Indian Ocean.
- This positions India as a key player in the race for deep-sea minerals, which are critical for the global transition to renewable energy and advanced electronics.

2. Understanding Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS)

- **Formation:** PMS are mineral-rich deposits that form around **hydrothermal vents** on the ocean floor. Superheated, mineral-rich water ejected from these vents cools and precipitates, creating chimney-like structures containing high concentrations of valuable metals.
- **Strategic Importance of Metals:** These deposits are rich in **copper, nickel, cobalt, gold, silver, zinc, and rare earth elements**. These metals are indispensable for green technologies like **EV batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines**, making their sourcing a matter of national and economic security.

3. Details of India's Exploration Contracts with the ISA

- **Dual Exploration Zones:** Unlike other nations with single-zone contracts, India now manages two distinct exploration areas for PMS, giving it a strategic advantage.
    1. **Central Indian Ocean Ridge (CIR):** A contract for a **10,000 sq km** area secured in 2016.
    2. **Carlsberg Ridge (CR):** A new contract for a **2,239 sq km** area located strategically near the Lakshadweep islands.
- **Strategic Value of Carlsberg Ridge:** The CR zone's proximity to India's maritime boundaries enhances logistical feasibility and strengthens India's access to vital resources close to home.

4. Multi-Faceted Significance for India

- **Ensuring Resource Security:** By securing its own deep-sea mineral sources, India can reduce its dependence on volatile and often monopolized foreign supply chains for critical metals like cobalt and nickel, which are essential for its "Make in India" and green energy ambitions.

- **Geopolitical Leverage in the Indian Ocean:** In the face of increasing Chinese presence and interest in the Indian Ocean's resources, these contracts solidify India's strategic footprint and reinforce its role as a leading and responsible maritime power in the region.
- **Boosting Scientific and Technological Prowess:** The exploration push drives indigenous innovation in oceanography, deep-sea robotics, and geology. Institutions like the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)** are at the forefront of developing the niche technologies required for such missions.
- **Advancing the Blue Economy:** This initiative is a cornerstone of India's **Deep Ocean Mission** and aligns perfectly with its vision for a sustainable **"Blue Economy"**—leveraging marine resources for economic growth while ensuring environmental protection.

5. Overcoming the Challenges Ahead

- **Technological Hurdles:** Extracting minerals from extreme depths (3,000–6,000 meters) requires highly sophisticated and expensive technology, including remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) and pressure-resistant equipment, much of which is still under development in India.
- **Ecological Concerns:** Deep-sea mining poses a significant threat to fragile and often unique hydrothermal vent ecosystems. The potential for irreversible damage to marine biodiversity is a major concern, and the full ecological impact remains poorly understood.
- **Economic Viability:** Deep-sea mining is a capital-intensive, high-risk venture. The commercial feasibility depends heavily on global metal prices, and the high costs of exploration and extraction could outweigh the benefits if market conditions are unfavorable.

6. The Path Forward: India's Deep Ocean Mission

- India's contracts are for a **15-year exploration phase**, which involves detailed surveys, resource assessment, and environmental impact studies. Commercial extraction can only be considered after this phase is successfully completed and approved by the ISA.
- The **Deep Ocean Mission (launched in 2021)** is the government's flagship program to build capacity in this domain. Key components include:
    - Developing technology for mining polymetallic nodules and sulphides.
    - Creating a manned submersible (**"Samudrayaan"**) capable of diving to 6,000 meters.
    - Establishing onshore processing plants for extracted minerals.
- A responsible and phased approach, potentially involving international collaboration on technology and environmental safeguards, will be crucial for success.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-pms-exploration-carlsberg-ridge-indian-ocean-significance-10278691/lite/

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC



DAILY EDITORIALS
October 2025

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 01.10.2025

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1. **A Century of Upholding Merit – The UPSC's Journey (The Hindu) - 1**
2. **Analysis of Trumph Approach to Peacemaking (The Indian Express) - 2**

1. A Century of Upholding Merit - The UPSC's Journey

GS Paper 2 - Governance, Constitution, Polity.**Topic** - Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Sub-topics - Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Role of civil services in a democracy.

1. Introduction - The Guardian of Meritocracy

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) is celebrating its centenary, marking 100 years as the bedrock of merit-based recruitment for India's central civil services. It is a key constitutional body that ensures an efficient, independent, and impartial civil service, which is vital for good governance and national integrity. Its journey is a testament to India's commitment to fairness and trust in public institutions.

2. Historical Evolution of the Commission

The UPSC's origins predate India's independence, evolving through key legislative milestones -

1926 - The Public Service Commission was first established on October 1, 1926, following the recommendations of the Lee Commission and provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919. Sir Ross Barker was its first Chairman.

1935 - With the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935, it was reconstituted as the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC).

1950 - After the adoption of the Constitution of India, the FPSC was renamed the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), and its role and autonomy were enshrined under Article 320 of the Constitution.

3. Foundational Principles and Core Functions

The UPSC operates on a set of unwavering principles that have sustained public faith in the institution for a century.

Core Philosophy - Its guiding philosophy is to provide a **"true 'level playing field'"** for all aspirants, irrespective of their background. This is inspired by the Bhagavad Gita's teaching - "Niyatam kuru karma tvam, karma jyaayo hyakarmanah, ... Asakto hyaacharan karma paramapnoti purushah" (Perform your duty with rigor and fairness, without attachment to outcomes).

Integrity and Impartiality - The Commission ensures impartiality in evaluation and protects against malpractice, political influence, and external pressures, maintaining confidentiality and fairness.

Primary Function - Its mandate is to select the most suitable and meritorious talent for the nation's civil services, including engineering, forest, medical, and various other cadres, through a rigorous and competitive examination process.

Scale of Operations - The scale is immense, with lakhs of applicants taking the preliminary examination, choosing from numerous optional subjects and 22 languages, showcasing the complexity and logistical challenge of its task.

4. UPSC as a Symbol of the 'Indian Dream'

The Commission is more than just a recruiting agency; it represents a pathway for social mobility and national service.

Aspiration Hub - For decades, the civil services examination has embodied the aspirations of India's youth, attracting the most determined and talented individuals.

Inclusive Opportunity - It provides a genuine opportunity for aspirants from the most underprivileged and remote corners of the country to rise to the highest echelons of government, making it a powerful tool for social equity.

5. Challenges and Future-Ready Reforms

As it enters its second century, the UPSC faces the challenge of adapting to a rapidly changing world, marked by technological advancements and evolving governance models. To remain relevant, it has initiated several key reforms.

Adapting to New Demands - The primary challenge is to keep the recruitment process aligned with the changing needs of modern governance and the impact of the global technological revolution.

PRATIBHA Initiative - The UPSC is launching the Public Recruitment Application and Integration Bridge for Hiring Applicants (PRATIBHA). This includes -

1. A new application portal.
2. One-Time Registration for applicants.
3. Greater ease of application and enhanced user experience.

Embracing Technology - The Commission is actively working to integrate digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance the efficiency, transparency, and integrity of its processes without compromising fairness and rigour.

6. Conclusion - The Way Forward

For 100 years, the UPSC has been the unwavering guardian of merit, ensuring that the nation's bureaucracy is staffed by individuals selected on the basis of competence and integrity. While its legacy is a source of immense pride, its future depends on its ability to continuously adapt and innovate. By embracing technological reforms like PRATIBHA and AI, the UPSC is preparing itself for the next century, committed to upholding its core values while evolving to meet the demands of a modern, dynamic India.

Source - https -
//epaper.thehindu.com/reader?utm_source=Hindu&utm_medium=Menu&utm_campaign=Header&_gl=1*1x0qkjl*_gcl_au*MTI4NzE1MzE3OC4xNzUyOTAyOTMyLjE3Mjg2Mjg3MjkuMTc1OTc0NzY2OS4xNzU5NzQ3NzE3

2. Analysis of Trump's Approach to Peacemaking

GS Paper 2 - International Relations.**Topic** - Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on global affairs.

Sub-topics - Conflict Resolution, Role of Major Powers in International Politics, Middle East Conflict (Israel-Palestine), Ukraine Conflict.

1. Introduction - Ambition vs. Execution

The article argues that while President Donald Trump's peace initiatives in the Middle East and Europe are bold ventures driven by the might of US power and his personal ambition, they are fundamentally flawed. His approach lacks the patience, diplomatic diligence, and deep understanding of complex conflicts necessary for successful and sustainable peacemaking. Consequently, his grand plans are ambitious declarations resting on "shaky foundations."

2. The Nature of Trump's "Peace President" Personal

Personal Commitment - Trump has a strong personal commitment to being remembered as a "peace president," willing to expend significant political capital on ending global conflicts.

Dominant but Impatient Style - His approach is characterized by bold, unilateral declarations and a belief that his personal intervention can quickly solve long-standing issues, as seen in his promise to end the Ukraine war "in a day."

Lack of Diplomatic Nuance - The core problem identified is that his commitment is not matched by the hard work of diplomacy. He tends to overlook the tragic roots of conflicts and the arduous process required for genuine reconciliation.

3. Case Study - The Middle East Peace Plan

Trump unveiled a sweeping 21-point plan aimed at ending the Gaza war and establishing a roadmap for peaceful Israeli-Palestinian coexistence.

Key Provisions of the Plan -

1. An immediate ceasefire and the exchange of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners.
2. Phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.
3. Delivery of large-scale humanitarian relief.
4. Establishment of an interim, technocratic Palestinian committee to govern Gaza, supervised by an international "Board of Peace" chaired by Trump himself.
5. Disarmament of Hamas militias, with amnesty for those who comply.
6. A framework for economic reconstruction and a conditional pathway toward eventual Palestinian statehood.

Reactions from Key Stakeholders -

1. **Arab & Muslim States (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, etc.) -** Offered nuanced formal praise. They welcomed Trump's personal commitment but stopped short of endorsing every provision, reiterating their core demand for a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem.
2. **Israel (Netanyahu) -** Did not reject the plan but made it clear that if Hamas refuses to comply, Israel will "finish the job" in Gaza. The plan also faces skepticism from Israel's far-right.
3. **Hamas and other Militant Groups -** Dismissed the plan as a one-sided deal heavily tilted toward Israel, viewing the terms as a call for "unconditional surrender."

4. Core Challenges and Implementation Pitfalls

The plan, even if accepted superficially, faces immense practical and political obstacles.

Intractable Issues - Key elements like the disarmament and demilitarization of Hamas and the establishment of a neutral, apolitical authority in Gaza are deeply contentious and have derailed past peace efforts.

Lack of Trust - The deep-seated enmity ensures that each side will likely find excuses to stall or abandon the process if it disadvantages them.

Logistical and Resource Burden - The plan requires a massive multinational stabilization force and international oversight, which faces challenges of legitimacy, coordination, and resources. Rebuilding Gaza's shattered infrastructure would be a monumental, long-term task vulnerable to ongoing violence.

Parallel to Ukraine - Trump's difficulties mirror his failed attempt in Ukraine, where his bold claims collided with the reality that neither Russia nor Ukraine would accept Washington's terms.

5. Conclusion - A Legacy of Bravado Over Substance

The article concludes that Trump's peacemaking style has distinct characteristics -

Assets - He brings immense political bravado, diplomatic energy, and the extraordinary leverage of US power. His high-stakes maneuvers create dramatic headlines and initial momentum.

Deficiencies - He lacks the essential qualities of a successful peacemaker - persistence, a willingness to compromise, and a deep, nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics.

Ultimately, any peace plan's success depends on the combatants' willingness to make painful concessions, supported by internal political consensus. Trump's approach, focused on grand gestures rather than a sustained, patient process, is unlikely to overcome the entrenched enmities in conflicts as complex as those in Gaza or Ukraine.

Source - https - //indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/trump-gaza-peace-plan-netanyahu-hamas-10280155/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 02.10.2025

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1. India-Japan Partnership - Synergies, Challenges, and Future Prospects(The Hindu) - 1
2. Tamil Nadu's Startup Revolution - A Case Study in Inclusive Innovation(Indian Express)- 2

1. India-Japan Partnership - Synergies, Challenges, and Future Prospects

GS Paper 2 - International Relations. **Topic** - Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub-topic - India-Japan Relations.

1. Introduction - A Partnership of Complementary Contrasts

The India-Japan "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" is set for a significant upgrade, underscored by Japan's target of investing 10 trillion yen (about ₹60,000 crore) in India over the next decade. Despite being studies in contrast—India being large, developing, and diverse, while Japan is small, developed, and homogenous—the two nations complement each other exceptionally well. The partnership is built on three key synergies - complementary demographics, a conflict-free history, and aligned geopolitical interests, particularly concerning the rise of China.

2. The Three Core Synergies Driving the Relationship

Diametrically Opposite Demographics - This is the primary economic synergy.

Japan - An aging economy (median age ~50 years) with a shrinking working-age population (59%). It is capital-rich and technology-intensive, with a high degree of automation (e.g., 1,531 robots per 10,000 employees in the auto industry).

India - A young nation (median age <30 years) with a stable and large working-age population (68%). It is labor-abundant and has vast land resources.

The Opportunity - This creates a perfect match where Japanese capital and technology can be combined with India's large workforce to create world-class manufacturing hubs.

A Harmonious History and Political Trust - The relationship is unburdened by any historical conflict or territorial disputes, making political negotiations smoother. Japanese brands like Sony and Mitsubishi are well-respected in India for their quality. The Maruti-Suzuki partnership stands as a landmark example of successful collaboration.

Geopolitical and Strategic Alignment -

The China Factor - A key driver is the shared goal of reducing economic and strategic dependence on China. Both nations run significant trade deficits with China (Japan - $46.5 billion; India - $99.2 billion in 2024-25).

The Quad - Both are active members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) along with the US and Australia, working towards a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific.

3. Challenges - Why Japanese FDI in India Underperforms

Despite the strong potential, Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India has stagnated and remains significantly lower than in other regions.

Underwhelming FDI Figures - In the post-pandemic years (2022-24), India received a fraction of the Japanese FDI that went to ASEAN nations. For example, in 2024, India received $5.3 billion compared to the $28.7 billion invested in ASEAN.

Supply Chain and Quality Issues - A 2025 JETRO survey revealed that 76.4% of Japanese firms in India cited the "absence of suppliers that meet the quality and technical capabilities requirement" as a major problem. These firms rely heavily on Chinese inputs, and India's anti-dumping investigations against Chinese imports create sourcing uncertainty and increase costs.

Regulatory Hurdles - The Press Note 3 regulation (April 2020), which mandates government approval for investments from countries sharing a land border with India, has inadvertently affected Japanese firms. Japanese companies with any Chinese equity holdings or beneficial interest (e.g., as sourcing partners)

face delays and are less likely to receive regulatory clearance, pushing them towards more open economies like those in ASEAN.

Future Avenues for Deepening Cooperation

The current global situation offers a prime opportunity to overcome these challenges and expand collaboration into new, critical areas.

Critical and Emerging Technologies -

Semiconductors - This is a key area of collaboration. Japan is a leader in manufacturing equipment and materials, while India needs capital and technology. This partnership can address Japan's labor shortage with India's pool of engineers.

Examples - Tata Electronics is partnering with Tokyo Electron for equipment and training, while Japanese chipmaker Renesas Electronics is working with the Indian government to skill engineering students. Other areas include Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital public infrastructure, and cybersecurity.

Integration in the Banking and Financial Sector -

Japanese megabanks are looking to expand into high-growth markets like India.

The landmark deal allowing Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. (SMBC) to acquire a stake in Yes Bank sets a major precedent for foreign investment in India's banking sector.

This can inject much-needed capital, fintech expertise, and global governance standards into Indian banking.

5. Conclusion - Translating Potential into Reality

The India-Japan relationship is at an inflection point, with complementary interests and aligned geopolitical goals creating a historic opportunity. While high-level assurances are promising, the real challenge lies in addressing the on-ground issues of supply chain quality and regulatory hurdles. If these can be effectively resolved, the partnership has the potential to translate into transformative investment, job creation, and strategic depth, significantly benefiting both nations and contributing to stability in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Tamil Nadu's Startup Revolution - A Case Study in Inclusive Innovation

GS Paper 3 - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. **Topic -** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors.

Sub-topics - Startup Ecosystem, Inclusive Growth, Role of State Governments in Economic Development, Industrial Policy.**Relevance -** This article serves as an excellent case study on how a state government can systematically build a thriving, inclusive startup ecosystem.

1. Introduction - From Manufacturing Hub to Startup Leader

Tamil Nadu, traditionally known for its manufacturing excellence, has engineered a remarkable transformation into a leading startup hub in India. This success is not accidental but the result of a deliberate, systems-based strategy that has seen the state's DPIIT-registered startups grow six-fold in just four years (from 2,032 to over 12,100). This has propelled Tamil Nadu from an 'Emerging State' to a 'Best Performer' in the national States' Startup Ranking 2022. The state's vision is to nurture startups from being petitioners for opportunity to becoming partners in the state's growth, as exemplified by the journey of Torus Robotics.

2. The Three-Pillar Strategy for Building the Ecosystem

Tamil Nadu's success is anchored in a comprehensive three-pillar strategy implemented by its nodal agency, StartupTN.

Pillar 1 - State Capital as a Strategic Catalyst - The state uses its capital not just for funding but to strategically de-risk early-stage ventures and attract private investment.

Tamil Nadu Startup Seed Grant Fund (TANSEED) - Provides equity-free seed grants of ₹10 lakh to early-stage startups, with an enhanced grant of ₹15 lakh for women-led, green-tech, and rural ventures. This

modest seed support has shown a 28X multiplier effect, with state funding of ₹18.79 crore attracting over ₹537 crore in further investments.

Frontier Sector Funds - Targeted funds like the Tamil Nadu Space Tech Fund (₹10 crore) offer milestone-based assistance to boost innovation in high-potential sectors.

Pillar 2 - Inclusion as a Core Strategy, Not Charity - Inclusion is woven into the architecture of the state's startup policy to ensure equitable growth.

Social Justice Initiatives - The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) Startup Fund (corpus enhanced to ₹50 crore) provides equity investments to level the playing field. This is complemented by the Periyar Social Justice Venture Lab, an accelerator for social enterprises from these communities.

Gender Parity - Thozhili bootcamps are conducted across the state to equip and support women entrepreneurs. Notably, 50% of all registered startups in the state are women-led.

Support for Marginalized Groups - Special Seed Grant Funds and structured mentorship are provided for physically challenged and transgender founders.

Rural Innovation - The Gramam Thorum Puthozhil (Establishing Start-ups in Villages) scheme aims to establish 100 startups in 100 villages, promoting decentralised entrepreneurship.

Pillar 3 - Building a Decentralised and Connected Ecosystem - The state has built physical and digital infrastructure to ensure that opportunities are not confined to a single city.

Physical Infrastructure - Ten regional startup hubs (in cities like Madurai, Tirunelveli, Erode) and 100 Pre-Incubation Centres in Tier-II/III/IV institutions have been established to bring infrastructure, mentors, and markets closer to entrepreneurs across the state.

Digital Rails -

1. **MentorTN -** A digital platform with over 320 mentors that has facilitated more than 1,120 hours of mentoring.
2. **TANFUND -** A portal connecting startups to over 300 investors, which has facilitated the raising of **₹127.09 crore** so far.

Academia-Industry Connect - StartupTN partners with the state's flagship skilling program, Naan Mudhalvan, to guide student projects from hackathons into commercially viable startups.

3. Ecosystem Enablers and Support Tools

Beyond the three pillars, several tools have been introduced to reduce friction for early-stage founders.

StartupTN Smart Card - Offers subsidised access to essential software and services.

Bilingual Call Centre - Provides crucial information in both Tamil and English.

BrandLabs - A course to help founders build strong brands.

Corporate Innovation Initiative - An open innovation portal connecting startups with large corporations like Bosch, Hero MotoCorp, and Daimler to solve real-world industry challenges.

4. The Way Forward - Tamil Nadu Global Startup Summit (TNGSS) 2025

To cement its position as a global startup destination, the state is hosting the TNGSS 2025 in Coimbatore (October 9-10, 2025). This summit aims to bring together over 30,000 global and domestic stakeholders. Key features include a first-of-its-kind AI-enabled matchmaking app to facilitate connections and inclusive infrastructure like crèches and feeding rooms to ensure a welcoming environment for all participants.

5. Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's journey to becoming a top-performing startup state demonstrates the power of a systematic, mission-driven approach. The state did not inherit a thriving startup engine; it built one by revitalizing its nodal agency, expanding its reach statewide, and making inclusion the very architecture of its growth model. By creating accessible and interconnected "rails of mentors, markets, and money,"

Tamil Nadu has created a robust and equitable ecosystem that serves as a model for other states to follow.

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 03.10.2025

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1. **Technological Unemployment - Historical Patterns and the AI Challenge - 1**
2. **Crafting India's Energy Policy - From Slogans to Strategy - 2**

1. Technological Unemployment - Historical Patterns and the AI Challenge

GS Paper 3 - Indian Economy / Science and Technology **Topics -** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics; Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

1. Introduction - A Recurring Historical Challenge

Technological unemployment, a term coined by economist John Maynard Keynes in 1930, refers to job loss caused by technological advancements. Keynes postulated that this occurs when our "discovery of means to economise labour" outpaces our ability to find "new uses for labour." This is not a new phenomenon but a recurring pattern throughout history, with the current wave of Artificial Intelligence (AI) bringing the issue back into sharp focus.

2. Historical Precedents of Technological Disruption

The article highlights several historical examples to show that resistance to job-displacing technology is a consistent theme, and often, the underlying technological cause is overlooked in favour of more visible political or social factors.

The Luddites (1811-1817) - The original protest against technological unemployment, where English textile workers destroyed automated looms that threatened their livelihoods. This has become a symbolic reference for anti-technology movements.

Indian Indigo Farmers (Pre-Independence) - While Mahatma Gandhi's Champaran Satyagraha is often framed as a fight against exploitative British planters, the article argues the root cause of low indigo prices was technological. German companies like Bayer and BASF had developed synthetic indigo from coal tar, making natural indigo cultivation economically unviable.

Bank Computerization in India (1978) - Over half a million bank employees went on strike to protest the introduction of computers, fearing mass job losses. Despite this resistance, the government pushed forward. The eventual outcome was not mass unemployment but a massive expansion of the banking sector, with population coverage increasing from under 10% to over 90% and the rise of digital banking.

Mumbai Textile Mill Strike (1982) - The widespread closure of Mumbai's cotton mills is often attributed to the bitter conflict between mill owners and the union leader Datta Samant. However, the article posits the fundamental reason was the market disruption caused by the arrival of cheaper and more durable synthetic cloths like nylon and polyester, which made cotton mills obsolete.

3. The Current Wave - Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Neo-Luddism

The contemporary wave of anxiety is centered around AI, with early signs of protest and concern emerging globally.

Modern Protests - Small-scale protests are already occurring, such as demonstrations outside the UK's Department of Science and OpenAI's office in San Francisco, with protesters demanding regulation and raising concerns about existential risks.

Concerns from Tech Pioneers - Even the creator of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, has started a campaign for a more human-centric web, warning against threats from misinformation and the domination of big tech platforms.

4. The Core Challenge - The Regulatory Dilemma

The central question facing governments today, including in India, is how to regulate AI and other frontier technologies. The challenge lies in striking a delicate balance.

Risk of Over-regulation - Too much regulation could stifle innovation, slow down economic progress, and prevent society from reaping the immense potential benefits of AI in fields like healthcare, education, and logistics.

Risk of Under-regulation - Too little regulation could allow the technology to cause severe social disruption, exacerbate inequality, and "savagely act as a sword against humanity" through job losses and misuse.

5. Conclusion - Navigating the Future

History teaches us that technological disruption is inevitable and often brings long-term benefits despite short-term pain and resistance. However, the unprecedented speed, scale, and scope of the AI revolution present a unique challenge. A proactive, balanced, and well-thought-out regulatory framework is not just necessary but essential for governments to navigate this transition, ensuring that the benefits of AI are distributed widely while mitigating the risks of social and economic upheaval.

2. Crafting India's Energy Policy - From Slogans to Strategy

GS Paper 3 - Infrastructure - Energy; Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Topics - Energy Security, Government Policies and Interventions, Geopolitics of Energy, Critical Minerals, Renewable Energy.

1. Introduction - Defining the Goals

To effectively navigate the future, India's energy policy must be guided by a clear and pragmatic interpretation of the national slogans 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. The article argues for a nuanced understanding of these terms to create a robust policy roadmap that addresses economic, social, and environmental imperatives.

2. Decoding 'Viksit' and 'Atmanirbhar' in the Energy Context

'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) - In the energy sector, this must be interpreted more broadly than just economic metrics like GDP. It should encompass social inclusiveness (energy access for all) and environmental protection (a clean energy transition). India does not have the luxury to "develop first and clean up later."

'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) - A crucial distinction must be made between 'self-sufficiency' and 'self-reliance'.

Self-Sufficiency (Producing what we consume) - This is an unrealistic and undesirable goal.

1. **Petroleum -** It's unrealistic. India's import dependency has increased from ~30% in the 1970s to ~85% today, despite efforts to boost domestic production.
2. **Coal -** While attainable (India has the 5th largest deposits), over-dependence on this highly polluting fuel would compromise the environmental goals of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

Self-Reliance (Ensuring access to energy) - This is a more pragmatic and achievable goal. It means creating a robust network of national and international relationships and assets to guarantee access to affordable, timely, and clean energy. A key new imperative of this approach is securing access to critical minerals essential for the green transition, such as nickel, cobalt, lithium, copper, and rare earths.

3. The Global Energy Backdrop - Key Realities for India

India's energy policy must be framed against a challenging global backdrop.

Ecological Crisis - Global efforts to limit climate change have largely failed, with the 1.5°C temperature increase target already breached in 2024. As a country highly vulnerable to global warming, India has no choice but to support and participate in international collaborative efforts for environmental protection.

Weaponization of Energy and Geopolitical Hypocrisy - Globalization is in a 'comatose' state, leading to the weaponization of energy trade. The article highlights hypocrisy where the US sanctions India for buying Russian oil while purchasing from Venezuela, and EU nations buy Russian LNG while calling for sanctions. The key lesson is that opportunism is the bedrock of contemporary energy policy.

China's Emergence as an Energy Leviathan - China dominates the green energy supply chain. While critical minerals are mined in Africa, Latin America, and Australia, they are overwhelmingly processed and smelted in China. This makes the global green transition, and by extension India's, heavily dependent on China.

4. A Five-Point Strategy for 'Energy Atmanirbharta'

Based on this analysis, the article proposes five high-level strategic initiatives for the Indian government.

1. **Enact Legislation -** Pass an "Energy Atmanirbharta Act" to create a solid legal and institutional framework for the country's energy security goals.
2. **Create Strategic Stockpiles -** Establish a strategic stockpile of critical minerals and metals, analogous to the existing Strategic Petroleum Reserves, to buffer against supply chain disruptions.
3. **Aggressively Acquire Overseas Assets -** Disproportionately invest public funds in acquiring, controlling, or managing international energy assets, including mines for critical minerals. The full weight of the Indian state (diplomatic and financial) should back these efforts.
4. **Boost R&D and Innovation -** Massively increase public investment in energy research and technology. Replicate and institutionalize the global model of successful Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) involving government departments, academia, research labs, and private businesses.
5. **Strengthen the Domestic Ecosystem -** Undertake domestic reforms to simplify the regulatory environment, ensure easy access to factors of production (land, capital), guarantee contract sanctity, and contemporize the workforce (e.g., training more solar maintenance engineers).

5. Conclusion

For India to achieve genuine energy security, it must shift its policy focus from the unrealistic goal of 'self-sufficiency' to the pragmatic pursuit of 'self-reliance'. This requires a clear-eyed understanding of the volatile global landscape and the implementation of a comprehensive strategy that combines aggressive overseas asset acquisition, robust domestic reforms, and a major push for technological innovation.

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 04.10.2025

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1. South – South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) (The hindu) - 1

2. Trump's 20 point Peace Proposal (The Indian Express) - 3

1. South – South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)

TOPIC - GS2/International Relations

The South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) has emerged as a transformative force in global development in shifting geopolitical landscapes, widening inequalities, and dwindling development aid.

About the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)

Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), 1978 enshrined principles of mutual respect, shared learning, and solidarity, far from being a transactional model among developing nations.

Nairobi Outcome Document (2009) - It was negotiated in the UN High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation in Nairobi, Kenya and adopted by the UNGA. It defined the principles guiding how cooperation among developing countries (South-South cooperation) operates, expanding beyond technical assistance to encompass political, institutional, and infrastructural cooperation.

The South-South Cooperation (SSC) is defined as a process where two or more developing countries pursue individual or shared capacity development objectives through knowledge exchange, skills, resources, and technical know-how. It involves governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector. It acts as a complement, not a substitute, to North-South cooperation. Triangular Cooperation is defined as 'Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries, supported by a developed country or multilateral organization'. It provides financial, technical, and experiential support to strengthen Southern partnerships and promote regional integration.

Key Principles of South-South Cooperation

1. Common endeavor based on shared experiences, solidarity, and objectives.
2. Respect for national sovereignty, ownership, and priorities.
3. Partnerships among equals, free from conditionalities.
4. Mutual accountability and transparency, aligned with development projects on the ground.
5. Multi-stakeholder engagement - NGOs, private sector, civil society, academia.
6. Theme (2025) - 'New Opportunities and Innovation through SSTC'

Contemporary Relevance of SSTC

A Response to Global Challenges - Over 800 million people still live in extreme poverty, and many developing nations spend more on debt servicing than on essential services like health and education. SSTC provides homegrown, scalable solutions tailored to local realities—from climate-smart agriculture to digital finance and health innovations.

Empowerment Through Solidarity - SSTC is built on mutual respect, shared learning, and sovereignty, unlike traditional aid models that often come with conditions. It fosters self-reliance and resilience, enabling countries to co-create solutions rather than depend on external prescriptions.

Catalyst for the SDGs - SSTC is a key engine for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, especially as traditional aid flows decline. It's transforming sectors like agriculture, health, education, and technology through locally owned, cost-effective innovations.

Key Concerns and Challenges in SSTC

Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination - Diverse political systems, economic priorities, and historical contexts often lead to fragmented efforts and difficulty in forming unified positions on global issues. It can dilute the impact of SSTC initiatives and hinder the creation of cohesive platforms for collaboration.

Limited Institutional Capacity - Many developing countries lack the technical, financial, and institutional capacity to implement and sustain SSTC projects. Fiscal constraints and evolving geopolitical dynamics pose serious challenges to collective action.

Funding and Resource Gaps - SSTC often relies on trust funds and voluntary contributions, such as the India-UN Development Partnership Fund or the IBSA Fund. These mechanisms are not always predictable or sufficient to meet growing development needs.

Political Will and Follow-Through - There are concerns about inconsistent follow-through on commitments, while countries like India have shown strong rhetorical support for SSTC. For example, the India-Africa Forum Summit has been overdue since 2015, raising questions about sustained engagement.

Triangular Cooperation Complexities - Involving developed countries or multilateral organizations adds value but introduces power asymmetries and bureaucratic hurdles.

Role of United Nations (UN) & UNDP

The United Nations commemorates SSTC on September 12, recognizing its role in fostering inclusive partnerships and sustainable development.

UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) - It supports coherence and coordination of SSC and TrC initiatives.

UNDP incorporated SSTC as a core working approach in its Strategic Plan (2014–2017).

1. It serves as an operational arm to support SSTC at global, regional, and country levels.
2. UNDP acts as Knowledge Broker, Capacity Development Supporter, and Partnership Facilitator.

India's Role and Philosophy

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) - India's evolution from a food-deficit to a food-surplus economy — underpinned by one of the world's largest food safety nets — illustrates the power of indigenous solutions. Its philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) aligns with SSTC's values of inclusion and cooperation. India has emerged as a hub for cost-effective, locally relevant innovations in digital transformation, climate resilience, health systems, and sustainable financing.

Key Contributions

1. Hosting the Voice of the Global South Summits;
2. Securing permanent membership for the African Union during its G20 presidency;
3. Establishing the Development Partnership Administration;
4. Scaling the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme in 160+ countries;
5. Launching the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and sharing digital innovations such as Aadhaar and UPI globally.

India-WFP Partnership - India and the World Food Programme (WFP) have co-created solutions with global relevance for more than six decades. It piloted innovations such as -

1. Annapurti (Grain ATMs);
2. Supply chain optimisation in food distribution;

3. Women-led Take-Home Ration programme;
4. National rice fortification project;

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/sstc-is-more-than-a-diplomatic-phrase/article70109816.ece

2. Trump's 20 point Peace Proposal

Recently, US President Donald Trump unveiled a 20-point peace proposal, dubbed as 'Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict' aimed at ending the protracted war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

About Gaza Conflict - Gaza, a narrow coastal strip in West Asia, often referred to as the Middle East. It was once a thriving mosaic of Arab, Turkish, Persian, and Jewish cultures. The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the Balfour Declaration by Britain (1917) laid the groundwork for territorial fragmentation and Zionist settlement in Palestine. Gaza became a focal point of resistance following Israel's establishment in 1948 and subsequent wars, and has witnessed multiple wars with thousands of casualties and widespread destruction. The current crisis escalated on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, the Palestinian militant group governing Gaza, launched a surprise attack on Israel, killing over 1,200 people and taking 250 hostages. It has drawn in actors like Hezbollah (Lebanon), Iran, and the US, turning Gaza into a geopolitical battleground.

Core Elements of the Gaza Peace Plan Announced By Trump

Hamas Disarmament and Amnesty - The Plan demands disarmament and surrender of Hamas and relinquish control of Gaza. Members pledging peaceful coexistence will be granted amnesty, while those wishing to leave Gaza will receive safe passage to countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, or Iran.

International Stabilization Force (ISF) - A temporary International Stabilization Force (ISF), supported by the US, Arab partners, Jordan, and Egypt, will replace Israeli troops in Gaza. The ISF aims to secure borders, prevent arms smuggling, and train vetted Palestinian police. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will gradually withdraw, maintaining only a 'security perimeter presence' until full stability is ensured.

Transitional Governance - Governance of Gaza will shift to a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee, supervised by an international 'Board of Peace' led by Trump itself.

Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction - The plan allows unrestricted humanitarian aid, focusing on infrastructure rehabilitation, hospitals, food supply chains, and road clearance. Aid will be delivered via the UN and Red Crescent without interference.

Hostage-Prisoner Exchange - All hostages must be returned within 72 hours of Israel's acceptance. In exchange, Israel will release 250 life-term prisoners and 1,700 Gazans detained post-October 7, including all women and children. Remains of hostages will be exchanged at a ratio of 1 Israeli to 15 Palestinians.

Regional and International Guarantees - Eight countries — Qatar, Jordan, UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt — have welcomed the plan.

1. China and Russia expressed support.
2. Guarantees will be provided to ensure Gaza remains free from future militant threats.

Challenges to Implementing Trump's Gaza Peace Plan

Hamas's Reluctance to Disarm and Cede Power - Hamas's deep-rooted presence, ideological stance and role in armed resistance in the region are seen as the most formidable hurdle.

Regional Opposition to Forced Resettlement - Trump's suggestion that Palestinians could be relocated outside Gaza was swiftly rejected by key regional players like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. These nations emphasized the right of Palestinians to remain in Gaza, opposing any form of displacement.

Security and Sovereignty Concerns - The proposed plan for International Stabilization Force (ISF) until Gaza is deemed safe could be interpreted as a de facto Israeli occupation, undermining Palestinian sovereignty and fueling distrust.

Clarity and Operational Details - The plan lacks timelines, maps, and enforcement mechanisms, raising doubts about its feasibility. Trump did not take questions during the announcement, leaving many aspects of the plan ambiguous.

Political Implications of Trump's Gaza Peace Plan

Israel's Political Calculus - The plan demands Hamas's complete disarmament and exclusion from Gaza's future governance, a stance that could deepen internal Israeli debates over long-term strategy.

Palestinian Governance Shift - Gaza would be governed by an apolitical Palestinian committee under international oversight, sidelining both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority until reforms are complete. The plan hints at a 'credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination', a politically sensitive proposition that could reignite debates over a two-state solution.

Regional Diplomacy and Realignment - Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar are expected to facilitate Hamas's safe exit and support reconstruction, signaling a shift toward more active Arab mediation. The plan implicitly sidelines Iran, which backs Hamas, potentially altering the balance of influence in West Asia.

For Trump - The plan could boost Trump's legacy and ambitions for a Nobel Peace Prize, reminiscent of the Oslo Accords, if successful. However, it carries a business dimension, with opportunities for large-scale reconstruction projects in Gaza.

Implications on India

Diplomatic Alignment and Global Standing - India welcomed the plan, calling it a 'viable pathway to long-term and sustainable peace' in West Asia. India's endorsement reflects its balanced diplomacy—maintaining ties with both Israel and Arab nations like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Strategic and Security Interests - The plan's emphasis on counterterrorism and deradicalization aligns with India's own security concerns, especially regarding cross-border extremism. Israel noted that the plan reflects shared values between India and Israel, including the fight against terrorism.

Economic and Infrastructure Opportunities - India's expertise in infrastructure development could play a key role in Gaza's reconstruction. Peace in West Asia would boost India's ambitions for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, facilitating trade and connectivity.

Regional Stability and Diaspora Welfare - West Asia hosts over 9 million Indians, making regional stability crucial for their safety and economic well-being. The region supplies about 80% of India's oil, so peace could stabilize energy prices and ensure uninterrupted supply chains. However, Pakistan's prominent role in the Gaza plan raises concerns for India.

Source - https - //indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-from-citizenship-check-fears-to-wider-voter-inclusion-how-ec-course-corrected-on-bihar-sir-10281095/?ref=infinite

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 06.10.2025

Index

1. Disaster Management(The Hindu) -1

2. Issues Related To Health(The Indian Express) -3

1. Disaster Management

India is moving beyond reactive relief efforts to a proactive, multi-layered strategy that integrates prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and recovery, reflecting a growing recognition of the complex risks posed by climate change, urbanization, and natural hazards.

India's Disaster Preparedness

India's approach to disaster preparedness has evolved into a robust, multi-tiered framework led by the Union Home Ministry (MHA), with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) at its core. India's strategy emphasizes prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and response—ensuring that resilience is not just reactive but deeply embedded in national development, anchored in the Disaster Management Act of 2005.

NDMA and the Disaster Management Act, 2005

The NDMA, established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, operates through five key divisions - Policy & Plans, Mitigation, Operations & Communications, Information & Technology, and Finance & Administration.

Its vision is to build a safer and disaster-resilient India through -

1. A technology-driven, multi-hazard, and multi-sectoral strategy;
2. Empowerment of stakeholders at all levels—central, state, district, and community;
3. Integration of disaster risk reduction (DRR) into development planning;

Shift in Policy - From Relief to Resilience

Financial Architecture for Resilience - The 15th Finance Commission's allocation of ₹2.28 lakh crore ($30 billion) over five years marks a pivotal moment in aligning public finance with DRR. Rather than focusing solely on post-disaster relief, the Finance Commission divided funding across -

1. Preparedness and Capacity Building (10%);
2. Mitigation (20%);
3. Response (40%);
4. Reconstruction (30%);

It ensures that resilience is embedded into every stage of disaster management—from early warning systems to rebuilding efforts.

Building the Budget-to-Project Pipeline - The Commission identified five priority areas to ensure efficiency and accountability in DRR financing -

1. Prioritising multi-hazard challenges across India's diverse regions.
2. Integrating scientific mitigation concepts into fiscal planning.
3. Avoiding duplication with existing central or state schemes.
4. Strengthening inter-ministerial and Centre-State coordination.
5. Establishing light-touch regulatory mechanisms for timely project implementation.

By 2025, inter-ministerial and Centre-State appraisal committees were operational for all region- or hazard-specific projects, ensuring a transparent and science-driven approach.

Progress in Reconstruction and Mitigation

Reconstruction Initiatives - Over the past two years, the MHA approved ₹5,000 crore in reconstruction packages for Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, and Kerala. These projects focus on rebuilding climate-resilient infrastructure and assessing damages caused by extreme precipitation events.

Nature-Based Mitigation Programmes - Under the 20% mitigation fund, projects worth ₹10,000 crore ($1.2 billion) have been approved to promote nature-based and sustainable solutions. These efforts built upon the National Cyclone Mitigation Programme (2011–22), which successfully reduced coastal vulnerability through cyclone shelters, embankments, and early warning systems.

Initiatives include -

1. Revitalising water bodies and green spaces to mitigate urban flooding.
2. Monitoring glacial lakes using remote sensing and automated weather stations.
3. Applying bioengineering techniques for slope stabilization in landslide-prone areas.
4. Rejuvenating beels (wetlands) along the Brahmaputra River.
5. Preventing forest fires through fuel evacuation and water body restoration.

Strengthening Preparedness and Capacity Building

Institutional and Community Training - Preparedness and capacity-building funds (₹5,000 crore) have focused on -

1. Modernising fire safety infrastructure.
2. Training 2.5 lakh volunteers under the Apda Mitra and Yuva Apda Mitra programmes.
3. Expanding research and training through the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM).

NIDM now offers a standardized curriculum across 36 streams of disaster management, with the goal of mainstreaming DRR education down to the panchayat level.

Expanding the Knowledge Network - The 327-member university network, along with the NDRF Academy and National Fire Service College, plays a crucial role in training public servants, conducting mock exercises, and promoting hazard-specific awareness and school safety programmes.

Coastal Resilience and Vulnerable Communities -

At the ICDRI 2025 summit, India spotlighted the vulnerability of coastal regions and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). With nearly 90% of global trade moving by sea and coastal GDP projected to double by 2030, the stakes are high. India is supporting SIDS with resilient infrastructure, early warning systems, and water security measures, while advocating for a global digital repository of best practices.

Enhancing Early Warning and Communication Systems -

Technological innovation has dramatically improved India's early warning capabilities, reducing casualties and improving community preparedness. The multi-media Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) delivers timely alerts in regional languages, ensuring last-mile communication even in remote areas.

International Cooperation and Global Leadership -

India's commitment to the UN's Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is evident in its international advocacy. Leadership in G-20, SCO, BIMSTEC, and IORA initiatives. During the G-20 presidency, India spearheaded the creation of the first Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, focusing on -

1. Early warning systems;
2. Disaster-resilient infrastructure;
3. Financing for DRR;
4. Resilient recovery;
5. Nature-based solutions;

These platforms help India exchange best practices and develop global frameworks for climate resilience and sustainable risk management.

Conclusion

India's approach to disaster risk reduction represents a paradigm shift — from reactive disaster response to proactive resilience-building. Through robust financial planning, scientific integration, and international cooperation, India is constructing a future-ready DRR ecosystem. By emphasizing community participation, nature-based solutions, and technological innovation, the nation is progressively de-risking its complex hazard landscape and positioning itself as a global leader in climate resilience.

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-direction-for-disaster-resilience/article70128332.ece

2. Issues Related To Health

Topic - GS2/Governance

Recent tragic incidents involving contaminated cough syrup and the resulting deaths of several children have placed India's reputation as the 'pharmacy to the world' under scrutiny.

About India's Pharmaceutical Industry

India's pharmaceutical industry stands as a global powerhouse — renowned for its scale, affordability, and innovation. India supplies affordable medicines to over 200 countries and contributes significantly to domestic and international public health. India's pharmaceutical exports are vital to low- and middle-income countries.

Scale and Reach

According to the Department of Pharmaceuticals, India ranks - 3rd globally by volume of pharmaceutical production; 14th by value, reflecting its cost-efficiency and mass-scale manufacturing; As of FY 2023–24 - The industry is valued at USD 50 billion; Domestic consumption accounts for USD 23.5 billion; Exports contribute USD 26.5 billion, with major markets including the U.S., Europe, and Africa;

Future Projection - Industry growth to USD 130 billion by 2030; A potential USD 450 billion valuation by 2047, aligning with India's centennial independence goals;

Global Leadership - India supplies -

1. Over 50% of global vaccine demand;
2. Around 40% of U.S. generic drug consumption;
3. A significant share of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and biosimilars;

Key Issues & Challenges Around India's Pharma Industry

Issues of Safety - It includes the contamination of cough syrups with toxic industrial solvents to the seizure of counterfeit cancer drugs in Telangana.In one incident, diethylene glycol (DEG) and ethylene glycol (EG) — toxic industrial chemicals used in paints and brake fluids — were found in pediatric medicine, leading to the deaths of several children. These incidents are not isolated; they point to systemic failures in oversight, quality control, and enforcement.

Recurrent and Preventable Crisis - Similar incidents in The Gambia (2022) and Uzbekistan (2022), which killed nearly 90 children combined, were traced back to Indian-made cough syrups. Investigations by the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed 'unacceptable levels' of these toxins. India introduced mandatory pre-export testing for cough syrups in 2023 — but only for export-bound batches, which left domestic products largely unchecked.

Fragmented Oversight and Weak Enforcement - India's drug regulation is governed by the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940, with responsibilities split between centre and state-level authorities. This dual structure has led to -

1. Jurisdictional confusion, with unclear accountability.
2. Inconsistent inspections and licensing standards across states.
3. Reactive governance, where enforcement follows public outcry rather than proactive monitoring.

Threat to India's Pharmaceutical Credibility - India supplies about 40% of generic medicines in the US; 25% in the UK; and 90% in Africa. The combination of lax oversight, fake drug markets, and profit-driven shortcuts risks undermining India's hard-won global standing in pharmaceuticals.

Regulatory Framework in India

Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) - It is a national regulatory authority responsible for drug approvals, clinical trials, import control, and coordination with state regulators under the MoH&FW. It oversees compliance with the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, 1945.

State Drug Control Authorities - Handle licensing, inspections, and enforcement at the state level; Work in tandem with CDSCO to ensure uniform implementation of drug laws;

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) - Regulates prices of essential medicines under the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO); Ensures affordability and accessibility of key drugs

Legal Framework

Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 - Governs manufacture, sale, and distribution of drugs and cosmetics; Includes provisions for Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Good Laboratory Practices (GLP);

New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 - Streamlines clinical trial approvals and compensation mechanisms; Introduces timelines for regulatory decisions and waivers for certain drug categories

Schedule M & Schedule Y -

Schedule M - Standards for manufacturing practices;

Schedule Y - Guidelines for clinical trial conduct and ethics;

Reforms and Policy Initiatives

National Pharmaceutical Policy (Draft 2023) - It focuses on regulatory efficiency, innovation, and global competitiveness; Emphasizes self-reliance in Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and biosimilars;

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme - It encourages domestic manufacturing of critical drugs and raw materials

Pharmaceutical Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme (PTUAS) - It supports SMEs in upgrading to WHO-GMP standards

Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech (PRIP) - It aims to build a robust R&D ecosystem.

Innovation & R&D - Establishment of National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPERs); Launch of the National Policy on R&D and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech (2023);

Global Alignment - India is increasingly aligning its regulatory practices with international standards -

1. Collaboration with WHO, US FDA, and EMA;
2. Adoption of ICH guidelines for drug development and safety;
3. Participation in global pharmacovigilance networks;

Way Forward

Rebuilding trust requires more than punitive action after each tragedy. India needs to -

1. Enforce uniform quality standards for both domestic and export markets.
2. Empower and reform the CDSCO to function independently of political and industrial pressures.
3. Mandate transparency in drug testing and recall data.
4. Establish accountability chains linking manufacturers, distributors, and regulators.

India's claim to being the world's reliable medicine supplier will continue to ring hollow, without such reforms.

Source - https - //www.newindianexpress.com/editorials/2025/Oct/08/punish-the-guilty-in-lethal-drug-case-fix-the-system

Editorial of the Day – 07.10.2025

Index

1. Investment Models - 1

2. Creative Capitalism - Redefining Capitalism With Compassion - 2

1. Investment Models

Topic - GS3/Economy

The ongoing global economic uncertainty, marked by protectionist measures and trade distortions demands a shift toward an inclusive economic system—one that prioritizes public welfare alongside private capital interests.

About the Indian Capital Investment - Rethinking Growth and Demand

Economic growth relies on expanding supply with robust and inclusive demand. Historically, three processes shaped the global capitalist system -

1. The creation of a wage-labour class;
2. Productivity gains from industrial mass production; and,
3. Rising demand through income growth.

In the modern and globalized world, aggregate demand has both domestic and external components. India's focus needs to turn inward — stimulating domestic demand through investment, fair wage growth, and innovation-driven productivity, with exports under pressure from global uncertainties.

Need of Domestic Investment

Reviving Private Investment - Indian private investment has stagnated, despite record-high profits. Between FY20 and FY25, public capital expenditure grew at a robust CAGR of 25%, while private investment lagged behind. Domestic firms accounted for 94% of private sector investment announcements in the first half of FY26, up from 77% in 2018–19. Indian outward FDI grew at a CAGR of 12.6% — higher than domestic investment growth — indicating capital's preference for foreign markets.

Ensuring Moderate Wage Growth - The Economic Survey 2024–25 highlighted a widening gap between corporate profits and wages. While profits reached a 15-year high, wage growth stagnated, weakening purchasing power and suppressing domestic demand. Moreover, the increasing contractualisation of formal sector jobs has diluted workers' bargaining power.

Strengthening Research and Development (R&D) - India's gross R&D expenditure stands at 0.64% of GDP, with only 36% contributed by the private sector—far below global benchmarks where businesses drive over 70% of R&D spending.

Declining Trend of FDI - Net FDI inflows have sharply declined—from $84.8 billion in FY 2021–22 to just $0.4 billion retained in FY 2024–25 after repatriations; Disinvestments surged by 51% in FY 2023–24 and rose again in FY 2024–25; Short-term profit-seeking behavior has replaced long-term strategic commitments;

Demand-Side Weakness - Weak consumer sentiment and uneven post-pandemic recovery have dampened domestic consumption.

Regulatory and Policy Bottlenecks - Issues like land acquisition delays, complex tax structures, and inconsistent enforcement of regulations continue to deter investment.

Why Does Domestic Investment Matters?

Stimulating Demand - Domestic capital can fuel internal consumption, creating a virtuous cycle of growth.

Job Creation - Investment in manufacturing and services directly translates to employment opportunities.

Resilience Against Global Shocks - With FDI showing signs of retreat, domestic capital can anchor stability.

Confidence Signaling - When Indian firms invest at home, it sends a strong message to global investors about the country's prospects. Domestic investment offers several advantages -

Stability - Less prone to sudden withdrawals;

Alignment With National Priorities - More likely to invest in infrastructure, manufacturing, and employment-generating sectors;

Multiplier Effect - Stimulates local demand and entrepreneurship;

Government Initiatives to Bridge the Gap

Make in India - Promotes manufacturing and innovation;

Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) - Encourages domestic production in key sectors;

Ease of Doing Business reforms - Simplifies compliance and reduces red tape;

Invest India - A facilitation platform for investors

Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023–24 Scheme allocated ₹1.3 lakh crore in interest-free loans to states for infrastructure projects in health, education, transport, and water supply. Public capital expenditure surged from ₹3.4 lakh crore in FY20 to ₹10.2 lakh crore projected for FY25—a compound annual growth rate of 25%.

Road Ahead

- Indian capital needs to evolve — beyond profit maximization — prioritizing national development over narrow profit motives. It means -

1. Investing in underserved regions;
2. Supporting innovation and startups;
3. Partnering with government initiatives;
4. Prioritizing long-term national interest over short-term returns;

Inclusivity, innovation, and domestic reinvestment should define the new phase of capitalism that can help India achieve a $30 trillion economy by 2047**.**

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/why-indian-capital-needs-to-invest-domestically/article70135134.ece

2. Creative Capitalism - Redefining Capitalism With Compassion

TOPIC - GS3/ECONOMY

The legacy of Ratan Tata, whose first death anniversary falls on October 9, continues to shape the contours of Indian industry and social enterprise through what has come to be known as Creative Capitalism — a philosophy that blends market forces with moral responsibility to uplift the underserved.

About Creative Capitalism -

Creative Capitalism was coined by Bill Gates in a 2008 address at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, by arguing that capitalism's traditional focus on profit maximization needs to evolve to address pressing global inequities. It is a reimagined philosophy that seeks to align profit with purpose, innovation with inclusion, and growth with equity. It is a hybrid model that bridges market mechanisms and moral imperatives, and proposes that businesses, governments, and nonprofits collaborate to extend the reach of market forces to underserved populations.

Creative Capitalism in India -

India's economic transformation post-1991 liberalization created fertile ground for Creative Capitalism. Tata Group became a model of stakeholder capitalism, balancing commercial success with social impact. Later on Infosys Foundation, startups and legacy firms are

embedding social purpose into their business models. The private sector is increasingly solving public problems, from fintech platforms offering microloans to underserved communities, to edtech ventures bridging the education gap in rural India.

Benefits of Creative Capitalism

Inclusive Growth and Social Innovation - Creative capitalism promotes inclusive growth, by encouraging firms to serve underserved markets. Initiatives such as Microsoft's Affordable Access Initiative and Grameen Bank's microfinance model illustrate how companies can drive innovation for low-income populations.

Corporate Reputation and Trust - Firms practicing creative capitalism often gain reputational capital, strengthening brand loyalty and stakeholder trust. Consumers increasingly prefer companies demonstrating ethical leadership and social purpose.

New Market Opportunities - Serving the 'bottom of the pyramid' opens untapped markets. For instance, Unilever's Project Shakti in India empowered rural women entrepreneurs while expanding distribution networks — creating both economic and social value.

Enhanced Collaboration between Public and Private Sectors - Creative capitalism fosters public-private partnerships where businesses, governments, and NGOs collaborate on issues like education, healthcare, and sustainability. The Gates Foundation's partnerships with pharmaceutical firms to develop affordable vaccines exemplify this synergy.

Driving Structural Changes - Firms adopting creative capitalism not only enhance Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but also drive structural change within global capitalism.

Challenges of Creative Capitalism

Profit-Social Mission Conflict - Balancing shareholder returns with social objectives is difficult. Firms may prioritize profit under the guise of social responsibility without robust governance.

Measurement and Accountability - Quantifying social impact remains complex. Many companies lack transparent metrics for evaluating their social initiatives, leading to 'impact-washing'.

Short-termism in Corporate Strategy - Shareholder pressure for quarterly profits can discourage long-term social investments, especially when returns are uncertain or indirect.

Dependence on Philanthropic Capital - In developing economies, creative capitalism often depends on philanthropic subsidies or donor-backed initiatives—raising questions about sustainability once funding ceases.

Case Studies

Gates Foundation & Big Pharma - Collaborations to produce low-cost vaccines have improved global health outcomes, demonstrating the practical potential of creative capitalism in saving millions of lives.

Google.org's Renewable Energy Projects - The blending of corporate expertise and social objectives shows how innovation can serve environmental and social goals simultaneously.

Future Outlook - Creative capitalism offers a transformative framework for reimagining corporate purpose in the 21st century. It continues to evolve through Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing, and impact entrepreneurship. The future challenge lies in institutionalizing accountability mechanisms to ensure that profit and purpose coexist sustainably. It introduces moral innovation into economic logic—urging businesses to 'do well by doing good', while it cannot entirely replace market dynamics. The path forward requires aligning incentives, transparency, and long-term commitment to ensure creative capitalism remains both ethical and effective.

Source - https - //www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/pioneer-of-creative-capitalism/article70140619.ece

Editorial of the Day – 08.10.2025

Index

1. **Atmanirbharata – Self Reliance (The Hindu)** - 1
2. **India's New Railway Links with Bhutan Matter (The Indian Express)** - 2

1. Atmanirbharata – Self Reliance

Atmanirbharta, central to India's philosophy and progress, has historically transformed crises into capabilities. Amid global volatility, self-reliance in finance, technology, and defence is vital to mobilise domestic resources and ensure sustainable, resilient national growth.

Background

Atmanirbharta as a Philosophy - Self-reliance has been central to India's journey, not only as an economic plan but as a way of existence. India has embraced Atmanirbharta with renewed focus, turning ambitious ideas into tangible achievements across sectors.

Historical Milestones of Self-Reliance -

1. **Green Revolution (1960s) -** Ensured food security during droughts.
2. **Digital Transformation (1990s) -** Leveraged talent for national strength.
3. **COVID-19 Pandemic -** Rapid development of indigenous vaccines showcased scientific and manufacturing self-reliance.
4. **Defence Sector -** India advancing towards self-reliance in defence systems.

Need for Financial Self-Reliance

Global Investment Volatility - FDI over $1 trillion since 2000, but 2024 saw 11% drop in flows and 27% fall in project finance deals.

Risks of External Dependence - Foreign portfolio investments remain volatile, highlighting the need to mobilise domestic resources.

Principle - Unlocking Bharat's wealth is essential to fuel national growth.

Gold as a Strategic Asset

Current Status - Indian households collectively hold close to 25,000 tonnes of gold, the largest private reserve globally, valued at about $2.4 trillion (over 55% of India's GDP in FY26 terms).

Paradox - Despite this, India imports around 87% of its gold demand, contributing 8% to the total import bill. Between 2010–2013, gold imports accounted for nearly a third of the trade deficit.

Opportunity - This paradox presents a unique chance to mobilise domestic gold for economic growth. Cultural and civilisational attachment to gold requires trust-based, non-coercive mobilisation strategies rather than restrictions.

Revitalising Gold Monetisation - Successful models include investing in assaying facilities, creating innovative gold savings products, and digitising gold flows via mobile apps to bring private gold into formal financial channels.

About Gold Monetisation Scheme - The Gold Monetization Scheme allows individuals to deposit gold in banks and earn interest. The previous attempts failed due to lack of trust and facilities.

Roadmap for Gold Monetisation

Infrastructure - Expand hallmarking and purity testing centres for reliable valuation.

Logistics - Banks to manage funds, while secure centres handle gold movement.

Digitalisation - Enable households to track gold deposits like bank balances.

Trust - Simplify procedures, remove GST and customs friction, ensure direct returns to depositors.

Impact of Revived Gold Monetisation

Lower Borrowing - Funds raised through gold monetisation could cost 4.5%-6.5%, lower than international borrowing.

Ease Pressure - Mobilising even a fraction of household gold could ease import pressures, strengthen the current account, and create a vast pool of domestic capital for infrastructure, manufacturing, and innovation. There will be an overall shift in mindset toward "Bharat Can Fund Bharat"

Way Forward

Infrastructure - Expand hallmarking and purity testing centres to ensure trusted valuation nationwide.

Logistics - Banks can manage funds, while secure collection and testing centres handle gold movement.

Digitalisation - Household depositors should be able to track their gold balances as easily as bank accounts.

Trust - Simplify processes by reducing GST and customs scrutiny, ensuring direct returns to depositors without hidden costs.

Conclusion

Bharat can fuel its own growth by harnessing domestic wealth, ingenuity, and resilience. Trust, foresight, and determination will make India truly self-reliant, defining its development on its own terms.

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-path-to-progress-that-is-paved-with-gold/article70136341.ece

2. India's New Railway Links With Bhutan Matter

TOPIC - GS3/ Economy and International realtion

Recently, India announced plans to build two cross-border rail lines to Bhutan.

About the New Rail Lines

Strategic Significance - Bhutan is a landlocked country, and the rail line will connect it to India's vast rail network and to Indian ports.

Routes - The total length is about 89 km.

1. Kokrajhar (Assam, India) to Gelephu (Bhutan) - A 69 km line.
2. Banarhat (West Bengal, India) to Samtse (Bhutan) - A 20 km line.

Timeline - The rail lines are expected to be completed within three to four years.

Advantages of the New Rail Lines

Trade and Logistics - It will boost trade by allowing goods to be transported more easily and in larger quantities by trains, compared to existing road routes.

Connectivity - It will give landlocked Bhutan direct access to Indian ports**.**

Tourism and Jobs - The lines will increase tourism to Bhutan, generating employment for Bhutanese citizens.

India's Policy - The project is a major example of India's Neighbourhood First Policy.

Security - The rail line provides India with an alternative route to connect with its North East Region**.** This is vital for security, as the Siliguri Corridor (or Chicken Neck), which currently links mainland India to the North East, is extremely narrow (22 km wide at one point) and is a significant security threat.

Indian Infrastructure Strategy - India is developing railways, roads, bridges, and tunnels along borders with China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Bhutan. Key projects include the Sela Tunnel and the Darbuk–Shyok–Daulat Beg Oldie (DS–DBO) road, aimed at bridging the infrastructure gap with China

The China Factor

Bhutan-China Diplomatic Status - Bhutan is the only country with which China currently does not have diplomatic relations.

China's Attempts to Influence Bhutan - China has been actively attempting to gain influence in Bhutan, particularly after the 2017 Doklam standoff. China is also expanding infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and in South Asia under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including a railway connecting Xinjiang to Tibet near Ladakh.

India's Strategic Response - India's rail line project is a proactive effort to counter China's influence in the region.

Challenges In Implementation of Rail Line To Bhutan

Topographical and Engineering Hurdles - The rail line must pass through the difficult, mountainous terrain of Bhutan, which requires high engineering standards, especially since the region is a seismic zone prone to earthquakes.

Land Acquisition - Securing land for the project, particularly in India, presents difficulties.

Bureaucratic Delays - Despite the estimated ₹4,000 crore cost, bureaucratic red tape could stall the project.

System Standardization - Issues related to standardizing complex systems, such as the differing signalling systems used by Indian and Bhutanese rail networks, will need to be managed.

Political Risk - Bhutan's domestic politics or shifts in public sentiment could potentially lead to the government deciding against continuing the rail link.

Funding and Execution - India is providing the entire funding for the project (even aid provided to Bhutan will be used to fund their share). India must ensure timely implementation within the 3–4 year timeframe, as India is often criticised for delays in infrastructure projects compared to China's rapid execution

Conclusion

The India–Bhutan cross-border railways strengthen economic development, trade, and tourism, enhance connectivity with the Northeast, and bolster strategic preparedness, demonstrating India's proactive approach to regional integration while countering geopolitical challenges posed by China.

Source - https - //indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/china-south-asia-india-railway-bhutan-jinping-modi-10293099/

Editorial of the Day – 09.10.2025

Index

1. Infinite Boxes - On the 2025 Chemistry Nobel Prize - 1
2. The Danger of An Unchecked Pre-Crime Framework - 2

1. Infinite Boxes - On the 2025 Chemistry Nobel Prize

GS PAPER-III Topic - Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to Richard Robson, Susumu Kitagawa, and Omar Yaghi for their work on Metal Organic Frameworks (MOFs).

About MOF

Structure - MOFs are three-dimensional (3D) crystalline structures in which metal ions serve as nodes and organic molecules as connectors.

Characteristics

Ultra High Porosity - MOFs form crystalline structures with a vast amount of empty space, creating numerous holes or pores. This high porosity allows them to absorb liquid and gas.

High Surface Area - Due to the millions of small pores, the internal surface area of MOFs is exceptionally high. This provides ample space for gas or liquid molecules to stick.

Key Contributions In the Evolution of MOF

Richard Robson- Foundation of MOF Design (1980s) - The concept of MOFs dates back to the 1980s when Richard Robson of the University of Melbourne established that molecular structures could be purposefully designed using coordination between metal ions and organic molecules.

Creation of Porous Structures - His experiment led to the formation of a diamond-like crystal filled with internal cavities, laying the foundation for future MOF research.

Limitation - Robson's structure was highly unstable, easily collapsing when subjected to water or heat. He established the foundation, which he called the Metal Organic Coordination Network.

Susumu Kitagawa – Development of Functional Frameworks (1997–1998)

Construction of 3D MOFs - In Japan, Susumu Kitagawa built three-dimensional frameworks using cobalt, nickel, or zinc ions connected by bipyridine molecules.

Gas Storage and Release - These frameworks remained stable even after being drained of water, allowing gases to be stored and released through their atomic gaps.

Concept of "Breathing" Solids - In 1998, Kitagawa proposed that MOFs could be made of soft solids capable of "breathing" as molecules moved in and out of their structure.

Omar Yaghi (Jordan) - Predictability and Industrial Reality - Yaghi sought to make MOF production predictable. He introduced the concept of Reticular Chemistry, where atomic and molecular units are intentionally designed and assembled like a building architect designs a structure. He used precise ratios of metals (like Zinc, Copper, Cobalt) and organic linkers (e.g., Benzene dicarboxylate) to build perfect 3D crystalline structures. Yaghi's team created a MOF in 1995 that was so stable it remained intact even when heated up to 350°C. This innovation shifted MOFs from mere curiosity to an industrial reality.

Real-World Applications of MOFs

Water Harvesting - MOFs can be designed to attract and absorb water molecules from humid air at night, releasing the water when heated by the sun during the day, thereby enabling water collection even in arid regions.

Food Preservation - Special MOF containers can absorb Ethylene gas, which is released by ripening fruit and causes fruits to spoil quickly, thereby extending food freshness.

Pollution Control (Clean Water) - MOFs can be designed as "super sponges" to absorb harmful chemicals and pollutants dissolved in water.

Climate Change Mitigation - MOFs can be designed to filter factory smoke, selectively capturing and trapping Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) while allowing other gases to pass through.

Example - A MOF called CALF-20 can efficiently capture carbon dioxide from factory exhaust and is already being tested in industrial plants.

Challenges of MOFs

Durability in Real Conditions - There is a need to continuously improve the durability of MOFs so that they can withstand real-world environments such as humidity and temperature fluctuations.

Economic Scalability - Large-scale and cost-effective production of MOFs remains a major scientific and industrial challenge.

Integration into Devices - The use of MOFs in batteries and catalytic filters demands engineering precision comparable to their intricate chemical design.

Conclusion

Through their pioneering contributions, the laureates created not just room for molecules, but for imagination itself, reshaping the future of sustainable material science.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/infinite-boxes-on-the-2025-chemistry-nobel-prize/article70139732.ece

2. The Danger of An Unchecked Pre-Crime Framework

GS PAPER-II Topic - Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Recent Supreme Court judgments have reignited debate on the constitutional and ethical legitimacy of Preventive detention

About Preventive Detention

Preventive Detention - Preventive detention allows the state to detain a person without trial or conviction to prevent them from committing a potential offence. It is an extraordinary power that limits personal liberty under exceptional circumstances.

Constitutional Provision - Articles 22(3)–(7) allow preventive detention laws that enable detention without trial in certain cases. A person ensnared in this Bermuda Triangle of Article 22 is effectively cut off from the Golden Triangle of Articles 14, 19, and 21, and is plunged into legal darkness.

Historical and Constitutional Background of Preventive Detention

Colonial Legacy - Preventive detention originated in the Bengal Regulations of 1818 and was retained under the Government of India Act, 1935 to maintain public order. Post-Independence, despite Britain restricting such measures to wartime, India adopted them permanently.

Early Judicial Validation - In A.K. Gopalan vs State of Madras (1950), the Supreme Court upheld the Preventive Detention Act, ruling that such detentions could be judged only under Article 22. This isolated preventive detention from Articles 14, 19, and 21 — creating a constitutional "Devil's Island."

Judicial Evolution

Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India (1978) - This landmark case expanded Article 21 by linking it with Articles 14 and 19, ensuring that "procedure established by law" must be fair, just, and reasonable.

A.K. Roy (1982) - The Court held that preventive detention laws cannot be challenged under Articles 14 or 19.

Continuing Executive Overreach - Preventive detention laws such as KAAPA (Kerala Anti-Social Activities Prevention Act) employ overly broad definitions like "goonda" or "rowdy," giving sweeping powers to the state. Advisory boards meant to check misuse often act as mere formalities rather than effective safeguards.

Supreme Court's Recent Observations

In Dhanya M. vs State of Kerala (2025), the Court stressed that preventive detention is an extraordinary power to be used sparingly and strictly per constitutional safeguards. It reiterated the distinction between "public order" and "law and order" and stated that detention cannot replace prosecution or bail.

In S.K. Nazneen vs State of Telangana (2023), the Court ruled that preventive detention cannot apply to mere law and order issues.

In Rekha vs State of Tamil Nadu (2011) and Banka Sneha Sheela vs State of Telangana (2021), the Supreme Court affirmed that preventive detention is an exception to Article 21 and must be tested against it.

Ethical Dilemmas Related To Preventive Detention

Pre-Crime Logic - The logic of preventive detention mirrors that of Minority Report (2002), where individuals are punished for crimes not yet committed. It undermines foundational legal principles — presumption of innocence, fair trial, and right to be heard.

Fallibility of Predictive Detention - The "subjective satisfaction" of the detaining authority is prone to error and misuse, especially against dissenters or political opponents. Weak procedural safeguards heighten the risk of arbitrary state action.

Way Forward

Restricting the Scope - Preventive detention should be confined to exceptional threats such as terrorism or transnational crimes, not used for routine law and order issues.

Strengthening Safeguards - Advisory boards must be independent and function as genuine checks, not rubber stamps. Regular judicial review should ensure compliance with Article 21 standards of fairness and reasonableness.

Re-examining Constitutional Validity - There is an urgent need to revisit the precedents set in A.K. Gopalan and A.K. Roy in light of modern constitutional jurisprudence. Preventive detention laws must be harmonised with the "Golden Triangle" of Articles 14, 19, and 21 to uphold liberty and justice.

Conclusion

Preventive detention, meant to safeguard public order, has become a tool of executive convenience. Without constitutional reform and judicial restraint, it will keep undermining the fundamental freedoms the Constitution upholds.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-danger-of-an-unchecked-pre-crime-framework/article70140459.ece

Editorial of the Day – 10.10.2025

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1. On the Wildlife Protection (Kerala Amendment) Bill, 2025 – (TH) **- 1**
2. Radical Centrism– (IE) **- 2**

1. On the Wildlife Protection (Kerala Amendment) Bill, 2025 – (TH)

GS PAPER – III TOPIC - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

The Wild Life Protection (Kerala Amendment) Bill 2025 seeks to arm the State with powers thus far reserved for the Union government. Kerala's decision to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 marks a turning point in the federal discourse on environmental governance.

Background

WPA 1972 - The central act was created to curb the decline of wildlife. After the 2022 amendment, it contains four schedules, with Schedule 1 providing the highest protection.

Section 62 - This section empowers the Central Government to declare an animal as vermin if its numbers have increased excessively, or if it is causing significant damage to humans or crops (e.g., wild boars, rats). Declaring animal vermin allows citizens to kill it without penalty.

Kerala's Problem - The population of wild boars has significantly increased in Kerala, destroying crops, invading human settlements, and causing injuries.

The Kerala Amendment Bill 2025 - The Kerala Government repeatedly requested the Central Government to declare the wild boar as vermin but was ignored. Arguing that 'Wild Life' is on the Concurrent List, Kerala introduced its own legislation. Kerala argues that the state knows the ground realities and needs the decision-making power to act locally.

Main Provisions of the Bill

Power to Declare Vermin - It attempts to grant the State Government the power to declare animals listed in Schedule 2 of the WPA as vermin in a specific area and for a specific time. This power currently rests solely with the Centre under Section 62. Powers of the Chief Wildlife Warden - It proposes giving the Chief Wildlife Warden the power to kill, tranquilize, capture, or translocate any animal causing grave injury to a human.

Concerns Associated with the Bill

Centre's Rationale - The Central Government insists on retaining the power to declare vermin to maintain uniformity across the nation and achieve conservation goals, arguing that animals move between states. Legal Supremacy of Central Law on Concurrent Subjects - Although the subject is Concurrent, if state and central laws conflict, the law made by Parliament prevails. Since the Kerala Bill seeks to override the Central Act regarding vermin declaration, it requires the President's assent to become law.

Conclusion

Regardless of which level of government holds the power, there must be procedural transparency and proper data used as the basis for declaring animal vermin.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/tusks-and-tensions-on-the-wild-life-protection-kerala-amendment-bill-2025/article70144084.ece

2. Radical Centrism – (IE)

GS PAPER-II **TOPIC -** Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

India's political discourse has increasingly been dominated by the ideological tug-of-war between the New Left and the Cultural Right. The idea of Radical Centrism seeks to offer politics that combines pluralism, equity, and national confidence within a constitutional framework.

About Radical Centrism

Radical centrism integrates the moral clarity of the Left with the cultural confidence of the Right, aiming to create a politics that embraces pluralism without erasing identity, promotes growth without abandoning equity, and seeks unity without enforcing uniformity. It harmonises the legacies of Nehru's secular inclusivity, Patel's pragmatic nationalism, Rajaji's economic liberalism, and Ambedkar's social justice, aspiring to build a principled, inclusive, and future-ready political vision.

Significance of Radical Centrism

Civic Nationalism - Radical centrism offers a new framework for Indian democracy grounded in constitutional pluralism and civic nationalism.

Dissent as Democratic Strength - It treats dissent as a sign of democratic health and upholds the Constitution as the supreme expression of Indian values.

Active Pluralism - It reaffirms India's unity in diversity, viewing pluralism not as passive tolerance but as active celebration of differences across caste, gender, religion, and region. It rejects both the homogenising tendencies of cultural nationalism and the fragmenting impulse of identity politics, advocating coalitions that transcend narrow vote banks. It places the marginalized — a Dalit woman or a tribal farmer — at the centre of the Indian narrative, affirming their role in shaping the national story.

Cooperative Governance - It embodies Atal Bihari Vajpayee's spirit of consensus, promoting dialogue over dogma and shared governance over zero-sum politics.

Reclaims Nationalism as Unifying Patriotism - Inspired by Sardar Patel's pragmatic nationalism, it calls for a patriotism that binds rather than blinds, fostering confidence without chauvinism.

Balances Economic Growth with Moral Purpose - Advocates market liberalisation tempered with investment in public goods like education, healthcare, and infrastructure, alongside targeted, efficient welfare and support for entrepreneurship.

Revives Consensus and Institutional Strength - Emphasises resilient institutions — judiciary, Election Commission, free press, and civil society — as safeguards for democracy, while promoting decentralisation and citizen engagement.

Anchors Social Justice as Core Ethic - Guided by Ambedkar's constitutional morality, it envisions justice as a foundational promise, ensuring representation, dignity, and equality through practical policy measures.

Challenges Associated With Radical Centrism

Ideological Polarisation - Deep-rooted ideological polarisation makes consensus politics difficult to sustain.

Economic Inequality and Populism - Economic inequalities and populist tendencies may distort the balance between markets and welfare.
Institutional Erosion and Centralisation - Institutional erosion and political centralisation hinder participatory governance.
Entrenched Political Interests - Resistance from entrenched political interests may obstruct efforts to transcend traditional vote-bank politics.
Shrinking Space for Nuanced Discourse - Public discourse often favours extremes, leaving limited space for nuanced narratives.

Way Forward

Constitutional Pluralism - Defend secularism, federalism, and minority rights while encouraging inter-cultural dialogue and respect.
Inclusive Economic Reform - Combine market-driven reforms with targeted investment in human capital and digital infrastructure to achieve equitable growth.
Civic Nationalism and Foreign Policy - Promote a shared Indian identity based on constitutional values, coupled with a robust defence and an assertive foreign policy.
Institutional Reforms and Citizen Voice - Strengthen democratic institutions, protect media freedom, and empower civil society as the people's voice between elections.

Conclusion

Radical centrism offers a principled, inclusive approach that transcends ideological extremes. Its focus is not on choosing sides but on choosing India's unity, diversity, and constitutional values.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-writes-india-is-too-complex-to-be-governed-by-ideological-rigidity-radical-centrism-offers-a-way-out-10295998/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 11.10.2025

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1. The Real Need is a Holistic Demographic Mission - 1

2. Stop Blaming Farmers for Stubble Burning, Start Supporting Them - 2

1. The Real Need Is A Holistic Demographic Mission

GS -II TOPIC - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

On August 15, 2025, a Demographic Mission was announced with an aim of monitoring undocumented immigration from Bangladesh and its demographic impact in India's border regions.

Background

Demographic Crossroads - India, now the world's most populous country, stands at a demographic crossroads.

Youth - Its large youth population is both a source of pride and a policy challenge.

Narrow Policy Focus - Despite its vast potential, demographic analysis in India has remained narrowly focused on population control, overlooking the evolving dimensions of fertility, mortality, migration, ageing, and human capability.

Need of the hour - A holistic approach to demography is essential for aligning population trends with national development goals.

Need for a Broader Demographic Vision

Understanding Demographic Transformation - A comprehensive demography mission must analyse the transformations that have occurred over the past two decades.

Beyond Fertility and Mortality - The mission should move beyond projecting population size or growth rates to focus on emerging qualitative aspects of population, such as education, health, and livelihood capabilities.

Focus on Human Capabilities - Demographic planning must recognise that population outcomes are shaped by human capability development — including access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities — rather than mere population control measures.

Addressing Regional Inequities - From a human capability perspective, there is an urgent need to address the imbalanced infrastructure across regions that constrains equal opportunity.

Migration as a Central Demographic Concern

Migration as a Balancing Force - Migration acts as a population balancer across regions. Hence, policies should facilitate mobility and opportunity rather than restrict them.

Constitutional and Political Dimensions - Though the Constitution guarantees freedom of movement, migrants often face constructed identities and social exclusion. The state must safeguard migrant identity and ensure equality in access to rights and services.

The Home-Host Dilemma - Migrants face dual disenfranchisement—excluded from voting both in their native and host regions. A demographic mission must address this "crisis of belonging" to restore migrants' political and social rights.

Longevity and Social Security Challenges in Demographic Mission

Redefining Ageing - Increasing life expectancy requires redefining economically productive years to ensure older citizens remain active and productive through health-oriented and flexible retirement policies.

Shared Responsibility for Security - Social security cannot remain the sole responsibility of the state. Employers should promote financial preparedness among workers for post-retirement years.

Planning for an Ageing Society - Policies must evolve to support an ageing population through reforms in pensions, healthcare, and workplace adaptability, ensuring continued productivity and dignity.

Need for Mainstreaming Demography into Policy Frameworks

Demographic Sensitisation in Governance - Embedding population data and trends into planning ensures policies respond to actual needs.

Rethinking Indicators - Moving beyond per capita measures to more nuanced, demography-sensitive indicators enhances policy accuracy.

Inclusive Discourse - Encouraging awareness about population diversity fosters inclusive development and social harmony.

Way Forward

Demography as a Capability Mission - India's demographic mission must evolve into a human development mission, linking population data to education, employment, and empowerment.

Mainstreaming Demography into Policy Frameworks -

1. **Demographic Sensitisation in Governance -** Embedding population data and trends into planning ensures policies respond to actual needs.
2. **Rethinking Indicators -** Moving beyond per capita measures to more nuanced, demography-sensitive indicators enhances policy accuracy.
3. **Inclusive Discourse -** Encouraging awareness about population diversity fosters inclusive development and social harmony.

Global Perspective - Demographic planning should be contextualised globally, drawing lessons from other regions while leveraging India's unique youth advantage.

Conclusion

A holistic demographic mission must synchronise population trends with social equity and economic sustainability, ensuring that India's demographic diversity remains a strategic national asset.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-real-need-is-a-holistic-demographic-mission/article70149226.ece

2. Stop Blaming Farmers For Stubble Burning, Start Supporting Them

GS-III TOPIC - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Every winter, Delhi and North India experience severe air pollution due to smoke, turning cities into "gas chambers." However, the farmers in Punjab and Haryana contribute only 30% to the smog; the remaining 70% comes from industries, construction dust, and vehicular emissions.

About Stubble Burning

The practice involves setting fire to leftover paddy stubble after harvest to quickly clear fields.

Reasons For Stubble Burning

Time Constraints - Fields must be cleared and wheat sown within seven days.

Cost and Speed - Burning is the cheapest and fastest method to handle around 20 million tonnes of stubble annually.

Soil Degradation - Intensive cropping cycles have depleted soil organic matter and lowered water tables, aggravating agricultural stress.

Existing Solutions To Tackle Stubble Burning

Technological Interventions

Happy Seeder & Super Seeder - Machines that sow wheat seeds without removing stubble.

Pusa Decomposer - ICAR-developed bio-liquid that converts stubble into compost in 25 days.

Government Support -

Funding - Over ₹1,000 crore allocated to Punjab; machinery subsidies of 50–80%.

Outcome - Stubble burning incidents fell 55% between 2016 and 2023 (NASA data).

Challenge - Many farmers distrust machinery or decomposers, fearing crop delays or losses.

Way Forward

Farmer-Led Demonstration - Conduct demonstration plots on progressive farmers' fields using Happy Seeders or Pusa Decomposer to build trust and encourage adoption.
Incentives/Bonus - Provide substantial per-acre bonuses to farmers who refrain from burning stubble, similar to European models, to motivate compliance through positive reinforcement.
Risk Coverage/Insurance - Offer 1–2 years of crop insurance or risk guarantees to reassure farmers that any loss from using new machinery or decomposers will be compensated.
Farmer-to-Farmer Training - Engage experienced farmers as trainers, leveraging their practical knowledge and credibility to educate peers more effectively than official instructors.
Access to Machinery - Establish cooperative machinery banks so farmers can rent expensive equipment affordably, addressing the limitations of subsidies and ensuring widespread access.
Adopt Regenerative Farming - Focus on restoring soil health for sustainable agriculture.

Conclusion

The narrative must change - farmers should be seen as 'part of the solution,' not the problem. By transforming stubble from waste into a valuable resource, India can simultaneously protect the environment and enhance agricultural productivity.
Source - https -//www.tribuneindia.com/news/premium/stop-blaming-farmers-for-stubble-burning-start-supporting-them/

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 13.10.2025

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1. Great Nicobar revives the Issue of Nature's Legal Rights – (TH) -1

2. India – Afghanistan Relations – (IE) -2

1. Great Nicobar revives the Issue of Nature's Legal Rights – (TH)

GS III TOPIC - Infrastructure - Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc

Great Nicobar - Strategic Development vs Environmental Conservation

India's ambitious development plan for Great Nicobar Island includes the construction of a power plant, township, transshipment port, and airport, part of a broader effort to boost India's strategic and economic presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. While the plan promises enhanced connectivity, trade, and energy infrastructure, it comes with significant ecological and social costs. The project threatens 13,000 hectares of pristine forest, raising critical concerns about biodiversity loss, tribal rights, and environmental sustainability. This scenario illustrates the persistent tension between strategic infrastructure development and environmental protection in ecologically sensitive regions.

Ecological Significance of Great Nicobar

Global Biodiversity Hotspot - The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, including Great Nicobar, are internationally recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, harboring endemic flora and fauna, and acting as a carbon sink and climate regulator. This makes the islands vital for ecological stability both regionally and globally.

Fragile Ecosystem - The island's ecosystem is highly sensitive to anthropogenic interventions. Past development projects, often driven by mainland priorities, have neglected island-specific ecological dynamics, resulting in habitat degradation, loss of endemic species, and disruption of natural processes.

Threats from Mega-Projects - Projects like the proposed power plant, township, port, and airport involve large-scale deforestation, soil disruption, and potential alteration of coastal and marine ecosystems. This threatens endemic species, migratory pathways, and coral reef health, while increasing carbon emissions and environmental vulnerability.

Tribal Rights and Legal Precedent

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 Compliance - Any diversion of forest land requires certification from the **Tribal Council** or Gram Sabha to ensure tribal consent. FRA aims to protect tribal autonomy, livelihoods, and cultural practices.

Lessons from Niyamgiri Hills (2013) - The Supreme Court judgment recognized the right of Gram Sabhas to reject mining and development projects affecting tribal lands, setting a legal precedent for community-led decision-making.

Concerns in Nicobar - Reports indicate that the Tribal Council may not have been consulted prior to forest diversion approval for the Great Nicobar project, raising serious legal and ethical questions regarding adherence to FRA provisions and protection of tribal rights.

Rights of Nature - A Global Perspective

Legal Personhood for Nature - Several countries, including Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and New Zealand, have recognized rivers, forests, and ecosystems as legal entities with rights. This allows appointed guardians to act in defense of ecological integrity.

Case Study – Atrato River, Colombia (2016) - The Atrato River was granted legal personhood, and a guardianship commission including indigenous representatives was established to protect both ecological and cultural interests.

Indian Innovation – Ganga and Yamuna (2017) - The Uttarakhand High Court granted legal personhood to Ganga and Yamuna rivers, with designated guardians to enforce protection and restoration measures.

Significance of Legal Personhood for Ecosystems

Ecological Safeguard - Assigning legal personhood enables ecosystems to have a voice in judicial and administrative processes, providing mechanisms for their protection, restoration, and sustainable management.

Integration with FRA - Legal personhood complements tribal autonomy by aligning ecological protection with community-led stewardship, ensuring that development projects do not compromise critical habitats.

Guardianship Mechanism - Designated bodies can legally represent forests and ecosystems, sue violators, and ensure adherence to sustainable practices, safeguarding bio-cultural heritage.

Way Forward

FRA Enforcement - Strict adherence to tribal consent and active participation in forest management decisions is essential. Projects must prioritize tribal voices in planning and implementation.

Implement Guardianship Models - Inspired by the Uttarakhand river cases and Atrato River model, **nature guardians** can be appointed to oversee ecological protection and restoration in Great Nicobar.

Robust Impact Assessment - Conduct comprehensive environmental, biodiversity, and seismic risk assessments to evaluate the feasibility of large-scale projects without undermining ecological and social integrity.

Legal and Institutional Clarity - Define the rights, responsibilities, and enforcement mechanisms for natural entities to balance strategic development with ecological sustainability.

Conclusion

Great Nicobar stands at the crossroads of strategic development, tribal rights, and ecological conservation. Leveraging the principles of tribal autonomy under the FRA and rights of nature, India has the opportunity to demonstrate sustainable and inclusive development. Thoughtful planning that integrates legal safeguards, community participation, and ecosystem guardianship can ensure that strategic projects are realized without compromising the fragile ecological and cultural heritage of the islands.

Source - https - //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/great-nicobar-revives-the-issue-of-natures-legal-rights/article70155867.ece

2. India – Afghanistan Relations –(IE)

GS-II TOPIC - Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Afghanistan FM Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit provides an opportunity to deepen bilateral ties, as India pursues pragmatic engagement with the Taliban, balancing strategic, humanitarian, and development priorities amid a New Great Game involving US, China, Russia, and Pakistan.

India's Pragmatic Engagement in Afghanistan Amid Complex Regional Dynamics

Historically, Afghanistan has been the "graveyard of empires", cautioning India against over-ambitious engagement or unrealistic expectations.

India's Pragmatic Approach - Avoids over-enthusiasm reminiscent of the late Afghan republic era. Engages through functional cooperation rather than formal recognition of the Taliban.

Regional Dynamics

US - Assigns Pakistan a significant role in Afghanistan and the western neighbourhood.

China - Expanding influence in Pakistan, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula, pursuing BRI-linked projects.

Russia - Recognizes the Taliban and maintains strong Iran ties.

Pakistan - Remains an implacable adversary of India, historically supporting Taliban factions.

Diplomatic Engagement

High-Level Meeting - India's External Affair Minister S. Jaishankar met Muttaqi on 10 October 2025 to discuss bilateral cooperation.

Embassy Reopening - India will re-establish its mission in Kabul, initially headed by a chargé d'affaires. This approach signals functional engagement without diplomatic recognition, maintaining alignment with international consensus.

Taliban Autonomy - Afghanistan retains sovereign control over its security and foreign policy, which India respects. Embassy operations (flag, staff) in Delhi do not imply formal recognition.

Human Rights Sensitivity - Jaishankar avoided commentary on Taliban human rights policies, focusing on practical cooperation. Past India-US 2+2 statements urged Taliban to respect human rights, but India pragmatically prioritizes engagement over confrontation.

Security and Strategic Cooperation

Cross-Border Terrorism - India and Taliban share concerns over Pakistan-backed groups like TTP.

Regional Irony - Pakistan, Taliban's past patron, cannot dictate India policy.

China and Pakistan - Likely wary of India-Taliban security cooperation due to geopolitical stakes.

Development and Humanitarian Cooperation

Areas of Cooperation - Food, healthcare, education, training, and completion of stalled infrastructure projects.

Visa Liberalisation - Taliban requests easier access for students and patients; India can allow under security protocols.

Economic Engagement - Taliban seeks Indian involvement in mining and other sectors, balancing Chinese influence.

Strategic Imperatives for India

Firm Presence - Necessary to manage great power competition in the western neighbourhood.

Preventing Chinese Dominance - Ensures Afghanistan does not become economically integrated with Western China.

Managing Pakistan Threats - Engagement helps mitigate Pakistan's strategic encirclement and maintains regional stability.

Way Forward

Sustained Engagement - Continue humanitarian, educational, and development cooperation.

Security Coordination - Collaborate cautiously on counterterrorism.

Economic Leverage - Expand Indian investment in infrastructure, mining, and other sectors.

Visa and People-to-People Links - Facilitate students, patients, and skilled workers within secure protocols.

Pragmatic Diplomacy - Functional engagement without formal Taliban recognition, respecting international consensus.

Conclusion

India's principled pragmatism balances development, humanitarian aid, and strategic interests. Engagement with the Taliban aims to safeguard regional interests, support Afghan people, and ensure South Asian stability, while navigating great power competition and limiting external influence.

Source - https - //indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-approach-taliban-recognition-afghanistan-muttaqi-10305973/

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 14.10.2025

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1. The RTI is Dead, Long Live the RTI-(IE) - 1

2. Rebuilding Trust in Public Service Recruitment Exams Need a Tech Overhaul(IE)-2

1. The RTI is Dead, Long Live the RTI(IE)

GS II **TOPIC –** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures

Marking 20 years of the RTI Act (2005), a landmark in India's citizen-led transparency movement, its spirit now faces challenges from the DPDPA 2023, which risks diluting public access to information and weakening government accountability.

Historical Background of RTI

Grassroots Struggle – The RTI Act, 2005, was the result of a prolonged movement led by social activists like Aruna Roy and Nikhil De.

Origin in Mewar – The movement began in Mewar, Rajasthan, known as the "RTI City."

People's Demand – The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) campaigned under the slogan "Our Money, Our Account" (Humara Paisa, Humara Hisab).

Impact of RTI – The Act empowered citizens to expose corruption, address government delays, and hold officials accountable.

Commemoration – A memorial/museum is being constructed in Mewar to honor this struggle and educate future generations.

Threats from Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) 2023

Official Aim vs. Effect – While the DPDPA claims to protect personal data, it is argued to undermine the RTI Act, metaphorically creating a "hole" in the RTI "pot," causing crucial information to leak away.

Mechanisms Weakening RTI

Restricting Personal Information Disclosure

RTI Act (Section 8(1)) - Personal information could be withheld only if unrelated to public activity or interest. Names of officials in public tenders could be disclosed.

DPDPA (Section 44(3)) – Personal information cannot be disclosed regardless of public interest.

Impact - Public Information Officers (PIUs) can refuse to provide names of officials, making accountability impossible.

Removal of Citizen Equality Clause

Original Provision – Citizens had the same right to information as Parliament or State Assemblies.

DPDPA Amendment – However, the amendment allows the government to restrict information to elected representatives, lowering the status of ordinary citizens.

Chilling Effect through Severe Penalties

Fines Imposed – Up to ₹250 crore for revealing personal information without permission.

Impact – Creates fear among journalists and activists, discouraging exposure of corrupt officials.

Implications

Hindrance to Accountability – Weakening RTI impedes citizens' ability to expose corruption despite past successes like the Adarsh Housing Society Scam and Commonwealth Games Scam.

Lack of Consultation – Amendments were made without public or opposition consultation, undermining democratic principles.

Way Forward

Restore Public Interest Override – Reinstate the clause allowing disclosure of personal information when larger public interest—such as corruption or misuse of power—is involved.

Balanced Data Framework - Harmonise the DPDPA and RTI Act through clear rules ensuring that privacy protection does not override transparency in governance.
Empower Information Commissions - Strengthen the Central and State Information Commissions with greater autonomy, staffing, and digital infrastructure for faster grievance redressal.
Promote Digital RTI Portals - Expand RTI Online and integrate real-time tracking, feedback, and data analytics to enhance accessibility and reduce bureaucratic delays.
Civic Awareness - Renew public education on citizens' right to information, linking it with good governance and anti-corruption movements.

Conclusion

Despite the RTI's dilution, the citizens' demand for transparency endures. As the Supreme Court held in State of UP vs Raj Narain (1975), governance must maintain "but few secrets." Balancing privacy and accountability is key to preserving democratic integrity.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-rti-is-dead-long-live-the-rti-10305257/

2. Rebuilding Trust in Public Service Recruitment Exams Need a Tech Over-haul(IE)

GS II **TOPIC** - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

A robust and transparent recruitment system is not merely a necessity but a fundamental right of every citizen aspiring to serve their nation.

Background

Erosion of Institutional Trust - Trust is the bedrock of any society's functioning, and the true wealth of a nation lies in its citizens' faith in institutions that govern them.
Purpose of Public Service Commissions (PSCs) - Public Service Commissions (PSCs) at both central and state levels were created to ensure fairness, meritocracy, and social justice in government recruitment.
Challenges to PSC Integrity - However, the integrity of this trust has been severely tested in recent years, especially across state-level commissions, due to repeated recruitment scams, malpractices, corruption, paper leaks, and manipulation.

Examples of System Failures

UPSC - Cases like Pooja Khedkar (who allegedly bypassed the system using fraudulent disability and OBC certificates) highlight flaws.
Bihar Police Exam 2023 - Issues included paper leaks and the use of proxies.
Punjab PPSC 2021 - Exposed a systemic failure where insiders leaked papers for bribes.
Uttar Pradesh (RO ARO & Police Constable) - Mass protest and government pressure led to the cancellation of exams due to paper leaks.
West Bengal SSC - A national news scandal involving high-ranking officials and politicians.

Implications of the Crisis

Aspirational Importance of Government Jobs - For millions of young Indians, government jobs provide the most reliable route to economic stability and upward social mobility.
Hope for the Underprivileged - PSCs are seen as beacons of opportunity for talented and less privileged aspirants who rely on a fair system to advance.
Impact on Youth and Society - Scandals have ruined the careers of deserving candidates and triggered widespread frustration and public protests.
Threat to Governance Credibility - The loss of confidence in recruitment processes undermines trust in state institutions and weakens the moral foundation of governance.
National Imperative - Restoring credibility and fairness in recruitment is vital for India's prosperity, social harmony, and democratic stability.

Reasons for the Crisis

Politicisation of Appointments - Positions in commissions are often filled based on political loyalty rather than merit or competence.

Opacity in Recruitment Processes - Exam design, evaluation, and result publication lack transparency, encouraging manipulation and corruption.

Absence of Accountability - Members found guilty of malpractice often escape scrutiny due to inadequate internal monitoring systems.

Technological Deficiencies - Reliance on outdated, paper-based processes makes it easier for proxies, impersonation, and leaks to occur.

Weak Legal Enforcement - Slow judicial processes and lenient penalties fail to deter exam-related fraud and misconduct.

Way Forward

Institutional Reforms

Transparent Appointments - A Collegium System should be established for appointing PSC members, similar to judicial appointments. This collegium should include the CM, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Chief Justice of the High Court.

Accountability and Merit - A review panel should monitor Commission decisions and fix responsibility for leaks. Selection for conducting exams must be merit-based, ensuring experts with professional qualifications and clean track records are chosen.

Increased Transparency - There must be transparency in the evaluation parameters for mains answers and the basis for interview marks. Performance statistics should be released. The answer keys should be published promptly, allowing candidates to check their results.

Technology-Led Solutions

Biometric Identification - Use Aadhaar-based fingerprint and iris scanning to prevent proxy candidates.

Encrypted Delivery - Design special printers for exam centres that print the paper only shortly before the exam using a password. This eliminates the risk associated with physically transporting paper.

AI Monitoring - Use AI in online exams to track candidate eye movements and record conversations to detect fraudulent activity in real-time.

Legal Framework

Central Legislation - The Public Examination Act 2024 (passed by Parliament, applicable to UPSC, SSC, Railways, Banking) provides for 10 years of imprisonment and up to a ₹1 crore fine for organized paper leaks.

State Laws - States should implement strict laws like Uttarakhand's Anti-Copping Law 2023, which mandates life imprisonment and up to ₹10 crore fine for copying mafia, including property confiscation.

Fast Track Courts - Special courts are needed to ensure justice is swift, aiming for case resolution within six months to a year.

Administrative Oversight - A National Regulatory Body could be established (or the duty given to the UPSC) to audit recruitment processes and set standards for all State PSCs.

Civil Society Role - Watchdog organizations and citizen groups must provide oversight to ensure accountability and place pressure on the commissions.

Conclusion

Restoring integrity in recruitment is essential to rebuild public trust and uphold citizens' right to fair opportunity. Institutional reform, ethical leadership, and participatory oversight can renew faith in a merit-based system vital for national progress.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rebuilding-trust-in-public-service-recruitment-exams-needs-a-tech-led-overhaul-10303200/

Editorial of the Day – 15.10.2025

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1. The Need to Address Caste-Based Atrocities – (TH) - 1

2. Nobel Prize for Economics 2025 – (IE) - 3

1. The Need to Address Caste-Based Atrocities – (TH)

GS2/Social Issues

Caste-based atrocities, from rural villages to urban institutions, discrimination and violence against SCs and STs, continue to plague India's social fabric, despite constitutional guarantees of equality and justice.

About the Caste-based Atrocities

Atrocity refers to any offense listed under Section 3 of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, committed by a person who is not a member of a Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST), against someone who is. These offenses include -

1. **Social exclusion** (e.g., denying access to public spaces)
2. **Physical violence** (e.g., assault, rape, murder)
3. **Economic exploitation** (e.g., land grabbing, bonded labor)
4. **Humiliation and verbal abuse** based on caste identity

The Act was enacted to prevent such offenses, ensure justice and dignity for SC/ST communities, and provide relief and rehabilitation to victims.

Recent Trend (NCRB 2023 Report)

Crimes Against Scheduled Castes (SCs) - A total of 57,789 cases were registered in 2023, marking a 0.4% increase over 2022. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number with 15,130 cases, followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The crime rate against SCs stood at 28.7 per lakh population.

Crimes Against Scheduled Tribes (STs) - A total of 12,960 cases were registered, reflecting a sharp 28.8% increase from the previous year. It is partly attributed to the ethnic violence in Manipur, where cases against STs rose from just 1 in 2022 to 3,399 in 2023.

Regional Disparities - High-incidence states for SC atrocities include -

1. Madhya Pradesh (72.6 per lakh);
2. Rajasthan (69.1 per lakh);
3. Bihar (42.6 per lakh);

Reasons Behind Caste-Based Atrocities in India

Historical and Structural Inequality - Untouchability and social exclusion has created vertical inequalities that persist even after legal abolition under Article 17 of the Constitution.

Absence of Caste Sensitivity in Institutions - Caste bias is deeply embedded in classrooms and family structures. Justice K Chandru Report recommended dropping caste-based names from schools and merging institutions to reduce segregation.

Institutional Apathy and Underreporting - MHA acknowledges that delays in investigation, lack of police sensitivity, and underrepresentation of SC/ST personnel contribute to poor enforcement of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Economic and Social Exclusion - Caste-based discrimination often manifests in denial of access to education, employment, and public services. It fuels resentment and perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

Legal and Institutional Gaps

Underreporting and Low Conviction Rates - West Bengal reported only 102 cases (NCRB 2023), with a crime rate of 0.5 per lakh, raising questions about underreporting or systemic gaps in registration. Only about 60% of SC-related cases led to charge sheets, while about 15% were closed due to lack of evidence or false claims.

Inadequate Implementation of Laws - NCST highlights that many states fail to establish Special Courts for speedy trials; appoint nodal officers to monitor implementation; provide timely relief and rehabilitation to victims; The Department of Social Justice notes that despite constitutional mandates, enforcement of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, remains inconsistent across states.
Judicial and Policing Bias - The Supreme Court struck down caste-based segregation in prison labor, calling it unconstitutional and a violation of human dignity. Moreover, a Parliamentary Standing Committee flagged lapses in state-level enforcement, urging the central government to push for stronger compliance with the PoA Act.

Constitutional Safeguards

Article 15 - It prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth;
Article 17 - It abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form;
Article 46 - It directs the State to promote educational and economic interests of SCs/STs;
Article 338 & 338A - It establishes the National Commissions for SCs and STs to monitor safeguards;

Contributions of Social Reformers

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - Drafting constitutional provisions like Article 17, which abolished untouchability;
1. Leading mass movements for temple entry and access to public resources;
2. Converting to Buddhism in 1956 as a form of protest and spiritual liberation for Dalits;
Periyar E.V. Ramasamy - He was founder of the Self-Respect Movement, a fierce critic of Brahminical dominance and religious orthodoxy. His contributions include -
1. Advocating for inter-caste marriages and women's rights;
2. Promoting atheism and rational thought to dismantle caste-based rituals;
3. Inspiring generations of anti-caste activists in Tamil Nadu;

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule
1. Opening the first school for girls in Pune in 1848;
2. Campaigning against untouchability, child marriage, and caste-based exclusion;
3. Promoting the idea of 'Bahujan upliftment' through knowledge and self-respect;
Vaikom Satyagraha - It was a non-violent protest in Kerala (1924–25) demanding temple entry rights for lower castes. Leaders like TK Madhavan and K Kelappan, supported by Mahatma Gandhi, played pivotal roles in it.

Legal Safeguards

The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 - It penalizes the enforcement of untouchability; and prohibits denial of access to public spaces and services.
The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 - It defines specific offenses as 'atrocities' (e.g., assault, humiliation, social boycott); It bars anticipatory bail for accused persons under Section 18, and mandates Special Courts for speedy trials; It provides for victim compensation and rehabilitation;
The SC/ST (PoA) Amendment Act, 2015 - It expands the list of punishable offenses; and strengthens witness protection and procedural safeguards.
National Helpdesk for Prevention of Atrocities - It has resolved over 634,000 grievances, offering legal aid and tracking complaints. Meanwhile, the Open Government Data Platform provides granular data on crimes against SCs, aiding transparency and research.

Judicial Interpretation

2025 - The Supreme Court upheld the bar on anticipatory bail for caste crime accused, warning against 'mini-trials' at the bail stage;
2024 - The Court declared caste-based segregation in prison labor unconstitutional, directing states to revise prison manuals within three months. These judgments affirm that caste-based discrimination violates fundamental rights to dignity and equality.
Institutional Mechanisms - Institutions like the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the Ministry of Social Justice are tasked with -

1. Monitoring implementation of safeguards;
2. Investigating complaints;
3. Advising on policy reforms;

Way Forward

Strengthen Law Enforcement - Ensure swift investigation, prosecution, and sensitisation of police and judiciary on caste bias.
Promote Egalitarian Values - Launch nationwide educational and media campaigns to dismantle caste-based prejudices.
Revitalise Civil Society - Encourage religious institutions, academia, and NGOs to foster inter-caste dialogue and solidarity.
Ensure Affirmative Action - Enforce reservations transparently, ensuring equitable access to education, employment, and resources.
Amplify Marginalised Voices - Empower Dalit, Adivasi, and Bahujan leaders to drive the social justice agenda.
Judicial Reforms - Fast-track courts for atrocity cases should be expanded to all districts.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-need-to-address-caste-based-atrocities/article70159373.ece

2. Nobel Prize for Economics 2025 – (IE)

GS III TOPIC - Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

The Nobel prize for economics 2025 was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt for having explained innovation-driven economic growth.

Key Lessons from Nobel-Winning Research

Joel Moky - Sustained Growth needs useful knowledge and openness to change.
Aghion & Howitt - Creative Destruction at the firm level generates stable national income.

Joel Mokyr's Contribution

Historical Puzzle of Stagnation - Joel Mokyr explored why economic growth was nearly zero for 1,800 years before 1800 and concluded that the transformation occurred when two kinds of knowledge were unified.
Prescriptive Knowledge – The "How" of Craft and Practice - Prescriptive Knowledge refers to practical, experience-based learning gained through trial and error or passed from masters to apprentices.
Focus - How things work (e.g., a carpenter knowing how to cut wood).
Period - Predominant before 1800, but limited in driving large-scale progress.
Propositional Knowledge-The "Why" of Science - Propositional Knowledge represents scientific understanding developed through experimentation and pursuit of truth.
Focus - Why things work (e.g., understanding why nitrogen enriches soil or why carbon affects steel strength).

Period - Emerged during Europe's Enlightenment era (16th–17th centuries).

Synthesis into Useful Knowledge – The Catalyst of Modern Growth - The combination of How (Prescriptive) and Why (Propositional) knowledge created Useful Knowledge, which catalyzed new innovations and triggered rapid economic growth after 1800.

Aghion & Howitt's Framework of Creative Destruction

The Paradox of Stability and Turbulence - Aghion and Howitt analyzed the paradox where the macro-economy remains stable—with steady growth and inflation—while the micro-economy experiences constant churn, as companies fail, emerge, and workers shift jobs.
Firm-Level Innovation and Temporary Monopoly - They showed that companies strive for temporary monopolies through innovation, leading to firm-level upheaval that sustains long-term national growth—a process termed Creative Destruction.

Economic Cycle of Growth and Innovation – Their model linked key economic variables into a self-reinforcing cycle -

R&D Funding – Companies need funds for research and innovation.

Savings – R&D is financed through people's savings.

Interest Rate – The level of savings depends on the prevailing interest rate.

Growth Rate – The economy's growth rate influences interest rates.

Feedback Loop – The growth rate then affects the scale of future R&D investment.

Relevance of Nobel Laureates' Work to Current Policy Debates

Government Support for Innovation – A key debate is whether governments should subsidise R&D in companies. While such support can boost innovation, it also risks benefiting individual firms more than society or future innovators.

Social Welfare and Openness to Change – An alternative view stresses social welfare subsidies to build safety nets that keep societies open to change despite disruptions like job losses from new technologies.

Balancing Growth and Stability – The Nobelists' insight highlights the need for both innovation incentives and social protection to achieve sustained, inclusive growth. There is a need to balance innovation with social safety nets-they are complementary.

Conclusion

The 2025 Nobel Prize highlights that sustained economic growth stems from Useful Knowledge and Creative Destruction, emphasizing the need to balance innovation incentives with social protection to ensure resilient, inclusive, and long-term economic development.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/nobel-prize-economic-sciences-winners-10304713/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. Navigating the global economic transformation – (TH) -1

2. The world after the American order – (IE) -3

1. Navigating the global economic transformation

General Studies 2 - International Relations **Topic -** Reforming Global Economic Order, South–South Cooperation, Digital Sovereignty, and Inclusive Growth

India and the Global South - Building a Fair Global Economic System

Context and Introduction

The global economic order is rapidly shifting amid a U.S.–China power struggle. Both powers are forming exclusive economic blocs to protect national interests. These changes are redrawing trade routes, currency systems, and strategic priorities. Within this disruption lies an opportunity for India and the Global South to create a just and balanced world order beyond neoliberal globalization.

Analysing New Economic Paradigms

State–Capital Nexus

1. Populist leaders increasingly align with large corporations for mutual gain.
2. This results in selective state control benefiting a few elites at public expense.
3. Public wealth is traded for private political and economic power.
4. The social contract between citizens and the state weakens, leading to inequality and mistrust.

Comparison Table

System Type	Role of Government	Main Beneficiaries	Impact
Laissez-faire capitalism	Limited state control	Public and small firms	Fair competition
Populist–autocratic capitalism	Heavy, selective control	Crony capitalists	Rising inequality, corruption

Resurgence of Power Politics

1. Economic policies are increasingly shaped by geopolitical calculations.
2. Crony capitalists influence national strategies to revive old-style power blocs.
3. The United States seeks to maintain dominance through global strategic control.
4. Its moves combine technology, finance, and resource access with foreign policy objectives.

Examples of U.S. Strategy

Strategy	Target Region	Purpose
Chip relocation	Taiwan–U.S.	Secure semiconductor supply
Route control	Panama	Protect key trade routes
Resource linkage	Africa, Central Asia	Access rare minerals
Arctic expansion	Greenland, Canada	Secure energy and ecological frontiers

Outcome - Creation of rival zones of influence, leading to new global tensions.

Digital Colonialism

1. Big Tech corporations dominate global data, finance, and communication systems.
2. They shape national policies and even influence democratic outcomes.
3. Over 100 central banks are testing CBDCs, potentially reducing monetary sovereignty.
4. AI governance and data regulation are tilted toward corporate interests over citizen rights.

Key Trends and Concerns

Trend	Example	Concern
AI and data laws	AI Action Plan, Cloud Act	Privacy threats
Financial systems	SWIFT, CBDCs	Weakening of national control
Digital monopolies	Big Tech dominance	Decline of fair competition

Result - Faster digital growth but less economic freedom, reduced transparency, and wider inequality.

Opportunity in Crisis

Lessons from Global Disruptions

1. Economic crises create openings for emerging economies like India and China.
2. The old neoliberal globalisation model prioritised profits, cheap labour, and exploitation of resources.
3. It led to high debt levels, weak welfare, and rising inequality.
4. A fairer system must focus on sustainability, equity, and balanced development.

Old Model Features	Effects
Profit-driven growth	Inequality and debt crises
Resource exploitation	Environmental degradation
Weak welfare	Social and economic imbalance

Deepening Inequality

1. According to the World Bank (2022) -
    - Nearly 47% of the global population lives below the $6.85/day poverty line.
    - Around 735 million people face chronic hunger.
2. These realities widen the North–South divide and fuel populist politics.
3. Social frustration leads to erosion of democratic trust and increased instability.

Indicator	Data (2022)	Concern
Global poverty	47% of population	Economic exclusion
Hunger	735 million people	Rising social instability
Social impact	Decline in trust	Populism and unrest

Building a Fairer Economic Order

1. India and the Global South must reject unfair economic hierarchies.
2. They should collaborate on a New Economic Deal emphasizing justice and cooperation.
3. Key priorities -
    1. Reforming global financial institutions (IMF, World Bank) for fair representation.
    2. Creating a debt-relief framework for developing nations.
    3. Enhancing South–South partnerships through BRICS and regional blocs.
    4. Promoting bipartisan diplomacy for durable international relationships.

Strategy	Objective	Example
Financial reform	Ensure fair global representation	IMF, World Bank reform
Debt-relief mechanism	End structural debt dependency	Global South coordination
South–South cooperation	Balanced trade and mutual growth	BRICS initiatives
Bipartisan diplomacy	Build long-term trust	Broader ties with U.S., Bangladesh, Nepal

Need for a Recalibration

Rethinking India's Growth Path

India must pursue state-led development alongside private enterprise. The state's leadership is crucial in areas affecting sovereignty, equity, and strategic interests.

Sector	State's Role	Purpose
Energy & Infrastructure	Build and regulate	Ensure stability and inclusive growth
Health & Education	Fund and expand	Universal welfare and human capital
Defence & Space	Lead and innovate	Strengthen strategic autonomy
Digital Finance & Data	Govern and protect	Preserve sovereignty and citizen rights

Preventing Corporate Dominance

1. Enforce anti-monopoly laws to prevent excessive corporate concentration.
2. Establish a sovereign wealth fund (like Norway's) to manage national savings responsibly.
3. Redirect and modernise Public Sector Units (PSUs) to function like China's state-owned enterprises for strategic influence.

Reform	Global Example	Benefit
Anti-monopoly laws	EU, U.S.	Promote fair competition
Sovereign wealth fund	Norway	Invests profits for social good
PSU redeployment	China	Strengthens global and economic presence

Investing in Knowledge and Digital Sovereignty

1. Deep investment in science, research, and education is vital for innovation.
2. Academic freedom must be preserved to drive creativity and discovery.
3. The digital-financial framework should align with constitutional values of justice, equality, and transparency.

Focus Area	Goal	Impact
Scientific research	Foster innovation	Enhance global competitiveness
Education autonomy	Encourage creativity	Build skilled, informed citizens
Digital finance	Reflect constitutional principles	Achieve secure, inclusive growth

Conclusion

India stands at a pivotal moment in the global economic transition. The way forward requires blending state-led strategic vision with inclusive, ethical growth.

By -

1. Reforming global financial systems,
2. Promoting equitable South–South cooperation, and
3. Strengthening its knowledge and digital base,

India can help the Global South construct a resilient, just, and multipolar economic order. The ultimate goal - a fair, transparent, and prosperity-driven world system rooted in shared justice and cooperation.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/navigating-the-global-economic-transformation/article70168195.ece

2. The World after the American order

General Studies 2 - International Relations **Topic -** Changing Global Order and India's Foreign Policy Strategy

Context

The post–World War II global order, led by the United States, is weakening. This system was based on liberal democracy, multilateralism, and economic openness. America's inward turn—especially during the Trump administration—has accelerated its decline. China is now attempting to reshape global norms and institutions around its own values and interests.

Introduction - Decline of Pax Americana

After World War II, the *Pax Americana* system promoted peace, democracy, and open markets. It was institutionalized through the UN, IMF, World Bank, and later the WTO. The US served as the guarantor of stability and global economic order. However, multiple challenges have eroded this dominance -

1. *Prolonged wars* (Iraq, Afghanistan) drained legitimacy.
2. *2008 financial crisis* damaged economic credibility.
3. *Nationalism and protectionism* rose globally.
4. *Domestic polarization* in the US weakened its global engagement.

The very principles that upheld the liberal order—free trade and multilateralism—are now being questioned by the US itself.

Changing Contours of Global Power

1. The Unraveling of the US-led Order

The US is withdrawing from its traditional global leadership role. Under Trump, the policy shifted from internationalism to isolationism.

Key moves -

1. Withdrawal from the *Paris Climate Agreement* and *Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)*.
2. Tariff wars with China and the EU.
3. Criticism of NATO and UN institutions.

Result - weakened transatlantic alliances, uncertain global leadership, and greater instability. US retreat allowed competitors like China and Russia to expand influence in strategic regions.

2. China's Assertive Expansion

China promotes an alternative model - *state-led capitalism + authoritarian governance*. *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* - connects over 140 countries through infrastructure, loans, and trade. Presents itself as a champion of *South–South cooperation* and "win-win development."

Criticisms and concerns -

1. *Debt diplomacy* in Sri Lanka, Zambia, and others.
2. *Opaque financing* and strategic encirclement ("String of Pearls").
3. *Aggression* in South China Sea and Indo-Pacific.

Through digital, financial, and technological initiatives, China seeks to reshape global governance in its favor.

3. A Multipolar and Pragmatic Global Order

Neither the US nor China can unilaterally dominate the world anymore. Rise of *middle powers* and *regional actors*—India, Japan, EU, ASEAN, Brazil, South Africa. Multipolarity implies diffusion of power across regions and issues. Global governance is becoming *issue-based* rather than *ideological* - Countries cooperate on climate, energy, and health without full political alignment. Platforms like *G20, BRICS, SCO, and ASEAN* reflect this plural and pragmatic approach.

Global South nations seek voice, equality, and reform in international institutions (UNSC, IMF, WTO).

Implications for India

India stands as a democratic power with both economic and strategic weight. Plays a *bridging role* between developed democracies and emerging economies.

Strategic participation in multiple forums -

QUAD – for Indo-Pacific security and technology collaboration.

BRICS – for reforming global institutions and promoting South–South cooperation.

Challenges for India -

1. Balancing ties with the US and Russia amid China's assertiveness.
2. Maintaining *strategic autonomy* in a polarized world.
3. Building economic resilience and technological capacity to project influence.

India's policy priorities -

1. Strengthen multilateralism and reform UN and Bretton Woods systems.
2. Promote inclusive development and rule-based global order.
3. Focus on *Atmanirbhar Bharat* for economic sovereignty.

Conclusion

The decline of the US-led order marks the end of a unipolar era. A new global system is emerging—*multipolar, plural, and issue-driven*. The contest is not just military but ideological—between *liberal democracy* and *authoritarian capitalism*. China fills part of the void but lacks universal trust and legitimacy. India and the Global South must leverage this transition to -

1. Shape an inclusive and equitable world order.
2. Reinforce sovereignty and development-oriented cooperation.
3. Lead with credibility and moral authority in global governance.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-world-american-order-10309216/

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2. Empower ASI to do its job – (IE) - 3

1. None too soon - On the setting of the northeast monsoon

General Studies 1 - Geography **Topic -** Climate and Weather Patterns in India - Northeast Monsoon Dynamics and Regional Impacts

Early Arrival of the Northeast Monsoon - A Boon and a Challenge for Southern India

Context

The early onset of the northeast monsoon has brought encouraging news for farmers in southern India. Expected better rainfall promises enhanced crop growth and improved water security. However, above-normal rainfall forecasts demand increased preparedness for floods and infrastructure resilience.

Introduction

The northeast monsoon arrived on October 16, 2025, marking an early onset ahead of the normal date (October 20 ± 7 days). The arrival has brought relief and optimism to regions like Tamil Nadu and coastal Andhra Pradesh, which depend heavily on this monsoon for agriculture. With IMD forecasting above-normal rains, the focus must remain on disaster preparedness, urban flood management, and safeguarding livelihoods.

Early Arrival of the Northeast Monsoon

IMD confirmation - Onset on October 16, 2025, four days before the normal mean date. The northeast monsoon (also called the retreating monsoon) is vital for rainfall in peninsular India, especially the southeastern coast. This monsoon is driven by northeasterly trade winds that pick up moisture from the Bay of Bengal and bring rainfall to Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and parts of Karnataka. The IMD predicts above 112% of the long-period average (LPA) rainfall, indicating above-normal monsoon intensity. While beneficial for agriculture, such intensity also increases the risk of urban flooding and cyclonic storms.

Monsoon Facts and Forecast Summary

Feature	Detail
Normal onset date	October 20 (± 7 days)
Actual onset (2025)	October 16
IMD forecast	Above 112% of LPA
Rainfall share (1971–2020)	Tamil Nadu – 48% of annual rainfall; Andhra Pradesh – 30%+
Cyclones expected	Minimum of 3 in Bay of Bengal
New concern	Increased cloudbursts and urban floods

Changing Weather Patterns and Rising Cloudbursts

A study by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) has found an increasing frequency of cloudbursts in recent years. Chennai and other urban centers remain vulnerable due to repeated flood disasters (notably 2015, 2021). Urbanization without adequate drainage and encroachment on wetlands have intensified flood risk. Above-normal rainfall + poor drainage = higher probability of waterlogging and loss of property and crops.

Government Preparedness and Institutional Response

The Tamil Nadu government is setting up a real-time flood-forecasting and early-warning system for Chennai. This will help monitor rainfall, manage reservoir releases, and control flood discharge effectively. Inter-agency coordination has improved across southern states, reducing flood-related casualties. Training of disaster response teams, upgrading machinery, and ensuring evacuation readiness have been prioritized. Digital mapping and hydrological modelling are being integrated into state disaster management frameworks.

Challenges and the Role of Citizens

Urban flood management gaps - Stormwater drains and city water channels remain clogged or poorly maintained. Encroachments and dumping of waste into lakes, rivers, and canals worsen blockages.
Public apathy - Many residents still blame only government agencies, neglecting their own civic duties. Lack of community ownership weakens local resilience. Real safety requires shared responsibility between citizens and authorities - Regular drain cleaning, solid waste segregation, and community awareness can significantly mitigate risk

Farm Sector Concerns

Fertilizer shortage - Farmers across southern India are reporting acute shortages of urea and other fertilizers during the sowing season. Tamil Nadu CM M. K. Stalin has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking immediate support to address shortages.
Union Agriculture Ministry has responded by increasing urea allocation -
October 2024 - 36.65 lakh tonnes
October 2025 - Higher allotment to meet demand

Other monsoon-dependent states (e.g., Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana) have also raised concerns. Ensuring timely input supply is critical to translate good monsoon conditions into higher yield.

Broader Implications

The northeast monsoon contributes significantly to India's overall food security, particularly for rice, pulses, and plantation crops.
Early and abundant rainfall can -

1. Refill reservoirs and aquifers,
2. Boost irrigation potential, and
3. Reduce power deficits in hydropower-dependent regions.

However, excess rainfall can trigger -

1. Crop damage, pest attacks, and soil erosion,
2. Urban flooding, and
3. Infrastructure strain in cities like Chennai and Puducherry.

Thus, climate adaptation strategies and sustainable water management are vital.

Conclusion

The early onset of the northeast monsoon symbolizes both hope and hazard for southern India. It offers an opportunity for agricultural prosperity but also demands strategic flood preparedness.
Governments must -

1. Strengthen drainage and flood-warning infrastructure,
2. Ensure fertilizer and input supply to farmers, and
3. Promote community-led waste management to prevent blockages.

Citizens must act responsibly to prevent waterlogging and pollution. With timely planning, improved coordination, and public participation, southern India can transform heavy rains into a sustainable and resilient opportunity for growth.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/none-too-soon-on-the-setting-of-the-northeast-monsoon/article70172124.ece

2. Empower ASI to do its job

General Studies 1 - History; Art & Culture **Topic -** Conservation of Cultural Heritage in India - Role of ASI and Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Heritage Preservation

Context

India possesses a rich and vast cultural heritage with over **3,**600 centrally protected monuments and many unlisted sites. The central debate today - Should heritage conservation remain a government-led responsibility under the ASI or should it be opened up to private participation through PPPs? The issue highlights the tension between preservation, public access, and modern relevance.

Strengthening the ASI's Capacity and Vision

Role and Legacy of ASI

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), established in 1861 during British rule, is the apex institution for archaeological conservation and research. Historically, it was a scholarly and scientific body, leading global archaeological studies. Over time, however, the ASI has become bureaucratic, underfunded, and less adaptive to modern challenges such as urbanization, tourism, and digital preservation.

Present Concerns

Policymakers show a declining historical consciousness and lack creative policy imagination. The ASI's rigid structure and lack of professional autonomy have limited its efficiency. Privatization may risk turning monuments into commercial tourist commodities, undermining their cultural and historical integrity. The problem lies not in the ASI's existence, but in its resource scarcity, weak community outreach, and limited modernization.

Key Steps to Strengthen the ASI

Professional revitalization - Recruit archaeologists, conservation architects, historians, and heritage managers on merit.

Field-level engagement - Strengthen collaboration with local communities, universities, and cultural NGOs.

Public participation - Organize heritage walks, school programs, and citizen-led conservation drives.

Digitization - Archive ASI's documentation and excavation reports online for transparency and research access.

Institutional reform - Grant the ASI greater professional autonomy and allocate adequate financial resources.

Heritage should be preserved with continuity, historical sensitivity, and cultural consciousness, not reduced to profit-making ventures.

Past Model Example

The Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) successfully integrated urban development with heritage conservation, serving as a model for balanced policy design.

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Heritage Conservation

Need for PPPs

The state alone cannot manage the enormous scale and diversity of India's heritage. PPP models can mobilize additional financial, managerial, and technological resources. Encourages community ownership and local economic benefits through heritage-linked tourism.

Successful Example

The Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum (Mumbai) restoration -

Collaboration between the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, INTACH, and private donors. Transformed a neglected colonial museum into a UNESCO award-winning heritage site. Showed that transparency, community involvement, and expert supervision can ensure success without commercialization.

Public Concerns

Risk of commercial exploitation and loss of authenticity if PPPs are profit-driven. Need for strict regulation, scientific restoration standards, and public accountability.

Key Steps to Strengthen PPP Models

Establish local heritage trusts involving authorities, experts, NGOs, and citizens. Link heritage to sustainable tourism and local crafts, ensuring economic benefit to surrounding communities. Ensure ASI or UNESCO supervision for maintaining scientific conservation standards.

Capacity building - Train local youth and artisans for long-term monument upkeep.

Promote community stewardship - Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents.

Way Forward

Heritage conservation must be a shared responsibility — between the state, private sector, and civil society. Privatization should complement, not replace, government oversight.A hybrid model can combine -

1. State oversight and authenticity (through ASI)
2. Private innovation and funding (through PPPs)
3. Community involvement and local empowerment

Heritage management should integrate education, conservation, and sustainable development, ensuring that monuments serve both as cultural symbols and community assets. Ultimately, balanced heritage governance will preserve authenticity while promoting inclusive access, employment, and cultural pride.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/empower-asi-to-do-its-job-10311423/

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2. Rising CO_2 Levels – (IE) - 2

1. Claim, counterclaim - On India and foreign policy

General Studies 2 - International Relations **Topic -** India and its neighbourhood- relations. Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

I. The Trigger - The Trump Claim and India's Response

The Incident - U.S. President Donald Trump publicly claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had assured him India would cease importing oil from Russia.[1] This placed India in an immediate diplomatic spotlight.

Contextual Backlash - This claim followed closely on the heels of Trump's previous controversial assertion regarding his mediation of an alleged "Operation Sindoor" ceasefire, highlighting a pattern of unpredictable U.S. diplomatic messaging.

India's Reaction - "Soft Denial" - The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) avoided an explicit refutation. It adopted a position of calibrated ambiguity, stating it had no knowledge of such a conversation, thereby neither confirming nor outright rejecting the President's claim.

Pattern of Restraint - This tactical restraint mirrored India's earlier non-confrontational approach during the "Operation Sindoor" controversy, indicating a consistent strategy of "quiet diplomacy" over public confrontation.

II. The Strategic Quandary - Factors Driving India's Ambiguity

Factor	Concern for India	Explanation of Strategy
Bilateral Trade Deal	Securing a near-term U.S.–India trade deal.	India seeks to avoid any action (like a direct public refutation of Trump) that could jeopardize ongoing economic and trade negotiations with the U.S.
China Factor	Managing the long-term Asian power balance.	India relies on strategic partnerships, including the U.S., for shared concerns over China's rise, necessitating a careful balancing act to maintain alignment.
Trump's Diplomacy Style	Unpredictable and transactional.	The "Art of the Deal" tactics employed by the U.S. administration make diplomatic coordination difficult, making Indian strategists prefer a measured, non-escalatory response.

III. The Larger Challenge - Moral Voice of a Rising Power

Tactical Utility vs. Moral Risk - While strategic ambiguity is tactically useful for preventing escalation and keeping dialogue open, its overuse risks being interpreted internationally as moral indecision or a lack of principle, particularly on crucial global issues like the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

Aspiration to Global Leadership - As India rises to become a global power, its foreign policy must transition from one driven solely by strategic convenience to one articulated with ethical consistency.

Credibility and Image - Moral clarity is essential for strengthening India's image as a responsible global power, distinguishing it from purely transactional diplomacy.

Principle over Appeasement - India's long-term credibility hinges not on appeasing great powers but on standing firm on universally accepted principles such as peace, sovereignty, and fairness.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/claim-counterclaim-on-india-and-foreign-policy/article70175673.ece#google_vignette

2. Rising CO_2 Levels

General Studies 3 – Environment **Topic -** Climate Change and Global Warming – Rising CO_2 Levels, Greenhouse Gas Dynamics, and Global Climate Governance

Rising CO_2 Levels - Causes, Consequences, and Global Governance Challenges

Context -

Between 2023 and 2024, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (CO_2) recorded its sharpest annual increase since systematic observations began in 1957, signaling both intensifying human emissions and weakening natural carbon sinks.

CO_2 and Its Role in Climate Change

CO_2 is the most significant anthropogenic greenhouse gas, responsible for the largest share of global warming. Although less potent molecule-to-molecule than methane (CH_4) or nitrous oxide (N_2O), its long atmospheric lifespan (hundreds to thousands of years) causes cumulative warming. Currently, CO_2 contributes to over 66% of total radiative forcing since the pre-industrial era. Pre-industrial concentration - 278 ppm, current levels show an increase of nearly 152%. The year 2024 became the warmest on record, with global temperatures rising 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels, surpassing the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C threshold. Persistent crossing of this threshold threatens polar ice melt, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem collapse.

Sources of Rising CO_2 Levels

Anthropogenic sources -

1. Burning of fossil fuels for power, industry, and transportation.
2. Deforestation and large-scale land-use changes reducing natural carbon sinks.
3. Industrial processes like cement and steel production.

Natural feedback mechanisms - Climate-induced feedbacks such as forest fires, droughts, and ocean warming are adding to CO_2 accumulation.

Carbon Cycle and Weakening Natural Sinks

CO_2 circulates through the natural carbon cycle, exchanged between atmosphere, oceans, and terrestrial ecosystems. Normally, 50% of human-emitted CO_2 is absorbed by natural sinks — forests (photosynthesis) and oceans (dissolution). In 2024, WMO reported a decline in the efficiency of these sinks -

1. Oceans absorbed less CO_2 due to reduced solubility in warmer waters.
2. Heatwaves and droughts decreased terrestrial uptake by vegetation.
3. Forest fires and land degradation released stored carbon back into the atmosphere.

This forms a vicious feedback loop, where warming reduces Earth's capacity to regulate CO_2, further intensifying climate change.

Other Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) and Their Impact

Methane (CH_4) -

1. Reached 1,542 parts per billion (ppb) in 2024.
2. Has 25 times higher heat-trapping ability than CO_2 but persists only for ~12 years.
3. Emitted from livestock, landfills, and fossil fuel extraction.

Nitrous Oxide (N_2O) -

1. Rose to 338 ppb in 2024.
2. About 270 times more potent than CO_2; persists for over a century.
3. Major source - Agriculture (fertilizers, manure management).

Together, CH_4 and N_2O contribute to one-third of total global warming.

Global Climate Governance and Policy Gaps -

The Paris Agreement (2015) under UNFCCC aims to limit global warming to below 2°C and strive for 1.5°C. Despite this, global emissions continue to rise, and most Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are insufficient for 2030 targets.

Key structural challenges

1. Inequitable responsibility between developed and developing countries.
2. Insufficient climate finance and technology transfer from the Global North.
3. Continued dependence on fossil fuels and delay in transitioning to renewables.
4. Weak implementation and accountability mechanisms in global climate regimes.

Implications of Rising CO_2 and Weak Climate Action

1. Accelerates global temperature rise and climate instability.
2. Intensifies extreme weather events, droughts, and floods.
3. Threatens food and water security, especially in vulnerable regions.
4. Increases the risk of crossing climatic tipping points, such as ice sheet collapse and permafrost thawing.
5. Undermines global biodiversity and long-term planetary sustainability.

Way Forward

The sharp CO_2 rise between 2023–2024 serves as a climate emergency warning.

Key action areas -

1. Deep, science-based emission reductions across all sectors.
2. Strengthening carbon sinks through afforestation, soil restoration, and wetland protection.
3. Expanding renewable energy and carbon capture technologies.
4. Enforcing climate accountability and improving transparency in NDCs.
5. Enhancing global cooperation for equitable climate finance and green technology access.

A comprehensive global strategy integrating mitigation, adaptation, and ecosystem resilience is vital to prevent irreversible climate tipping points.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/explained-rising-co2-levels-10313591/# -~ -text=Globally%20averaged%20CO2%20concentration%20near,during%20the%202011%2D2020%20decade.

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1. Unreliable air and noise data, real-time deception

General Studies 3 - Environment **Topic -** Pollution, Environmental Governance, and Data Integrity

1. Context and Core Issue

Recent failures in India's environmental monitoring systems—Delhi's *Real-Time Air Pollution Network* and Lucknow's *National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network*—have exposed systemic flaws. These failures highlight how unreliable environmental data weakens public policy, erodes citizen trust, and damages India's global credibility in environmental governance.

2. The Problem - Unreliable Data and Governance Crisis

Delhi's Air Monitoring Failure - Sensors are incorrectly placed (under trees, behind walls, near obstructions), leading to distorted readings. In some cases, there were proposals to install sensors in cleaner areas, underestimating pollution levels intentionally. Dashboards often classify air as "moderate" despite visibly hazardous smog — creating a *data-reality gap*.

Governance Failure - Such manipulation of environmental data represents a breakdown of accountability. When data loses credibility, the foundation of environmental policy becomes unstable and illegitimate.

3. The Importance of Sound Data for Environmental Policy

Policy decisions on stubble burning, vehicular limits, or industrial emissions depend on *scientifically valid and representative* data. Distorted or unverified data can misdirect policy interventions and hinder effective outcomes. Weak monitoring mechanisms undermine India's international commitments, including -

1. *Paris Agreement targets* on emissions.
2. *WHO Air Quality Guidelines* for public health protection.

4. The Lucknow Case - Faulty Noise Monitoring System

The National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network in Lucknow failed to capture true decibel levels. The *Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000* remain outdated and below WHO standards. Weak enforcement and negligible penalties make noise control policies ineffective. Former Environment Minister Anil Madhav Dave (2017) had highlighted these flaws in Parliament, but no systemic reform followed.

5. Policy Consequences and Constitutional Dimensions

Misleading air and noise data lead to policy paralysis — delaying action by courts and government agencies. In Delhi, inaccurate AQI readings delay judicial interventions on pollution-related cases. In Lucknow, faulty noise data affect citizens' *fundamental rights* under Articles 19 (Right to Expression) and 21 (Right to Life). The Supreme Court's move to transfer noise pollution cases to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) signals recognition of pollution as a *public health and fundamental rights issue*, not just a nuisance.

6. Missing Pillars of Environmental Data Governance

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) provides detailed guidelines for -

1. Sensor placement and calibration
2. Periodic audits and data transparency

However, enforcement remains weak due to -

1. Political interference
2. Absence of *independent scientific oversight*

Unlike international standards, India's monitoring networks lack third-party audits and independent review panels. Class-1 quality sensors are installed at high cost but without transparency or accountability in operation.

7. Public Health Implications of Flawed Monitoring

Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) estimates -If Delhi's air met WHO standards, life expectancy could increase by *8.2 years*. Across India, air pollution reduces life expectancy by *5 years*. Misrepresentation of air quality data conceals health emergencies and diverts accountability. Studies link long-term exposure to NO_2 and $PM_{2.5}$ with -

1. Weakened lung function
2. Asthma and cardiovascular issues
3. Accelerated myopia in children

Behind every misleading dataset lies real human suffering — children, elderly, and vulnerable populations face preventable harm.

8. Science as the Foundation of Environmental Monitoring

Accurate monitoring must rest on scientific discipline and independent oversight. Key recommendations for reform -

1. Strict adherence to scientific protocols in sensor installation and calibration.
2. Independent expert supervision to ensure data validity.
3. Raw data access to the public for transparency.
4. Regular third-party audits of air and noise data.
5. Citizen oversight mechanisms to enhance accountability and trust.

9. Broader Governance and Democratic Implications

In a democracy, misleading health and pollution data undermines public trust and accountability. Flawed data supports inaction, suppressing citizens' voices demanding their right to health and a clean environment. Real-time systems must *reflect real conditions*, not serve as bureaucratic façades. *Technology without transparency* becomes a tool of deception rather than empowerment.

10. The Way Forward - Data Integrity as the Core of Governance

Environmental governance in India stands at a critical juncture. Robust data integrity, scientific rigour, and transparent oversight are indispensable to -

1. Protect public health
2. Fulfil constitutional rights
3. Strengthen India's environmental diplomacy and credibility

Without trustworthy data, policies become *performance without purpose*. Restoring public trust in environmental data is the first step toward accountable and sustainable governance.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/unreliable-air-and-noise-data-real-time-deception/article70187261.ece

2. On Air, Connect the Dots

General Studies 3 – Environment **Topic -** Air Pollution, Climate Interaction, and Environmental Governance

1. Context - India's Winter Pollution Pattern

India's winter season, especially in North India, is typically marked by poor air quality due to both meteorological and anthropogenic factors. Despite a temporary improvement in air quality during autumn 2025, this must be interpreted in a broader climatic context, as conditions may worsen during

the winter months. The improvement is short-term and situational, not indicative of a systemic environmental recovery.

2. Factors Behind Short-Term Improvement in Air Quality (Autumn 2025)

Timely monsoon withdrawal - This year's monsoon withdrew on time, unlike in previous years where delays caused air stagnation.
Warmer-than-usual weather - Enhanced atmospheric dispersion helped dilute surface pollutants.
Favourable meteorological conditions - Sustained wind movement and less humidity allowed pollutants to disperse more efficiently.
Result - Air quality during Diwali 2025 was relatively better compared to severe smog episodes of previous years.
However, these conditions are temporary and meteorologically driven, not due to structural policy change.

3. El Niño–La Niña Transition Effects on Air Quality

El Niño phase (previous years) - Characterized by higher surface temperatures and altered rainfall, which affected India's monsoon dynamics.
Transition to weak La Niña (current phase) -

1. Brings cooler global temperatures but can prolong Indian winters.
2. Causes stagnant air layers, reducing vertical and horizontal atmospheric mixing.
3. Promotes pollutant accumulation near the surface from vehicular, industrial, and biomass-burning sources.

Implication - Cleaner air during Diwali could be followed by increased pollution in November–December due to longer, stagnant winter periods.

4. Stubble Burning and Delayed Harvest – Agricultural Linkage

Stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana remains a significant seasonal contributor to North India's smog.
Delayed paddy harvest - Caused by erratic rainfall and climate variability. This delay shifts stubble burning peaks to late October and November, coinciding with low temperatures and slow wind speeds, worsening pollution episodes. Despite policy measures like in-situ residue management and financial incentives, enforcement remains weak.
Systemic problem - Lack of sustainable alternatives such as bioenergy conversion, composting infrastructure, and crop diversification.

5. Climate–Air Quality Interaction - The Systemic Link

Air pollution in India cannot be seen as an isolated urban or seasonal issue. It is part of a larger climate–air feedback system, where -

1. Warmer global temperatures intensify urban heat islands, trapping pollutants.
2. Altered monsoon and rainfall variability reduce natural atmospheric cleansing.
3. Deforestation and land-use change further exacerbate particulate matter retention.

Hence, air quality management must integrate climate adaptation policies for effectiveness.

6. Policy and Governance Implications

Fragmented interventions—such as seasonal crackdowns or temporary restrictions—fail to produce long-term results. Policymakers must adopt scientifically informed, data-driven, and anticipatory approaches, including -

1. Strengthening early warning systems (e.g., SAFAR-based air forecasts).
2. Interlinking climate models with air quality forecasting for preventive action.
3. Promoting electric mobility, public transport, and bioenergy from agricultural residues.
4. Expanding urban green buffers to reduce pollutant concentration.
5. Ensuring citizen participation and inter-state coordination between Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and UP.

7. Long-Term Challenge of Air Pollution

Better air quality during Diwali 2025 should not create complacency. Weak La Niña, delayed stubble burning, and cooling atmospheric conditions are likely to cause extended smog episodes during November–December 2025. These will impact public health, transportation, and economic productivity if not mitigated proactively. The challenge lies in transforming reactive pollution management into predictive, climate-integrated planning.

8. Way Forward – Towards Climate-Aware Air Quality Strategy

Adopt a holistic and integrated approach that combines -

1. Climate adaptation policies (addressing temperature and rainfall shifts)
2. Agricultural reform (promoting sustainable crop residue management)
3. Urban emission reduction (through transport electrification and cleaner fuels)
4. Meteorological data integration for real-time policy action.

Cross-sectoral coordination among ministries (MoEFCC, Agriculture, Urban Development, Power) is essential. Build resilience through research, regional cooperation, and public awareness. Recognize air quality improvement as both an environmental and public health imperative, aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251022/281981793813202?srsltid=AfmBOoo_stEJWO1KsTnbidjgcQIFa8-cq5_MtY1BNSBVnodLUX1TctvX

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1. Tapping the shine - On the solar industry in India

General Studies 3 – Environment **Topic -** Energy – Renewable Energy, Solar Power Development, and Climate Commitments

1. Context - Solar Power as a Strategic Pillar of Energy Transition

India's energy mix is undergoing a historic transformation — from coal dominance to renewable expansion. Solar power lies at the core of India's climate strategy, sustainability goals, and energy security framework. As India becomes the world's 3rd-largest solar producer, the focus now shifts from capacity building to global competitiveness and export diversification. Ensuring economic sustainability of the solar sector is critical to maintaining industrial momentum and climate credibility.

2. India's Solar Power Journey - Growth and Achievements

Solar energy has evolved into one of India's most dynamic industries.

Global standing - 3rd-largest solar energy producer (after China and the U.S.), surpassing Japan (IREA 2024–25).

Generation capacity - 1,08,494 GWh of solar power in 2024–25.

Installed capacity - Increased from 2 GW in 2014 to 100 GW in 2025 (as per MNRE).

Effective operational capacity - Around 85 GW, highlighting the gap between installed and functional output.

Solar energy has become cheaper than coal since 2017, driving rapid private-sector investment in utility-scale projects. Represents India's shift toward climate-resilient and low-carbon power generation.

3. Policy Commitments and Capacity Targets

Under India's updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - 50% of total installed electricity capacity will come from non-fossil sources by 2030 (~500 GW). Solar's share - 250–280 GW by 2030.

To meet this, India needs to add around 30 GW per year, but the current pace is only 17–23 GW annually. This shortfall risks delaying India's renewable energy and climate goals under the Paris Agreement.

4. Cost Challenges and Global Competitiveness

Indian solar modules are **1.5 to 2 times costlier** than Chinese modules.

Reasons -

1. Smaller economies of scale.
2. Dependence on imported raw materials like polysilicon and wafers.
3. Fragmented supply chains and higher logistics costs.

While India has ramped up capacity, China dominates the global solar market, exporting 236 GW in 2024. India's exports to the U.S. (4 GW in 2024) benefited temporarily from U.S. import restrictions on Chinese modules. Without new global markets, India's domestic overcapacity could lead to underutilization and financial strain.

5. Domestic Policy Initiatives Supporting Solar Expansion

PM-KUSUM Scheme - Promotes solar-powered irrigation pumps and decentralized rural solar generation.

PM-Surya Ghar Scheme - Encourages rooftop solar adoption in urban and semi-urban households.

Both schemes face implementation delays due to financial constraints, slow subsidy disbursal, and grid integration issues. Nevertheless, these programs serve as model templates for international collaboration, particularly in Africa.

6. Strategic Expansion through Solar Diplomacy – Africa as a Key Market

India seeks to become a global solar supplier, leveraging the International Solar Alliance (ISA) framework. Africa presents a strategic opportunity -

1. Only 4% of arable land in Africa is irrigated due to energy shortages.
2. Enormous potential for solar-powered irrigation, microgrids, and rural electrification.

By offering affordable and decentralized solar solutions, India can -

1. Strengthen South–South cooperation.
2. Counterbalance China's dominance in African renewable markets.
3. Ensure sustainable demand for its expanding solar manufacturing base.

This aligns with India's vision of solar diplomacy — combining development aid, trade, and climate leadership.

7. Industrial Sustainability and Export Strategy

To remain competitive, India must focus on -

Value chain localization - From polysilicon to solar cells and modules.

Research and innovation - Improve module efficiency and reduce material dependency.

Export diversification - Target emerging markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

Strategic financing - Through EXIM Bank and ISA-backed credit mechanisms for developing countries.

India must evolve from a *domestic producer* to a *global solar technology supplier*.

8. Summary Table

Aspect	Key Data / Observation	Implication
Global Rank	3rd after China and the U.S.	Major renewable power player
Solar Generation (2024–25)	1,08,494 GWh	Surpassed Japan
Manufacturing Capacity	2 GW (2014) → 100 GW (2025)	Rapid expansion
Effective Capacity	~85 GW	Gap between installed and operational output
Annual Capacity Addition	Required - 30 GW; Actual - 17–23 GW	Need acceleration
Cost Factor	1.5–2× higher than China	Competitive disadvantage
Exports (2024)	India - 4 GW vs China - 236 GW	Limited market access
Key Schemes	PM-KUSUM, PM-Surya Ghar	Domestic growth and Africa models
ISA Role	Global solar diplomacy	Expands market and strengthens leadership

9. Challenges Hindering Long-Term Growth

1. High input costs and dependency on imports for key components.
2. Limited financing for startups and MSMEs in solar manufacturing.
3. Slow pace of rooftop and decentralized solar adoption.
4. Grid integration issues due to variable generation patterns.
5. Trade barriers and global price competition limiting export potential.

10. Way Forward - Building a Sustainable and Competitive Solar Ecosystem

Boost domestic manufacturing - Deepen production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes for the full solar value chain.
Enhance efficiency - Invest in R&D for next-generation solar technologies (perovskite, bifacial, thin-film).
Integrate climate and trade policy - Align export financing with ISA-led partnerships.
Create new markets abroad - Establish *India–Africa Solar Corridors* and regional solar parks.
Encourage innovation and affordability - Develop modular and portable systems for rural use.
Ensure energy equity - Link solar growth with livelihood generation and rural development.

This integrated approach will ensure India's solar transition is economically viable, globally competitive, and socially inclusive.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/tapping-the-shine-on-the-solar-industry-in-india/article70190555.ece

2. Nutrition Needs Nuance

General Studies 2 – Governance **Topic -** Issues Relating to Health, Nutrition, and Human Development

1. Context and Overview

Nutrition forms the foundation of public health, influencing productivity, immunity, and disease prevention. In India, the nutrition discourse is often oversimplified, focusing narrowly on calorie intake and cereal consumption rather than dietary diversity and quality. A more nuanced understanding of dietary habits, socio-economic context, and market dynamics is essential to address the dual challenge of undernutrition and overnutrition.

2. Dual Burden of Malnutrition

India faces a dual nutritional burden - Undernutrition among vulnerable groups—children, women, and rural poor. Overnutrition and obesity among urban and semi-urban populations, leading to rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and cardiovascular disorders.

Key reasons - Transition from traditional diets to ultra-processed, calorie-dense foods rich in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. Rapid urbanization, rising incomes, and sedentary lifestyles.

This creates a paradox - caloric sufficiency coexisting with micronutrient deficiencies.

3. Changing Dietary Patterns

Generalized dietary guidelines are often ineffective because they ignore regional, cultural, and economic diversity. Need for context-specific interventions considering -

1. Regional food habits.
2. Socioeconomic class and affordability.
3. Cultural dietary preferences.

Protein intake - Essential for metabolic health, but excessive reliance on limited plant-based sources can reduce nutritional balance.

Low-fat diet misconceptions - Overemphasis leads to increased consumption of refined carbohydrates, worsening obesity and metabolic issues.

Rising sugar consumption and energy-dense food intake correlate with increasing obesity and diabetes cases. According to MoSPI, per capita calorie consumption has risen — but from nutrient-poor, processed sources, not wholesome foods.

4. Structural and Policy Limitations

Agricultural policy bias - Overemphasis on cereal production (rice and wheat) due to Green Revolution legacies, neglecting pulses, millets, and horticultural crops.

Market dynamics - Cheap availability and aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods distort consumer choices.

Nutritional policy gap - Current frameworks often fail to integrate agriculture, health, and education policies cohesively.

Public health messaging remains simplistic — calorie counts, "eat less fat," or "more protein" — lacking nuance about balance and diversity.

5. Policy Response – Towards Integrated Nutrition Governance

a) Aligning Agricultural and Public Health Policies -

1. Promote crop diversification toward pulses, fruits, vegetables, and millets.
2. Incentivize sustainable agriculture and production of nutrient-rich foods.
3. Ensure affordability and accessibility of diverse food items through markets and public distribution systems.

b) Regulatory and Economic Measures -

1. Introduce front-of-pack labeling for high-sugar and high-fat foods.
2. Impose taxes on ultra-processed foods and limit marketing targeting children.
3. Strengthen food safety and quality standards.

c) Public Awareness and Behavioural Change -

1. Move beyond calorie-centric campaigns.
2. Integrate nutritional literacy in schools, workplaces, and community programs.
3. Encourage awareness on portion control, balanced meals, and cooking practices.

d) Linking Nutrition with Ecology and Economy -

1. Local food systems and farmer incentives must align with nutritional outcomes.
2. Focus on reducing post-harvest losses and improving supply chain efficiency.
3. Promote eco-nutrition — linking sustainable agriculture with dietary health.

6. Challenges

1. Persistence of socio-economic inequalities affects access to nutritious food.
2. Cultural inertia and food habits make behavioral change slow.
3. Weak inter-ministerial coordination between agriculture, health, and education sectors.
4. Data limitations in capturing dietary diversity and regional consumption patterns.
5. Private sector influence in food marketing and pricing distorts health priorities.

7. Way Forward

Shift from reductionist to holistic nutrition strategies that combine -

1. Scientific evidence (on nutrient balance and metabolic health),
2. Cultural realities (local diets, traditions),
3. Economic incentives (making healthy food affordable),
4. Environmental sustainability (sustainable crop systems).

Focus on "Food Systems Approach" — integrating production, distribution, consumption, and health.

Strengthen community-level nutrition surveillance and targeted interventions for vulnerable groups.

Develop region-specific dietary guidelines that reflect India's diversity rather than one-size-fits-all models.

Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251023/281943139109818?srsltid=AfmBOorlY3hY1hWBlK1sl9OS5D5F812CJoQxCh5PkxRafTuSxVOPFyqo

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1. Good job - On Tamil Nadu and women in hazardous jobs – (TH)

General Studies 2 - Social Justice **Topic -** Labour Reforms, Gender Equality in Workforce, Workplace Safety & Women Empowerment

Introduction

Tamil Nadu's decision to permit women to work in operations previously classified as hazardous marks an important stride toward advancing gender equality in industrial labour. This change challenges historical assumptions that restricted women from certain forms of work, instead recognizing their capability to operate across multiple sectors. By amending the Tamil Nadu Factories Rules, 1950, the State signals confidence in women's autonomy while ensuring that safeguards remain in place.

Gradual Progress in Labour Reforms

Labour reforms generally evolve through sustained incremental changes rather than abrupt policy shifts. Tamil Nadu's recent proposal allowing women to work in nearly 20 categories of hazardous industrial operations reflects a continuing reform trajectory. The amendment permits women to take up roles earlier reserved exclusively for men, with exceptions only for pregnant women and adolescents. This demonstrates a shift from a protectionist, paternalistic approach to one emphasizing equality, capability, and safety-based regulation.

Expanding Employment Opportunities for Women

The State had earlier removed restrictions on women working night shifts in factories, signalling broader labour liberalization. Under the latest rule, women can be assigned night duties only with written consent, ensuring participation is voluntary and free from coercion. These reforms collectively dismantle stereotypes portraying women as inherently vulnerable or requiring constant state/organizational protection. The policy affirms women's right to choose their occupation and conditions of employment.

Broadening Scope of Occupations Open to Women

The new rules allow women to work in multiple industrial processes, including -

1. Electrolytic processes and glass manufacturing
2. Lead and manganese compound handling
3. Gas and petroleum generation activities
4. Blasting operations, tanning of raw hides and skins
5. Fireworks, match factories, and pesticide manufacturing
6. Chemical industries producing carcinogenic dye intermediates
7. Hazardous workplaces involving benzene, high noise, or vibration exposure.

Opening these sectors normalizes women's presence even in traditionally male-dominated industrial environments, promoting greater inclusivity in skill development and employment.

Beyond Legal Permission - Need for Supportive Workplace Infrastructure

Legal reforms must be supported through workplace-level changes, including -

Adequate sanitation facilities such as separate toilets and changing rooms
Medical check rooms and regular health assessments
Secure transportation and compulsory drop-home arrangements for night-shift workers
Safety gear designed specifically considering women's physiology

Effective implementation will require cooperation between industry management, monitoring by labour departments, and periodic inspections to prevent workplace exploitation or unsafe conditions.

Ensuring Freedom, Not Forced Participation

The objective is to enlarge opportunities, not to oblige women to take up hazardous roles. Women must retain full freedom to opt out without fear of losing wages, promotions, or employment. Equity is meaningful only when accompanied by autonomy, safety, dignity, and non-discrimination in the workplace.

Conclusion

The amendment signifies an essential move toward removing structural and legal barriers faced by women in industrial employment. However, the success of this reform depends on how effectively workplaces implement safety measures, consent systems, and support services. Tamil Nadu's initiative can become a model for inclusive and gender-equitable industrial growth if matched with practical sensitivity, adequate monitoring, and investment in supportive infrastructure.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/good-job-on-tamil-nadu-and-women-in-hazardous-jobs/article70194321.ece

2. Execution Petitions

GS2/Polity & Governance; Judiciary

Recent Supreme Court data reveals that over 8.82 lakh execution petitions are pending across district courts nationwide, 3.38 lakh new petitions were filed in just six months, calling the situation 'highly disappointing' and 'alarming'.

About the Execution Petitions

It is a legal application filed by a decree-holder — a person who has won a civil case — to enforce the court's judgment, like -

1. Recovering a monetary award;
2. Taking possession of property;
3. Enforcing an injunction or specific performance;

It is governed by Order XXI of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, which outlines the procedures for executing various types of decrees. It is supposed to be the final and most straightforward stage of litigation. The lower courts are responsible for processing these petitions, but they often become mired in procedural delays and resistance from judgment-debtors.

Why Does This Matters?

The pendency of execution petitions undermines public faith in the judiciary. For litigants, it means -

1. Continued financial and emotional strain.
2. No closure despite winning a case.
3. A perception that justice is inaccessible or ineffective.

Why Execution Petitions Are Stuck?

Delays Built Into Procedure - The Civil Procedure Code (CPC) mandates several steps — issuing notices, hearing objections, and providing multiple opportunities to the losing party — all of which stretch over months or even years.

Data from the NJDG - According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) -
An average civil suit takes 4.91 years to conclude.
An execution petition takes another 3.97 years.
Nearly 47.2% of pending execution cases were filed before 2020.

Top Reasons for Delay -
Counsel not available - **38.9%**
Stay by another court - **17%**
Awaiting documents - **12%**

Other Reasons for Delay

Low Priority - Execution petitions are often treated as administrative rather than judicial matters, leading to deprioritization.

Procedural Complexities - The process involves multiple steps—notice issuance, objections, attachment of property, and sometimes police assistance.

Resistance from Judgment Debtors - Many use legal tactics to delay compliance, including filing frivolous objections or appeals.

Lack of Monitoring - Until recently, there was minimal oversight on how long execution petitions remained pending.

Key Efforts in Reducing Execution Petitions

Supreme Court's Past Efforts - TIt has previously intervened to fix delays in execution proceedings. In 2021, a three-judge bench led by then CJI SA Bobde issued 14 mandatory directions to trial courts, including a six-month deadline for disposing of execution matters. In March 2025, while hearing a decades-old property dispute, the current bench directed all High Courts to collect and monitor district-level data on pending executions and ensure their disposal within six months. The Supreme Court has granted six more months to all High Courts to expedite disposal, and directed the Registrar General of the Karnataka High Court to explain non-compliance with earlier orders.

Legal Reforms - The Law Commission of India, in its 14th Report, had recommended reforms to streamline execution proceedings. It led to amendments in the CPC in 1976, allowing executing courts to adjudicate all related questions, including those of title, within the same proceedings — eliminating the need for separate suits.

Policy Recommendations - Dedicated execution benches in civil courts;

1. Digitization and tracking of execution cases;
2. Strict timelines and performance audits for judicial officers;

Conclusion

The backlog of execution petitions exposes a deep structural flaw in India's judicial machinery. Litigants often wait years to receive the fruits of justice, despite winning in court. The Supreme Court's strong words — describing this as a 'travesty of justice' — serve as a call for systemic reform, improved judicial data systems, and a renewed commitment to ensuring that justice delivered on paper translates into justice in practice.

SOURCE - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/pendency-courts-execution-petitions-supreme-court-data-10324597/

3. Sanctuary Status for the Forest Saranda – (IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 3 - ENVIRONMENT **TOPIC -** Conservation of biodiversity and wildlife (specifically sanctuaries and elephant reserves/corridors).

1. Ecological and Strategic Significance of Saranda

Geographical Identity - Located in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, Saranda is India's largest sal (Shorea robusta) forest, spanning over 82,000 hectares.

Biodiversity Hotspot - It is an ecological treasure, providing habitat for over 200 species of flora and fauna, including critical populations of elephants and leopards.

Critical Wildlife Corridor - Saranda is a vital component of the Singhbhum Elephant Reserve. It functions as a crucial migratory corridor connecting wildlife populations between Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

Ecosystem Services - The dense sal canopy and numerous water streams make it a massive natural carbon sink, essential for the ecological balance of India's eastern forest ecosystem.

The Resource Conflict - This immense ecological wealth coexists with vast deposits of high-quality iron ore, making the region a prime target for intensive industrial mining.

2. Rationale and History of the Sanctuary Proposal

Historical Context - The initial recommendation to declare Saranda a wildlife sanctuary dates back to 1968 (by the then-Bihar government).

Renewed Urgency - The proposal gained new momentum due to extensive reports of -

1. Mining-induced degradation of the forest canopy.
2. Significant loss and fragmentation of elephant habitat.

Expert Endorsement - The sanctuary proposal has been repeatedly recommended by top conservation bodies, including the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Judicial Intervention - Due to the state government's failure to act on recommendations, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) intervened in 2020. The NGT directed the Jharkhand government to finalize the sanctuary proposal under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Continued state inaction has now led environmentalists to escalate the case to the Supreme Court, which is currently examining the matter.

3. Core Conflict - Environmental vs. Economic Dimensions

Mining Impacts - Decades of mining have caused severe environmental damage -

Habitat Fragmentation - Mining leases and infrastructure (roads, facilities) have broken up contiguous forest patches, isolating wildlife.

Disruption of Corridors - Elephant migration routes have been severely disrupted, leading to increased human-animal conflict.

Water Pollution - The dumping of "red-mud waste" (iron ore tailings) has contaminated rivers and streams, harming aquatic life and local communities.

Policy Failure - The 2011 Saranda Action Plan, which was intended for rehabilitation and reforestation, has shown limited success precisely because new and existing mining leases continued to operate.

Legal Implications of Sanctuary Status - Declaring Saranda a sanctuary under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, would -

1. Provide the highest level of legal protection to the forest.
2. Impose strict regulations on industrial and mining activities within its boundaries, potentially halting new leases and restricting existing ones.
3. Create a legal framework to promote and fund community-based conservation efforts.

4. The Tribal Rights Dimension (Ho Community)

Constitutional Safeguards - Saranda is a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.

Affected Population - The region is predominantly inhabited by Adivasi communities, primarily the Ho tribe, who have a deep symbiotic relationship with the forest for their livelihood and cultural identity (dependence on Non-Timber Forest Produce - NTFP).

The PESA Act - The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) mandates that the local *gram sabhas* (village councils) must be consulted before any acquisition or alteration of land use.

The Dilemma -

Criticism - Critics argue that declaring a sanctuary without the free, prior, and informed consent of these gram sabhas would be a violation of the PESA Act and the Fifth Schedule, potentially alienating the very communities that protect the forest.

Counter-argument - Proponents suggest that a well-designed sanctuary status, centered on **eco-tourism** and sustainable forest-based livelihoods, could economically empower the tribal communities while ensuring biodiversity protection.

5. Way Forward - A Balanced and Inclusive Approach

Central Challenge - The Saranda issue is a classic example of the need to reconcile ecological integrity with developmental pressures and community rights.

Recommended Actions -

Prioritize Ecological Restoration - Implement scientific restoration programs for areas already degraded by mining.

Enforce Mining Accountability - Hold mining companies legally and financially responsible for environmental remediation ("polluter pays" principle).

Centralize Community Participation - Ensure that the Ho tribe and local gram sabhas are not just consulted but are central partners in the decision-making, design, and management of the protected area.

Constitutional Mandate - A successful resolution would uphold India's constitutional commitments under -

1. **Article 48A** (DPSP - State's duty to protect the environment and wildlife).
2. **Article 21** (Right to Life, which the Supreme Court has interpreted to include the Right to a Healthy Environment).

Final Goal - Granting sanctuary status through a participatory and sustainable process can make Saranda a model for inclusive conservation in India, demonstrating that ecological protection and tribal welfare can be mutually reinforcing.

Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251024/282389815710830?srsltid=AfmBOop4WPkx0pLcWeGcj1fu_pta8gWE89M9Kw8YiSYtzOjwj-pCH4Ex

4. Urban Governance

GS2/Governance

Urban India is buckling under the weight of rapid, unplanned growth, with dysfunctions ranging from clogged drains and toxic air to flooded streets and crumbling infrastructure — highlighting the urgent need for empowered city-level governance, often stifled by state control.

About India's Urban Governance

India's urban landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, shaped by rapid population growth, infrastructure expansion, and evolving governance frameworks. Currently, over 30% of the population resides in cities in India and contributes nearly 70% of India's GDP, and projections suggest that the population aims to rise to nearly 50% by 2050.

Governance Crisis in Urban India

Unfulfilled Promise of Constitutional Framework - The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) of 1992 granted constitutional status to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), envisioning them as self-governing institutions responsible for urban development and service delivery. The 12th Schedule of the Constitution assigned 18 functions to these bodies, including urban planning, sanitation, solid waste management, and poverty alleviation. However, a CAG Audit in 2024 exposes that on average, only 4 out of 18 functions are under their full control, with state governments and parastatal agencies frequently intervening in local governance.

Lack of Administrative Autonomy - ULBs often cannot recruit their own staff — personnel assessments are conducted by state authorities, leading to severe staff shortages. For example, the Shimla Municipal Corporation required 720 personnel but was sanctioned only 20 new posts. Across 18 states, one-third of all sanctioned positions remain vacant, crippling ULBs' capacity to perform essential functions.

Democratic Deficit and Institutional Neglect - The 74th Amendment mandated institutional mechanisms like State Election Commissions (SECs), District Planning Committees (DPCs), and Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) to ensure accountability and coordinated planning. But, the CAG audit in 2024 found widespread neglect of these provisions -

1. 61% (1,600 of 2,625) ULBs in 17 states lack an elected council.
2. Only five states appoint mayors through direct elections.
3. Just 10 states have constituted DPCs, and only three have prepared annual district plans. Of the nine states required to form MPCs, only three have functional committees.

Financial Distress and Fiscal Dependence - Many states have failed to regularly constitute State Finance Commissions (SFCs), delaying fiscal transfers and weakening local finances.

1. According to the CAG, across 15 states, ULBs faced an average shortfall of ₹1,606 crore due to partial release of recommended funds.

2. Furthermore, despite being empowered to collect property taxes, ULBs cannot fix or revise tax rates independently, with many taxes still pegged at outdated values.
3. It leads to a 42% expenditure–revenue gap across 11 states, forcing ULBs to allocate just 29% of their funds to development activities — far below what is needed for sustainable infrastructure and service delivery.

Major Efforts & Initiatives in Urban Governance

National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) - It was launched to create a digital backbone for urban India; It enables citizen-centric governance through platforms like -

1. **India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX)** for secure data sharing;
2. **SmartCode** for collaborative urban tech development;
3. **Geospatial Management Information System (GMIS)** for project monitoring;

Smart Cities Mission - Aims to develop 100 cities with smart infrastructure, e-governance, and sustainable urban planning; Focuses on integrated command centers, intelligent traffic systems, and digital citizen services;

AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) - Targets improvement in basic urban infrastructure - water supply, sewerage, stormwater drainage, and non-motorized transport; Encourages reforms in urban planning and municipal finance;

Compendium of Urban Reforms (NIUA) - It is the best practices in financial management, e-governance, and pro-poor reforms. Promotes peer learning through the PEARL initiative under JnNURM.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) - Focuses on sanitation, waste management, and behavioral change; Introduced star rating protocols for garbage-free cities;

Ease of Living Index & Municipal Performance Index - Benchmarks cities on governance, quality of life, and sustainability; Encourages data-driven decision-making and citizen feedback loops

Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) - Tracks municipal performance and governance quality across cities.

Strengthening Urban Governance in India - Pathways to Reform

Administrative Autonomy - ULBs need to have full control over staff recruitment and management.

Democratic Strengthening - State governments must ensure regular municipal elections through empowered SECs.

Functional DPCs and MPCs - These bodies should be operationalized for integrated regional planning.

Fiscal Empowerment - SFCs should be constituted and implemented on time, ensuring predictable fiscal transfers.

Local Tax Reforms - Grant ULBs authority to assess and revise local taxes, improving revenue generation.

Conclusion

India's urban future depends on revitalizing its Urban Local Bodies. Without real autonomy, both administrative and fiscal, cities will continue to struggle under weak governance and inadequate planning. Empowering ULBs through the faithful implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment is not merely a constitutional mandate — it is a developmental necessity. Through strong, accountable, and financially independent local institutions can India's cities reclaim their promise as vibrant, productive, and livable spaces.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/india-s-urban-crisis-deepens-as-states-choke-city-level-governance-125102200921_1.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.10.2025

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1. The mirage of port-led development in Great Nicobar – (TH) -1

2. The other massive pendency in Indian courts –(IE) -2

1. The mirage of port-led development in Great Nicobar

General Studies 3 - Economy **Topic -** Infrastructure- Investment models in infrastructure.

1. Flawed Economic & Commercial Rationale

The project's fundamental economic assumptions are described as weak and untested.

Faulty Premise of Automatic Traffic - The core argument—that building large-scale port capacity will automatically attract shipping traffic—is misleading.

Supporting Precedent - The Vallarpadam Port in Kerala is cited as a key example where infrastructure investment alone did not guarantee commercial success or divert significant traffic.

Absence of Success Factors - Transshipment hubs do not succeed merely on infrastructure. They require a complex ecosystem that Nicobar lacks -

Network Connectivity - Dense feeder links to smaller ports.

Cargo Base - A strong industrial or manufacturing hinterland.

Carrier Loyalty - Long-term commitments from major shipping lines.

Critical Structural Deficit (No Hinterland) - The port suffers from a fatal flaw - the complete absence of an industrial or logistics base. With no local industry to anchor trade, every container must be imported and subsequently exported, making sustained growth difficult.

Geographical & Cost Disadvantage - The port's remoteness (1,200 km from the mainland) makes it logistically challenging and expensive. All essential supplies, from containers to personnel, must be shipped in, increasing operational costs. This isolation would disrupt established shipping schedules, discouraging major carriers from making it a regular stop.

Unrealistic Volume Targets - The claim that Nicobar (with no committed lines) could handle volumes doubling that of Colombo (which handles less than 8 million TEUs) is presented as highly implausible and lacking credibility.

2. Misplaced Strategic & National Imperatives

The strategic and national connectivity arguments are portrayed as impractical justifications.

Questionable Military Justification - The argument that a commercial port is needed for strategic military value is weak.

Existing Capabilities - The Indian Navy's INS Baaz already performs the necessary surveillance and deterrence roles in the region effectively.

Unclear Link - The necessity of a massive *commercial* port to achieve military objectives remains unproven, especially as China has not posed a direct naval threat in that specific area.

Lack of Transparency - The text suggests that if strategic aims are the true goal, they should be pursued openly rather than being "disguised as economic development."

Impractical "Maritime Arc" - The idea that Galathea Bay, Vizhinjam (Kerala), and Vadhavan (Maharashtra) will form a seamless national maritime network is dismissed as disregarding practical reality.

Different Economic Zones - These ports operate in distinct maritime zones with different economic drivers.

Independent Logic - Vizhinjam (proximity to sea lanes) and Vadhavan (strong industrial hinterland) have their own independent commercial logic.

Galathea's Isolation - Galathea Bay is isolated, lacks a cargo base, and is unsuitable to act as a central hub for a national network.

3. Disregard for Global Logistics & Market Realities

The project fails to account for the entrenched nature of the global shipping industry.

Entrenched Shipping Routes - Global carriers are highly resistant to altering established routes. Hubs like **Colombo and Singapore** are preferred because they offer integrated logistics, operational efficiency, and significant rebates.

India's Cost Disadvantage - Indian ports, despite investment, generally impose higher port-calling and handling charges, reducing their global competitiveness.

Cautionary Example (Krishnapatnam) - The withdrawal of all container services from Krishnapatnam Port in 2024 (shifting to bulk cargo) highlights that carriers prioritize cost and network integration above all else.

Misleading Comparison (Vizhinjam) - Vizhinjam's initial success is not a reliable model for Galathea Bay. Its traffic is dominated by a single company, MSC, which is also seeking an ownership stake in the terminal. The absence of commitments from other major carriers to move from Colombo reveals a structural weakness - success depends on long-term partnerships, not just one investor-carrier.

Galathea's Core Limitation - Being geographically isolated and logistically undeveloped, it cannot replicate the performance or ecosystem of mainland ports.

4. Conclusion - A Case of Overreach

Ambition vs. Practicality - The project reflects a disconnect between India's maritime ambitions and the "economic and logistical realities" of the shipping industry.

Risk of Failure - A world-class port without sufficient users or traffic will not enhance India's influence. Instead, it risks becoming a "cautionary tale of misplaced ambition."

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-mirage-of-port-led-development-in-great-nicobar/article70197906.ece

2. The other massive pendency in Indian courts

General Studies 2 - Polity/Governance **Topic -** Judiciary - Issues, Challenges, and Reforms.

1. The Core Problem - Execution Petitions

The Supreme Court flagged the delay in execution petitions as a critical failure of the justice system.

Definition - An execution petition is a legal step taken *after* a court issues a judgment (a decree) to enforce that judgment—for example, to recover money or property.

The "Weakest Link" - The process, which should be a simple procedural step, often drags on for years, becoming a significant bottleneck.

Systemic Failure - The SC views this delay not as an isolated issue but as a "symptom of a deeper malaise," highlighting that winning a case has become meaningless if the judgment cannot be implemented.

Statistical Evidence - Nearly one-third of all civil cases in district courts are execution petitions, underscoring that enforcement, not just judgment, is a primary cause of judicial backlog.

2. The Magnitude of Judicial Pendency

The article outlines the staggering scale of the backlog across the Indian judiciary.

Total Caseload - Over 5.3 crore cases are pending across all Indian courts (as of 2025, per NJDG).

Distribution of Pendency -

1. **Subordinate Courts -** ~4.4 crore cases
2. **High Courts -** ~60 lakh cases
3. **Supreme Court -** ~80,000 cases

Delayed Timeline - The average disposal time for cases ranges from 5 to 15 years, with some lasting over two decades.

3. Identified Causes of Pendency

The text identifies five primary drivers behind the chronic delays in the judicial system.

1. Vacancies and Infrastructure Deficits -

Judicial Shortage - A deficit of nearly 5,000 judges against a sanctioned strength of over 25,000.
Poor Ratio - The judge-to-population ratio is approximately 21 per million, far below the 1987 Law Commission recommendation of 50 per million.
2. Procedural Complexity - The system is burdened by frequent and unnecessary adjournments. Outdated procedures and bureaucratic delays (e.g., serving notices) stretch case timelines.
3. Poor Enforcement Mechanisms - This directly relates to the execution petition crisis. Enforcement requires coordination with other state bodies (police, revenue authorities), which introduces bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and potential corruption.
4. Government as the Largest Litigant - Government departments and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are responsible for nearly 50% of all pending cases. This is often due to a policy of "mechanically" filing appeals without assessing their merit, choking the appellate courts.
5. Technological and Administrative Limitations - Despite the e-Courts Mission Mode Project, digital infrastructure and data integration are "uneven," particularly in lower courts, hindering efficiency gains.

4. Consequences of Pendency

The failure to deliver timely justice has wide-ranging negative impacts on society and the economy.
For Citizens - Causes immense emotional, financial, and psychological strain on litigants, forcing them to endure prolonged uncertainty.
For the Economy - Creates inefficiency in contract enforcement, a key metric that harmed India's rank in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (2020). This uncertainty deters both domestic and foreign investment.
For the Judiciary and Governance - It erodes the moral authority of the judiciary and damages public faith in the rule of law. It directly contradicts the constitutional promise of "justice—social, economic and political" enshrined in the Preamble.

5. Solutions and Way Forward

The article collates both existing initiatives and necessary future steps to tackle the crisis.
Existing Judicial/Policy Initiatives -
Specialized Courts - Creation of Fast-track courts, Family courts, and Commercial courts to handle specific types of cases.
ADR - Promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms like mediation, conciliation, and arbitration.
Infrastructure - The proposal for a National Judicial Infrastructure Authority (NJIA).
Technology - Adoption of virtual hearings, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommended Steps for Reform

Fill Vacancies - Prioritize recruitment, training, and retention of judges.
Specialized Enforcement - Establish "separate enforcement wings" in courts specifically to expedite execution petitions.
Institutional Reform - Implement the All India Judicial Service (AIJS) to ensure merit-based, uniform appointments.
Reduce Inflow - Actively promote ADR and Lok Adalats to resolve disputes *before* they enter the mainstream court system.
Accountability - Use the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) for data transparency and periodic judicial performance audits.
Empower Citizens - Promote public legal education to encourage early settlements.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/pendency-courts-execution-petitions-supreme-court-data-10324597/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 28.10.2025

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2. The quiet art of coexistence - What North Block taught us about life, work, and animals – (IE) - 3

1. A start for North-South carbon market cooperation – (TH)

General Studies 3 - Economy **Topic -** Issues relating to mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Effects of liberalization on the economy.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) and India have announced a new strategic agenda. A key part of this agenda is a plan to connect India's new carbon market with the EU's climate change policy. The goal is to allow Indian exporters to deduct the carbon price they pay in India from the carbon tax they would have to pay at the EU border. This is seen as a major step, but it faces significant hurdles.

Key Terms Explained

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) - This is a carbon tariff (a tax on imports) implemented by the EU. It targets carbon-intensive goods (like steel, aluminum, cement) entering the EU.

Purpose - To prevent "carbon leakage," where EU companies might move to countries with weaker environmental laws.

Mechanism - If an Indian steel exporter wants to sell in the EU, the EU will check the carbon emissions used to make that steel. The exporter must pay a tax on those emissions *unless* they can prove they *already paid a carbon price* in India.

Indian Carbon Market (ICM) / Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) - This is India's domestic "cap-and-trade" system.

Purpose - To put a price on carbon emissions and incentivize Indian industries to invest in cleaner technology.

Mechanism - The government sets a limit (a "cap") on emissions, and companies that emit less can sell their extra allowance (a "credit") to companies that emit more. This creates a market and a "carbon price."

EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) - This is the EU's own domestic carbon market. It is the world's oldest and largest, and its mechanisms are well-established. CBAM is designed to link directly to the price set by the EU ETS.

Absolute Cap vs. Intensity-Based - This is the most critical technical difference.

Absolute Cap (EU's model) - A hard limit on the *total amount* of emissions. For example, a factory is allowed 100 tonnes of CO2, period. This is what CBAM is based on.

Intensity-Based (India's current model) - A limit on emissions *per unit of production*. For example, a factory must reduce its emissions *per tonne of steel* produced. The factory could still *increase* its total emissions if it dramatically increases production. This model is not seen as equivalent by the EU.

North-South Cooperation - A term in international relations referring to cooperation between developed countries (the "Global North," like the EU) and developing countries (the "Global South," like India).

Linking India's Carbon Market (ICM) with the EU's CBAM

1. The Proposed Linkage & Potential Benefits

Core Agreement - As part of a new Strategic EU-India Agenda, the EU proposes to link its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) with the Indian Carbon Market (ICM).

Mechanism - In principle, the carbon price paid by an Indian company under the domestic ICM would be deducted from the CBAM charges imposed when exporting goods to the EU.

Primary Benefit (Exporters) - This linkage is intended to protect Indian exporters from "double taxation"—paying a carbon price twice, once in India (ICM) and again at the EU border (CBAM).
Secondary Benefit (Climate) - It could create a strong financial incentive for Indian industries to accelerate decarbonization and invest in cleaner production technologies to lower their domestic carbon costs.
Global Precedent - If successful, this would represent a breakthrough in "North-South" cooperation on carbon markets, setting a new model for climate and trade policy.

2. Challenge 1 - Structural & Institutional Gaps

Maturity Disparity - The EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) is a mature, 20-year-old system with robust, tested mechanisms. India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS/ICM) is new, evolving, and institutionally weak.
Fundamental Accounting Mismatch - This is the biggest hurdle. CBAM is designed for a "tonne-for-tonne" accounting of emissions.
EU ETS - Based on absolute emission caps (a hard limit on total emissions).
Indian ICM - Currently based on intensity-based improvements (reducing emissions *per unit* of product). This is not compatible with CBAM's rules.
Lack of Trust & Verification - India's system currently lacks the robust institutional equivalents of the EU's independent verification bodies, cap-setting processes, and transparent emission registries.
Consequence - The EU is unlikely to recognize Indian carbon credits as equivalent or credible for deduction unless India undertakes a complete structural redesign of the ICM to match EU compliance standards (i.e., move to an absolute cap).

3. Challenge 2 - Carbon Price Disparity & Economic Risk

The Massive Price Gap - There is a huge disparity between the carbon prices in both markets, which reflects their different stages of development.
EU ETS Price - Approximately €60 – €80 per tonne.
Indian ICM Price - Estimated at a much lower €5 – €10 per tonne.
Ineffective Deduction - With this price gap, the deduction at the EU border would be minimal. Indian exporters would pay the small ICM tax and then still pay the vast majority of the CBAM levy, effectively facing the "double burden" the linkage was meant to prevent.
Domestic Political Risk - If Indian industries feel they are being taxed twice (even if one tax is small), they may lobby the Indian government to dilute or weaken the domestic ICM rules, which would further undermine its environmental credibility and its standing with the EU.

4. Challenge 3 - Political & Strategic Contradictions

The WTO Stance - India, alongside other developing countries, has formally opposed CBAM at the WTO and other global forums, labeling it a unilateral and protectionist trade barrier.
The Political Contradiction - By agreeing to link the ICM with CBAM, India is simultaneously contesting and cooperating with the same mechanism. This linkage politically legitimizes a system that India is officially protesting.
Sovereignty Concerns - The linkage effectively gives Brussels a say in India's domestic policy. The EU will be the ultimate judge of whether India's carbon price is "sufficient" for deductions. This represents a potential infringement on India's policy autonomy.
Trade Instability - Indian exporters become vulnerable to domestic policy shifts. If industry pressure forces India to roll back its ICM rules, exporters would immediately lose their (potential) deductions and face the full, uncapped CBAM levies at the EU border.

5. Conclusion & Way Forward

Symbolic vs. Real - The proposed linkage is a bold and significant symbolic step. However, it is hostage to major technical, financial, and political hurdles.

Mutual Action Required - For this "breakthrough" to yield tangible benefits, a two-sided effort is essential -

India's Role - Must undertake serious institutional reform to strengthen the ICM, ensure credible verification, and (most importantly) align its design with global standards (likely moving toward absolute caps).

EU's Role - Must provide technical support, clarity on equivalence, and potentially offer a transitional framework rather than a rigid, immediate pass/fail judgment.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-start-for-north-south-carbon-market-cooperation/article70209291.ece

2. The quiet art of coexistence - What North Block taught us about life, work, and animals – (IE)

General Studies 4 - Ethics **Topic -** Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration & Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction - The Human Soul of Bureaucracy

Core Premise - The article is a reflective memoir by an IRS (Indian Revenue Service) officer, narrating her emotional farewell to North Block, one of India's most iconic administrative buildings.

Central Theme - It humanizes the often-impersonal image of bureaucracy by exploring the institutional soul, memory, and emotional dimensions of administrative life.

Key Focus - The narrative moves beyond the building's architecture to capture its role as a living ecosystem where humans, nature, and institutional culture coexist.

2. Architectural and Institutional Significance

Historical Context - North Block was designed by Herbert Baker (as part of the larger Lutyens' Delhi plan) and was completed in 1931 during the British Raj.

The Nerve Centre - It serves as the functional core of India's executive decision-making, housing key ministries including -

1. Ministry of Finance
2. Ministry of Home Affairs
3. Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)
4. Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)

Symbol of Continuity - The building symbolizes administrative continuity and institutional resilience, having remained the seat of India's financial governance from the colonial era through independence.

Architectural Heritage - The sandstone structure, with its grand domes, vaulted corridors, and courtyards, is a physical embodiment of India's bureaucratic heritage and a key part of the Lutyens' conservation zone.

3. The Human Dimension of Bureaucracy

Challenging Stereotypes - The author's reflections counter the stereotype of a detached, "mechanical" bureaucracy, showing it is inhabited by real people with attachments and shared experiences.

The Daily Rhythm of Life - The article personifies the building's routine, highlighting the different moods of the bureaucratic day -

Mornings - Brisk, purposeful, and energetic.

Afternoons - Quieter, more introspective, and reflective.

Evenings - Relaxed, as the workday winds down.

Emotional Connection - It emphasizes that officers form a deep sense of belonging. Their desks, corridors, and colleagues become integral parts of their professional identity and memory.

Informal Institutional Culture - The article notes the evolution of an unwritten culture built on mutual respect, silent cooperation, and personal bonds. This informal culture is crucial for maintaining morale within the rigid, formal administrative framework.

4. Coexistence with Nature - A Metaphor for Harmony

A Striking Feature - A unique aspect of the narrative is the harmonious coexistence between officers and the animals (monkeys, cats, and dogs) that live within North Block.
Symbol of Mutual Understanding - This relationship was based on a mutual understanding, where each species respected the other's territory and rhythm.
Reflection of Indian Ethos - This living harmony is portrayed as a reflection of India's civilizational philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), which extends empathy to all living beings.
Metaphorical Significance - The animals' persistence and adaptability serve as a metaphor for -
Resilience and Inclusivity - The ability of the system to accommodate diverse elements.
Organic Governance - The interaction of multiple, independent parts.
Balance - The coexistence represents the crucial balance between administrative order (discipline) and spontaneity (humanity).

5. Institutional Memory and Emotional Heritage

Beyond Brick and Mortar - The author stresses that North Block is not just a physical space but a repository of institutional memory. It carries the legacy of countless decisions, debates, and reforms that have shaped India.
Emotional Heritage - For the officers who served there, the building evokes nostalgia and represents years of dedication, service, and shared struggles.
Transition and Change (Central Vista) - The author's farewell is contextualized by the Central Vista Redevelopment Project, which is moving ministries to modern complexes. This symbolizes the emotional challenge of transitioning from heritage spaces that hold deep administrative identity.
Value of Continuity - The article underscores the importance of retaining the institutional *culture*, *ethics*, and *spirit* during such physical transitions to maintain administrative cohesion and morale.

6. Modernisation and Digital Transformation

The Old vs. The New - The narrative subtly contrasts the traditional "file rhythm" of paper-based bureaucracy with the new "digital rhythm" of modern systems.
Efficiency vs. The Human Touch - While acknowledging that technology brings efficiency and transparency, the author notes that the soul of bureaucracy lies in its human touch.
The "Indigitizable" Element - Relationships, shared experiences, mentorship, and informal networks that ensure smooth functioning cannot be fully digitized.
Humane Administrative Reform - The piece implies that administrative reforms must be humane, inclusive, and mindful of legacy systems and culture to ensure smooth adaptation by the personnel.

7. Ethical and Emotional Insights in Governance

The article provides several insights that are directly relevant to public administration ethics -
Empathy and Compassion - The care shown by officers for both animals and colleagues highlights the humane side of bureaucracy, a core civil service value.
Emotional Intelligence (EI) - It showcases EI in action - officers understanding institutional emotions, adapting to routines, and maintaining composure and patience under pressure.
Duty and Belonging - The deep sense of pride and belonging to the workplace is shown to reinforce commitment, accountability, and dedication to public service.
Balance of Formality and Humanity - It demonstrates that even within strict hierarchies, maintaining kindness, patience, and mutual respect is essential for strengthening institutional integrity.
Alignment with Foundational Values - These principles directly align with the Civil Services Values outlined in the Second ARC Report and the Code of Ethics (DoPT, 2014), such as integrity, compassion, and dedication.

8. Conclusion - Preserving the "Heart" of Governance

A Tribute - "Goodbye, North Block" is ultimately a tribute to the "soul" of India's civil service.

The Core of Governance - It serves as a powerful reminder that governance is not merely about laws, data, and efficiency, but about human connections, empathy, and collective memory.

The Way Forward - As India's administration modernizes and relocates, the article concludes that preserving the institutional culture and ethical spirit embodied by North Block is essential for ensuring the "heart" of governance remains as strong as its new structures.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/north-block-rashtrapati-bhavan-kartavya-path-kartavya-bhavan-10329339/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 29.10.2025

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1. Relief, rehabilitation - On India's east coast and cyclones

General Studies 3 - Disaster Management **Topic -** Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation, and Response.

Cyclone Preparedness and Livelihood Challenges on India's Eastern Coast

1. Introduction - The Bay of Bengal Cyclone Dynamic

Core Context - The Bay of Bengal is notoriously known for spawning devastating cyclones, making India's eastern coastline highly vulnerable.

The Central Paradox - While India has achieved remarkable success in improving preparedness and early warning systems over the last two decades (largely preventing mass casualties), the socio-economic and livelihood impacts from these disasters remain a severe and persistent challenge.

Peak Vulnerability - The period of October and November is historically the most active and dangerous cyclone season for this region.

2. Historical Context and Cyclone Patterns

Peak Season - A clear pattern shows that 9 out of 12 major cyclones recorded between the 18th and 20th centuries occurred during October and November.

Benchmark Disasters - The high fatality rates of past cyclones serve as a stark reminder of the region's vulnerability -

1977 Severe Cyclone - Struck near Nizampatnam, Andhra Pradesh, causing approximately 10,000 fatalities.

1999 Super Cyclone - Made landfall near Paradip, Odisha, also resulting in approximately 10,000 fatalities.

3. Case Study - Cyclone Montha (October 2025)

Recent Event - A severe cyclonic storm that intensified on October 27–28, 2025.

Impact Regions - Affected Odisha, north coastal Andhra Pradesh, and adjoining areas of Tamil Nadu.

Specifically Affected Districts -

Andhra Pradesh - Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli, Srikakulam.

Odisha - Ganjam, Gajapati.

Evacuations - Demonstrated the current preparedness model, with 10,000+ people shifted from low-lying areas in Kakinada and Konaseema (Andhra Pradesh).

4. Improved Disaster Preparedness (The Success Story)

Systemic Improvement - Over the last two decades, Union and State governments have significantly enhanced early-warning systems and response mechanisms.

Tangible Result - The mass casualty events seen in 1977 and 1999 have been largely prevented.

State-Level Actions (Example - Cyclone Montha) -

Odisha - Deployed NDRF, issued a "Red Alert" for southern districts, and evacuated vulnerable zones.

Andhra Pradesh - Activated coastal monitoring, established shelter and relief camps, and ensured emergency food and power supplies.

5. The Persistent Challenge - Socio-Economic Impacts

Even with improved preparedness, the economic and livelihood losses continue to be severe and represent the next frontier of disaster management.

Property Loss - Widespread damage to public infrastructure (roads, power lines, housing) and private property.
Livelihood Impact - The most severe losses are borne by the most vulnerable economic groups - Fisherfolk (loss of boats, nets, and fishing days).
Farmers (crop inundation, soil salinity).
Daily-wage earners (loss of work).
Animal Losses - A critical but often under-reported economic blow.
Example - Cyclone Gaja (2018) caused massive losses of cattle, draught animals, and poultry in Nagapattinam and Thanjavur, devastating the local agrarian economy.

6. Mitigation Measures and Future Challenges

Measures Already Taken (Structural) -
Construction of multi-purpose cyclone shelters.
Building of embankments and coastal buffers.
Promotion of cyclone-resilient housing.
Measures Already Taken (Non-Structural) -
Advanced forecasting systems.
Community training and capacity building.
Regular mock drills.
The Key Challenge Ahead - The primary gap is no longer just in preparedness, but in ensuring on-ground efficiency during the relief and rehabilitation phases.
Role of Leadership - Political leaders must ensure that post-disaster support is impartial, inclusive, and reaches all affected communities without bias.

7. Conclusion - Redefining Resilience

The Paradigm Shift - India's cyclone management has successfully evolved, turning once-fatal storms into more manageable crises.
Beyond Survival - Resilience must be redefined to extend beyond mere survival.
The New Focus - The goal must now be to build robust systems for -
Restoring livelihoods quickly.
Protecting animal welfare (livestock).
Rebuilding community confidence and self-sufficiency.
Sustained Investment - Protecting vulnerable coastal populations requires sustained investment in local capacity building and long-term climate adaptation strategies.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/relief-rehabilitation-on-indias-east-coast-and-cyclones/article70212647.ece

2. Trump's visit to Asia - Flux in US-China ties has consequences for Asian nations

General Studies 2 - International Relation **Topic -** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Navigating the "Chimerica" Challenge - India's Foreign Policy

1. Introduction - The New Great Game

The relationship between the United States and China, once defined by deep economic interdependence ("Chimerica"), has fractured. This synergy, where China's manufacturing power complemented America's consumption-driven economy and shaped the global order for three decades, is now broken. It has been replaced by a "competitive coexistence" characterized by systemic rivalry, technology competition, and security anxieties. This recalibration is reshaping the global order, forcing Asian nations like India to navigate a complex geopolitical environment and adopt a proactive, pragmatic, and regionally anchored foreign policy.

2. The Flux in US-China Relations

The Fracture - The previous US-China synergy has dissolved due to growing distrust, competition over technology, and mutual security concerns.

US Policy Shift - The US now officially views China as a "systemic rival" rather than a partner.

US Policy Continuity - This adversarial stance has remained consistent across recent administrations, from President Trump's trade wars and tariffs to the Biden administration's technology restrictions and strengthening of security alliances.

China's Response - Under Xi Jinping, China has sought to strengthen its regional influence through economic diplomacy, notably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Security Initiative.

Current State (2025) - The current dynamic is one of "competitive coexistence," marked by the US (under Trump) re-engaging allies like Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN, while simultaneously holding a limited détente with China.

3. Implications for Asia

Strategic Insecurity - Asian countries, especially middle powers, remain anxious about the oscillating US approach (swinging between confrontation and accommodation with China).

The Core Dilemma - Many regional economies are caught in a difficult position, dependent on both the US security umbrella and Chinese trade networks.

Indo-Pacific as the Theatre - The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the principal theatre for this rivalry.

US Counter-balancing - Washington's intent to counterbalance Beijing is illustrated by institutions like the QUAD, AUKUS, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

A Key Vulnerability - The long-term sustainability of these US-led coalitions is questionable, as it depends on consistency in US policy, which has historically fluctuated with political changes in Washington.

4. India's Strategic Dilemma and Opportunity

A Dual-Edged Sword - The shifting US-China relationship presents both significant risks and new opportunities for India.

The Risk (Security Imperative) - As China deepens its assertiveness across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and in South Asia, India's cooperation with the US and its allies becomes strategically vital.

The Dilemma (Autonomy) - India must maintain its foreign policy autonomy and avoid being drawn into a zero-sum confrontation that would limit its flexibility and policy options.

The Opportunity (Proactive Regionalism) - India must move beyond reactive diplomacy and adopt a "proactive regionalism" by -

1. Engaging ASEAN, Africa, and the Indian Ocean littorals to shape the surrounding balance of power.
2. Strengthening its domestic economic resilience.
3. Expanding defence partnerships.
4. Investing in critical technology alliances.

5. Policy Recommendations for India

Strategic Balancing - Maintain close coordination with the US and QUAD members while simultaneously engaging in calibrated dialogue with China to prevent escalation.

Economic Diplomacy - Deepen participation in regional trade and technology frameworks to offset China's economic influence.

Maritime Strategy - Strengthen India's presence in the Indian Ocean and collaborate with ASEAN for a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

Autonomous Foreign Policy - Uphold India's tradition of strategic autonomy by balancing ties with multiple poles of power, including the EU, Japan, and Russia.

Institutional Capacity - Build robust think tanks and policy institutions designed to anticipate shifts in great-power politics rather than merely respond to them.

6. Way Forward

The Core Task - For India, the primary challenge is to navigate this geopolitical flux without compromising its sovereignty or regional leadership.

India's Role - As Asia becomes the principal stage for great-power competition, India's ability to combine prudence with initiative will determine its role in shaping the 21st-century balance of power.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-trumps-visit-to-asia-flux-in-us-china-ties-has-consequences-for-asian-nations-10332669/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 30.10.2025

Index

1. Federalism and funds - On Kerala and PM SHRI – (TH) -1

2. Foreign Capital and the Indian Banking Sector – (IE) -2

1. Federalism and funds - On Kerala and PM SHRI

General Studies 2 - Polity/Governance **Topic -** Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

1. Introduction - The Federal Fault-line in Education

Core Issue - Kerala's unexpected decision to initially join the PM SHRI (Prime Minister Schools for Rising India) scheme, which is aligned with the NEP-2020, has ignited a significant political and administrative debate.

Central Conflict - The controversy highlights the delicate balance States must strike between accessing necessary central funds and preserving their federal autonomy in education policy.

Underlying Tension - This episode exposes the deep-rooted friction in India's Centre-State governance framework, particularly concerning education, a subject on the Concurrent List.

The Contradiction - The move was surprising because Kerala, along with Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, has been a vocal critic of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, citing ideological and federal concerns.

2. Background - Kerala's Controversial Decision

The Scheme - The PM SHRI scheme aims to upgrade and brand 14,500 schools across India as "model institutions" that will showcase the NEP-2020 vision.

The Surprise - Kerala's decision to join was shocking because it had consistently opposed the NEP-2020 on several grounds -

Encroachment on Federalism - Viewing the NEP as a centralizing policy that encroaches on State powers.

Ideological Concerns - Voicing fears that the policy could introduce communal bias and anti-scientific content into the curriculum.

3. Political & Administrative Controversy

Financial Coercion - Kerala's decision was reportedly driven by funding pressure. The Centre had allegedly withheld central funds due under the Samagra Shiksha (SS) scheme, linking their release to the adoption of NEP-linked schemes.

Internal Government Friction - The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Centre was signed without Cabinet approval, causing a significant dispute within the ruling LDF government.

Political Fallout - The CPI (a key coalition partner) demanded the immediate withdrawal of the decision. The CPI(M) defended the move as a pragmatic choice, necessary to secure funds for teacher salary arrears that were blocked by the Centre.

Current Status (Temporary Resolution) -

1. The implementation of PM SHRI in Kerala is currently frozen.
2. A Cabinet subcommittee has been formed to review the MoU and its implications.
3. Kerala will formally inform the Centre of this suspension pending the subcommittee's report.

4. Broader Context - Tamil Nadu's Legal Challenge

A Parallel Struggle - This situation mirrors the actions of Tamil Nadu, which also faced the withholding of Samagra Shiksha (SS) funds for refusing to adopt the PM SHRI scheme.

Different Response - Unlike Kerala's internal review, Tamil Nadu escalated the issue by approaching the Supreme Court, challenging the Centre's right to link statutory funds to a conditional scheme.

5. Kerala's Educational Prowess (The Irony)

Exceeding Benchmarks - The core irony is that Kerala's existing state education system already outperforms many of the key benchmarks set by the NEP-2020.
Key Strengths - The state boasts near-universal Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), high student retention rates, superior learning outcomes, and strong infrastructure, including widespread digital access.
A "Cosmetic Exercise" - Consequently, for Kerala, joining PM SHRI is seen as a purely cosmetic exercise—merely "rebranding" its existing high-performing schools rather than undertaking any genuine reform.

6. Core Issue - Federalism and Conditional Funding

Erosion of Cooperative Federalism - The Centre's tactic of withholding legitimate funds (like those for Samagra Shiksha) to compel States to adopt a central scheme (PM SHRI) is seen as a direct assault on the principles of cooperative federalism.
Forced Compliance - PM SHRI implementation mandates compliance with specific NEP-2020 features, including the controversial "Indian Knowledge Systems," which critics fear is a vehicle for pseudoscience.
Autonomy as a Bargaining Chip - This approach effectively reduces state autonomy to a bargaining chip for accessing central funds, which rightfully belong to the states as part of the financial architecture.
Role of Judiciary - The article emphasizes that the judiciary, as the guardian of India's federal structure, must intervene to ensure this power dynamic is not abused.

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

A Case Study in Tension - Kerala's brief alignment and subsequent pause on the PM SHRI scheme perfectly encapsulates the tension between state autonomy and central conditionalities in national education policy.
Responsibility of the Centre - The Centre must respect federal principles and refrain from using financial leverage to force ideological or policy alignment.
Legal Recourse for States - States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu should explore legal avenues (following Tamil Nadu's lead) to safeguard their rightful share of education funds *without* having to compromise their policy independence or the scientific integrity of their curriculum.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/federalism-and-funds-on-kerala-and-pm-shri/article70217227.ece

2. Foreign Capital and the Indian Banking Sector

General Studies 3 - Economy **Topic -** Financial Sector and Banking Reforms - (Specifically, issues of capital adequacy, competition, and FDI)

1. Introduction - The Need for Foreign Capital

Critical Driver of Growth - Foreign capital has long been a critical driver for emerging economies, and India is no exception.
Context of Liberalization - As India steadily liberalizes its financial sector, foreign investment in banks has become a vital component of its economic strategy.
Core Objectives - This investment is crucial for strengthening capital adequacy (meeting regulatory norms), fostering healthy competition, and deepening financial inclusion.

2. Evolution of Foreign Investment in Indian Banking

Pre-1991 (Regulated Era) - The banking sector was tightly regulated and dominated by Public Sector Banks (PSBs) following the nationalizations of 1969 and 1980. There was little to no foreign presence.
Post-1991 (Liberalization) - The economic reforms of 1991 opened up the financial services sector to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) permitted foreign banks to operate through branches and subsidiaries, subject to specific licensing norms.
Recent Trends - Over the last two decades, foreign investors have increasingly infused capital into **private sector banks** through strategic stakes, portfolio investments, and partnerships. This reflects growing global confidence in India's banking growth story.

3. Advantages of Foreign Capital

Strengthens Capital Base - Foreign capital supplements domestic resources, which is essential for Indian banks (especially private ones) to meet stringent Basel III capital adequacy norms and expand their credit portfolios. This also reduces the fiscal pressure on the government, which would otherwise need to fund PSB recapitalization.
Technology & Expertise Transfer - International banks and investors bring advanced technology, sophisticated risk management practices, global banking expertise, and new product innovations, thereby modernizing India's entire financial ecosystem.
Supports Financial Inclusion - Aligns with India's policy goals (like the Jan Dhan Yojana) by providing banks with the capital needed to expand their outreach, invest in digital banking infrastructure, and offer innovative products to unbanked and underbanked populations.
Global Integration - This investment links the Indian banking sector to global capital markets, improving its overall competitiveness and creating new opportunities for cross-border financial synergies.

4. Recent Trends - Rising Investments in India

Strong Market Appeal - Recent years have seen significant interest from global financial giants, highlighting India's appeal as one of the fastest-growing banking markets in the world.
Key Investors -
Singaporean Funds - GIC, Temasek, and Fullerton have invested billions in top-tier private banks like HDFC, Kotak Mahindra, and Axis Bank.
Sovereign Wealth & Pension Funds - Canadian funds (CPPIB, CDPQ) and sovereign wealth funds from Abu Dhabi and Qatar have acquired long-term stakes.
US Private Equity - Firms such as Warburg Pincus, Carlyle, and Blackstone have infused significant capital into both Indian banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
European Players - Zurich Insurance and HSBC have also strengthened their presence and investments.

5. Challenges and Risks of Foreign Investments

Regulatory Concerns & National Interest - The RBI imposes caps on foreign ownership (74% in private banks, 20% in PSU banks) to ensure a balance between attracting capital and safeguarding national interests and financial stability.
Dependence on Global Markets - Excessive reliance on foreign capital can expose the Indian banking sector to global shocks. This includes volatility from international interest rate changes, currency fluctuations, or sudden geopolitical tensions.
Profit Repatriation - A large foreign shareholding can lead to significant profit repatriation (dividends) flowing out of the country, potentially reducing the funds available for domestic reinvestment and creating a tension between development priorities and investor interests.
Concentration of Ownership - Heavy dependence on a few large sovereign wealth or pension funds could reduce the diversity of stakeholders. This makes banks vulnerable if one or two major investors decide on a sudden exit, which could destabilize the bank.
Creating a Level Playing Field - Public Sector Banks (PSBs), often burdened with legacy Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and lower operational autonomy, may find it difficult to compete with agile, foreign-capital-backed private banks.

6. Policy Reforms Needed to Optimize Investments

Balanced Liberalization - India must maintain its cautious and balanced regulatory framework—continuing liberalization while implementing safeguards to prevent destabilizing ownership patterns.
Strengthening Domestic Savings - Policies must also focus on encouraging greater domestic capital infusion (from retail and institutional investors) into banks to reduce overdependence on foreign funds.
Channelizing Investment - Foreign investments should be strategically channeled into high-priority areas like fintech, AI-driven banking, and sustainable (Green) finance to accelerate modernization.
Level Support for PSBs - To ensure healthy competition, it is vital to continue recapitalization and governance reforms in Public Sector Banks, making them more competitive.

7. Way Forward - An Opportunity and a Responsibility

A Dual View - Foreign capital in Indian banks represents both a significant opportunity for growth and a serious responsibility for regulators.

Positive Impact - It has been a key enabler in making the Indian banking sector more globally competitive, capital-strong, and technologically advanced.

Regulatory Vigilance - Regulators must remain vigilant to protect financial sovereignty, maintain systemic stability, and ensure that the benefits of this foreign capital contribute to inclusive growth for the entire economy.

Source - OCTOBER 30TH INDIAN EXPRESS

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 31.10.2025

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1. Out of the fortress - On protecting India 's tigers- (TH) **-1**

2. Don't Rely on The Heavens – (IE) **-2**

1. Out of the fortress - On protecting India 's tigers- (TH)

General Studies 3 – Environment **Topic -** environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment. Wildlife conservation and related policies (e.g., Project Tiger).

A New Conservation Model ("Out of the Fortress")

1. Introduction - A Progressive Shift in Conservation

Core Concept - The new policy from the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry marks a progressive shift in India's conservation strategy, moving away from an exclusionary "fortress" model.

Redefining Conservation - It redefines conservation as a "social contract" between people and nature, rather than a system that pits them against each other.

Upholding Legal Rights - The policy strongly reaffirms the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, emphasizing that forest dwellers are stakeholders, not trespassers.

Central Theme - The new approach promotes coexistence over exclusion, seeking to align ecological protection with social justice and active community participation.

2. Key Features - People and Tigers as Partners

Reversing the 2024 NTCA Directive - The policy acts as a corrective, reversing a 2024 National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) directive that had sought mass village relocations from tiger habitats.

Promoting Co-habitation - It actively promotes new research and pilot projects aimed at creating sustainable models for the co-habitation of humans and tigers.

Collaborative Model - This redefines conservation as a collaborative and resilient model, rather than one that relies on the forced separation of humans and wildlife.

3. Rights and Redress Mechanisms

The new framework is built on a strong foundation of legal safeguards to protect tribal and forest-dwelling communities -

Primacy of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 - The policy mandates that no forest dwellers can be relocated until the procedures laid out in the FRA are legally completed and their rights are settled. This prevents forced relocations.

Protection via SC/ST Act - It strategically invokes the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act as a legal shield. This measure aims to safeguard communities against unlawful evictions and holds authorities accountable for violations.

Three-Tier Grievance Redress System - A new three-tier system is proposed to address grievances, ensuring that communities have a legal safety net and a mechanism for participation—elements often missing in previous relocation programs.

4. The Central Dilemma - Balancing Conservation and Development

Diverse Community Aspirations - The policy acknowledges that forest communities are not uniform. Some desire access to modern education and healthcare, while others wish to preserve their traditional lifestyles.

The Conservationist Viewpoint - This must be balanced against the established ecological science, which emphasizes that human-free core zones are vital for the long-term protection and breeding of tigers.

Balancing Act - The national mission must, therefore, maintain scientific rigor in conservation while simultaneously respecting and upholding community rights.

5. Implementation Challenges Ahead

Local Complexity vs. Central Control - Top-level ministries in Delhi cannot effectively manage the complex local realities of conservation. The policy's success will depend on creating "fine-grained local mechanisms" for implementation.

Inter-Departmental Friction - The Forest Departments and the Environment Ministry still dominate conservation policy. Resistance is expected from this "conservation establishment," which may fear that a rights-based approach will -

1. Slow down the consolidation of habitats.
2. Increase the administrative burden.

Inconsistent FRA Implementation - States have shown significant variation in their willingness and ability to implement the Forest Rights Act, posing a major hurdle to the policy's uniform application.

6. The "Middle Path" (The Stated Goal)

A Dual Mandate - The policy aims for a balanced "middle path" that protects both ecology and human rights.

A Critical Warning - It cautions that transitioning from the fortress model must not lead to unchecked human activity within critical core tiger zones.

The Ideal Framework - The ultimate goal is to create a coexistence framework that is -

1. **Socially Legitimate -** (Respected and supported by local communities).
2. **Ecologically Sound -** (Based on scientific evidence for tiger protection).
3. **Regionally Adaptive -** (Flexible enough to suit different local contexts).

7. Conclusion - A Future of Coexistence

Ecology and Dignity - India's conservation journey must find a way to balance ecological integrity with human dignity.

A Corrective Step - This new framework, with its focus on rights-based conservation and community-led coexistence, is a significant corrective to the failures of the fortress model.

Conditions for Success - Its success is not guaranteed. It depends entirely on effective local implementation, strict scientific oversight, and genuine cooperation from State governments.

Ultimate Vision - The policy aims for a sustainable future where both tigers and tribal communities can thrive as equal partners.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/out-of-the-fortress-on-protecting-indias-tigers/article70221403.ece

2. Don't Rely on The Heavens – (IE)

General Studies 3 - Environment **Topic -** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Air Pollution and the Fallacy of Artificial Rain

1. Introduction - A Crisis and a "Desperate Measure"

Core Context - The recurring and severe menace of air pollution in India, particularly in the National Capital Region (NCR), has reached critical levels.

Policy Consideration - This crisis has forced policymakers to consider desperate, short-term measures, including artificial rain (cloud seeding).

Article's Stance - The idea of inducing rainfall to "wash away" particulate matter, while seemingly innovative, is a flawed approach that raises serious concerns about its sustainability, feasibility, and long-term effectiveness.

2. Understanding Artificial Rain (Cloud Seeding)

The Mechanism - Artificial rain is a weather modification technique. It involves dispersing substances like silver iodide, potassium iodide, or dry ice into existing clouds to act as condensation nuclei and induce precipitation.

Global Use - This technique has been employed in countries like China and the UAE, primarily to augment rainfall in arid regions.

Critical Dependency - The success of cloud seeding is not guaranteed. It depends heavily on specific meteorological conditions, most importantly the presence of moisture-bearing clouds.

The Indian Feasibility Challenge - In India, the peak pollution season (winter) often coincides with dry weather conditions and a lack of suitable clouds. Limited experiments by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) and the IMD in Maharashtra and Karnataka have yielded inconsistent outcomes—ranging from negligible rainfall to only moderate success.

Conclusion on Efficacy - This high dependency on variable weather and inconsistent results underscores that cloud seeding cannot be a reliable or scalable solution for air pollution.

3. Why Artificial Rain is a Short-Sighted Measure

Temporary Relief - Even if artificial rain is successfully induced, the relief it provides from air pollution is **purely temporary**. Rain *can* help settle particulate matter (PM 2.5, PM 10) and reduce high Air Quality Index (AQI) levels for a few days.

The Rebound Effect - Pollution levels rebound very quickly once the primary emission sources—such as vehicles, construction, stubble burning, and industries—resume their activity.

High Cost & Diversion - The process involves high logistical and financial costs, requiring aircraft or drones for seeding. This diverts crucial funds, attention, and resources away from sustainable, long-term interventions.

4. The Real Solution - Structural and Policy Reforms

The article argues that India's pollution crisis demands systematic reforms, not unpredictable weather interventions.

1. Emission Control - Strengthen the enforcement of existing emission norms under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Accelerate the transition to cleaner fuels (e.g., CNG, Hydrogen) and electric mobility.

2. Stubble Management - Move beyond punitive actions and provide viable economic incentives and technological alternatives (e.g., ex-situ/in-situ management) for farmers to stop crop residue burning.

3. Sustainable Urban Planning - Increase the green cover (urban forests) to act as natural carbon sinks. Improve municipal solid waste management to prevent open waste burning. Create buffer zones to separate industrial and residential areas.

4. Public Awareness - Promote behavioral changes, such as reduced reliance on personal vehicles and the adoption of energy-efficient appliances.

5. Technological and Governance Solutions

Data-Driven Policy - Invest in real-time air quality monitoring systems, predictive modelling, and data-driven urban policies.

Improved Coordination - Use data to enhance accountability and coordination among Central, State, and local authorities (e.g., the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR).

Economic Instruments - Aggressively promote renewable energy to reduce dependence on coal-fired power plants. Strictly enforce pollution taxes ("polluter pays" principle) on industries.

6. Way Forward - Rely on Science, Not "The Heavens"

Rejecting Quick Fixes - The reliance on concepts like artificial rain reflects a dangerous tendency to seek "quick fixes" while avoiding the difficult task of addressing systemic flaws.

The Real Path - India must "rely on the heavens" but instead rely on science, strong governance, and public participation to secure clean air.

Lasting Solution - The only viable path toward long-term environmental health and resilience lies in sustainable urban development, strict regulatory enforcement, and regional cooperation (to manage trans-boundary pollution).

Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251031/281844354878393?srsltid=AfmBOop8f9oBP55X0vZW89gz28Zy4gy5YkgsccGspo8k8eOUWLX0JNHN

Editorial of the Day – 01.12.2025

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1. **India needs research pipelines(TH)** -1
2. **GDP growth is robust; GST cuts and US tariffs will shape momentum(IE)** -3

1. India needs research pipelines (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.(Indigenization of technology and developing new technology)

Introduction

India faces a critical policy challenge- it cannot sustain its economic growth ambitions relying solely on public grants. History shows that economies successfully converting science into industry share a specific discipline—they maintain stable, long-term partnerships where company investments are linked to university strengths. To replicate this, India must shift private research spending from episodic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) gestures to a predictable innovation pipeline that funds real lab time, supports doctoral cohorts, and secures pilot production lines.

Global Models of Corporate–Campus Research

Successful global economies demonstrate specific traits in R&D investment that India can emulate-

Industrial-Scale Budgets- Leading global technology firms invest amounts rivalling national R&D budgets. *Example-* In 2024, Meta allocated ~$44 billion (nearly 1/3rd of revenue). Giants like Alphabet, Amazon, and Microsoft maintain similar multi-billion dollar programs.

High Research Intensity- U.S. companies demonstrate high R&D-to-sales ratios. In 2022, U.S. firms booked ~$692 billion in domestic R&D against $14 trillion in net sales (approx. 5% ratio).

China's High-Intensity Model- Huawei**-** Reported 179.7 billion yuan in R&D in 2024 (20.8% of revenue), with over 50% of the workforce in R&D.

BYD- Invested 54.2 billion yuan with an R&D intensity of nearly 7%.

Policy Instruments for Partnerships

USA (NSF)- The National Science Foundation's *Industry–University Cooperative Research Centres* pool company contributions for pre-competitive university research.

Consortia- The *Semiconductor Research Corporation* supports multi-university consortia to train talent and solve industry-aligned problems.

Key Shared Traits- Successful models utilize joint centres, shared production lines, long-horizon consortia, and open talent pathways.

India's Position and Emerging Leaders

Current National Baseline- India's Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD) is approximately 0.65% of GDP. Private enterprises contribute only about two-fifths (40%), significantly lower than the firm share in advanced economies.

Emerging Indian Corporate Leaders (FY24 Data)-DR. Reddy's- Invested ₹22.9 billion (8.2% of sales).Tata Motors- Invested ₹29,398 crore (6.7% intensity).Sun Pharma- Spent 6.7% of global revenue on R&D. Bharat Electronics (BEL)- Dedicated 6.24% of turnover .Reliance Industries- Recorded over ₹4,100 crore in expenditure (FY24-25).

Existing Effective Models

IIT Madras Research Park- Hosts 200+ companies adjacent to labs and student teams.

IDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence)- Links start-ups and research labs for defence innovation.

India Semiconductor Mission- Ties investments, skills, and academia (e.g., Micron ATMP project in Sanand).

Roadmap for Scaling Research–Industry Linkages

To build self-reliance with global openness, India requires a structured approach to link Private R&D with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)-

Set Sector-Wise R&D Expectations- Establish three-year R&D-to-sales ratios for strategic sectors (Auto, Pharma, Electronics, Defence, Space, Energy).Targets should rise gradually, respecting cash-flow constraints and export goals. Adopt Shared IP frameworks that reward both academic publication and commercialisation.

Strengthen Co-funded Research Models- Incentivize co-funded projects and matching grants routed through HEIs. Focus on multi-year work with open data, clear deliverables, and industry-relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Create dedicated line items for university-run pilot lines and testbeds that companies can book by the hour. Shift from single projects to problem portfolios managed by multi-university centres.

Modernise Tax Tools for R&D- Shift incentives from inputs to measurable outputs (patents, standards, clinical milestones, field trials). Link tax deductions to collaboration with accredited HEIs and the hiring of graduate researchers.

Build Collaboration Capabilities- Support campus programs to train faculty/PhDs in industry collaboration, IP negotiation, and translational projects.

Talent Pathways- Expand roles for PhDs in product teams, create dual-track roles (adjunct appointments), and sponsor doctoral cohorts aligned with company roadmaps.

Improve Corporate Disclosure- Encourage listed firms to report specific R&D spending and the share directed to Indian HEIs. Publish results in Indian languages and practitioner-friendly formats to build prestige around research careers.

Anchoring Innovation in India's Knowledge Ecosystem

Contextual Relevance- Indian campuses are situated beside dynamic markets and draw on deep knowledge traditions.

Value Add- When corporate research engages with this heritage and location, it acquires context, depth, and relevance—capabilities essential for high-performing industrial R&D.

Conclusion

India possesses the necessary components—labs, talent, and markets—for world-class innovation. The path forward requires a shift from "wishful thinking" to a national supply chain for innovation.

Industry's Role- Set transparent targets, fund real lab time, and build collaborative networks.

Academia's Role- Focus on research with measurable value, remain open to industry questions, and demonstrate outcomes.

Result- A stable engine of growth where research funding translates into scalable industrial outcomes.

Source- https- //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-needs-research-pipelines/article70341873.ece

2. GDP growth is robust, GST cuts and US tariffs will shape momentum(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment

Introduction

India's economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience, recording a robust 8.2% GDP growth in Q2 FY26, significantly surpassing the RBI's estimate of 7%. With a cumulative first-half growth of 8%, India

retains its position as the fastest-growing major economy globally. This performance is particularly significant as it occurs against a backdrop of global headwinds, including US tariffs and geopolitical instability. The focus now shifts to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to calibrate a policy that balances this growth momentum with price stability.

Sectoral Performance Analysis

Agriculture (Resilient Foundation)- Registered a growth of 3.5%, driven by a favorable monsoon and increased crop output.

Impact- This is expected to have a multiplier effect on rural incomes, boosting rural consumption and agricultural exports.

Manufacturing (Industrial Revival)- Clocked a strong growth of 9.1%, signalling a recovery in industrial activity and investment demand.

Corporate Health- Corporate profitability surged by 15.5%, reflecting improved balance sheets and strong private sector performance.

Services (Urban Engine)- Growth driven primarily by finance, real estate, and professional services. Highlights the resilience of the urban economy and the formal employment sector. Exports- IT and BPO exports remain crucial for sustaining foreign exchange inflows.

Government Spending (Fiscal Consolidation)- Non-interest, non-subsidy revenue expenditure contracted by 6.4%.While this acted as a drag on immediate growth numbers, it reflects the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation in the post-pandemic era.

Demand and Consumption Trends

Private Consumption- Showing clear signs of recovery, evidenced by a surge in vehicle sales, which indicates a revival in demand for durable goods.

Investment Activity- Maintained steady momentum with capital formation making a positive contribution to GDP.

Policy Boost- The GST rate cuts implemented in September 2025 are projected to further stimulate consumption and investment in Q3.

External Sector Vulnerabilities

Export Contraction- Merchandise exports to the US fell by 9% in October, attributed to tariff barriers and a slowdown in global demand.

Global Risks- The sector faces headwinds from US interest rate policies, rising trade restrictions, and geopolitical conflicts. These factors pose risks to India's export-oriented sectors and balance of payments.

Structural Drivers and Challenges

Key Drivers of Growth- Strong domestic consumption and private investment. Sustained Government capital expenditure (Capex) in infrastructure and energy.

Formalisation- Benefits accruing from GST, digital payments, and improved tax compliance.

Corporate Deleveraging- clean balance sheets enabling fresh investment.

Emerging Challenges

Fiscal Pressure- Lower-than-expected nominal GDP growth could constrain revenue collections.

Uneven Demand- Slower rural demand persists in certain geographical pockets.

Inflation Volatility- Food inflation remains susceptible to climate change and monsoon variability.

Monetary Policy Implications (The MPC Dilemma)

The Inflation Context- Headline inflation remains below the RBI's target, theoretically creating space for rate cuts. Core inflation pressures are currently moderate.

The Growth Context- Strong domestic momentum (8.2% growth) argues against aggressive easing to prevent the economy from overheating. The RBI must prioritize long-term financial stability over short-term stimulus.

External Factors- Exchange rate volatility due to global uncertainties. Risks of imported inflation, particularly from potential oil and commodity price shocks.

Policy Considerations- To Cut or Not to Cut

Arguments for Rate Cut	**Arguments Against Rate Cut**
Inflation is currently under control and below target.	Strong growth momentum suggests caution; no immediate need for stimulus.
Private consumption and investment need support to sustain the pickup.	Global uncertainty requires maintaining liquidity buffers.
Easing by global central banks could reduce pressure on capital outflows.	Premature easing could compromise the credibility of the inflation-targeting framework.

Conclusion

The Q2 FY26 GDP data underscores the resilience of India's domestic demand and the success of structural reforms like GST and digitization. However, the path ahead requires vigilance. While the domestic engine is strong, fiscal constraints and external risks loom. The MPC's upcoming decision will likely be a balancing act—sustaining this high-growth trajectory without compromising inflation stability—to ensure a durable economic future.

Source- https- //indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/gdp-growth-is-robust-gst-cuts-and-us-tariffs-will-shape-momentum-10394931/

Editorial of the Day – 02.12.2025

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2.Give states their fair share, protect their fiscal space(IE) -2

1. War clouds- On the U.S. and Venezuela (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3- International Relation

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape in the Americas has witnessed a sharp escalation following Donald Trump's declaration that Venezuela's airspace is "closed in its entirety." This move has heightened fears of a looming military confrontation. While Washington frames these aggressive maneuvers as a necessary component of the "war on drugs," critics view the military build-up as a pretext for regime change, exploiting Venezuela's deepening internal political and economic collapse.

Escalating US Pressure and Justification

The "Closed Airspace" Declaration - Donald Trump's assertion that Venezuela's airspace is closed has acted as a flashpoint, triggering immediate fears of a potential US military strike.

Narrative of "War on Drugs" - Washington justifies its intensified operations in the Caribbean and Pacific as measures targeting alleged drug traffickers. The US administration explicitly alleges that President Nicolás Maduro leads the Cartel de los Soles, which they have designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

Strategic Military Build-Up Around Venezuela

The US has significantly boosted its regional military presence, signaling a potential shift from diplomatic pressure to kinetic action -

Naval Deployment - The USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier has been positioned in the region, along with two amphibious ready groups containing over 4,500 Marines and sailors.

Aerial Dominance -F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper drones are stationed in Puerto Rico, in close proximity to Venezuela. B-1 Lancer bombers have been flown along the Venezuelan coastline as a show of force.

Political Alignment - These military moves coincide with open support for opposition leader María Corina Machado, suggesting a coordinated push toward regime change.

Venezuela's Internal Political and Economic Crisis

Governance Failures - The Maduro regime is accused of rigging the 2024 election and presiding over a near-total economic collapse, marked by hyperinflation and shortages.

Humanitarian Impact - The instability has caused millions of Venezuelans to flee the country.

The Drug Trade Nuance - While Venezuela is an established transit route for drugs coming from Colombia, the text notes that the US has provided no concrete evidence linking Maduro personally to drug trafficking.

Legacy of Opposition Support - The US and Europe previously recognized figures like Juan Guaidó to delegitimize Maduro, a strategy that is being revisited.

Sovereignty, Sanctions, and Historical Lessons

Impact of Sanctions - US-imposed sanctions have arguably exacerbated the economic distress faced by ordinary Venezuelans rather than just targeting the regime.

Violation of International Law - Recent US strikes resulting in civilian deaths are flagged as violations of international law.

Question of Sovereignty - Threats against the state are viewed as an assault on Venezuela's sovereignty, irrespective of Maduro's governance failures.

Risk of Repetition - Critics warn that the US risks repeating the costly interventionist mistakes of Afghanistan (2001–2021) and Iraq (2003).

Conclusion

The situation in Venezuela presents a complex dichotomy - while the rule of Nicolás Maduro is marred by legitimacy crises and governance failures, the escalating US military pressure threatens to undermine regional stability and sovereignty. Drawing from the lessons of Afghanistan and Iraq, a path rooted in dialogue, de-escalation, and diplomacy is advocated as the only sustainable solution to prevent another destabilizing crisis in the Americas.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cautious-optimism-on-india-and-growth/article70345469.ece# -~ -text=India's%20challenge%20is%20to%20maintain%20the%20growth%20momentum&text=Growth%20has%20been%20led%20by,also%20provided%20a%20modest%20boost.

2.Give states their fair share, protect their fiscal space(IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2 - Governance

TOPIC - Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Introduction

Fiscal federalism in India is the constitutional mechanism that ensures a balanced distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States, enabling both tiers of government to meet their developmental and welfare obligations effectively. While the 14th Finance Commission marked a paradigm shift by increasing the states' share in the divisible pool of central taxes from 32% to 42%, thereby enhancing their fiscal space, the subsequent 15th Finance Commission period witnessed a marginal decline. As the 16th Finance Commission begins its deliberations, critical questions regarding equitable allocation, fiscal autonomy, and the shrinking fiscal space—particularly for high-income states—have taken center stage. Addressing these is vital for maintaining cooperative federalism and preventing overdependence on the Centre.

Trends in Fiscal Transfers

The core of states' fiscal resources comprises tax devolution and grants from the Centre. The trends over recent Finance Commission (FC) periods reveal significant shifts -

14th Finance Commission Era - The vertical devolution share of states in central taxes was raised sharply from 32% to 42%. This led to an increase in the post-transfer fiscal space for states, rising from 63.85% to 68.08% of combined receipts.

15th Finance Commission Era - There was a slight reversal in gains, with states' fiscal space declining marginally to 67.39%. The reduction in pure tax devolution was only partially offset by specific Finance Commission grants and non-FC grants, indicating a shift from "untied" funds (devolution) to potentially "tied" or conditional funds (grants).

State-wise Variations and Regional Disparity

The impact of these fiscal shifts has not been uniform, with developed states facing a deeper crunch -

Impact on High-Income States – States like Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu experienced a notable fall of 0.38 percentage points in their fiscal space during the 15th FC period.

Dual Blow - These states faced a simultaneous reduction in their own revenue receipts and central transfers. This reflects the uneven impact of horizontal distribution formulae (which often prioritize equity/need over contribution) and the rising prevalence of non-sharable cesses.

Structural Factors Affecting Fiscal Space

Several policy and structural changes are eroding the revenue autonomy of states -

Rise of Non-Sharable Cesses & Surcharges - The Centre has increasingly resorted to collecting revenue through cesses and surcharges. Unlike the divisible pool of taxes, these are not shared with states, effectively shrinking the pie available for devolution despite high tax collections.

Horizontal Distribution Criteria - The use of "Income Distance" and other equity-based weights in the devolution formula tends to disadvantage high-income states relative to less developed states, reducing the incentive for performance and contribution.

GST Reforms & Compensation - The potential GST 2.0 reforms, which may include rate rationalization (reductions), pose a revenue risk. The cessation of the GST compensation cess has removed a guaranteed revenue cushion, exposing states to market volatilities and reducing their revenue autonomy.

Implications for Governance and Development

Constrained Developmental Spending - Reduced fiscal space directly limits the ability of states to finance critical sectors such as infrastructure, public health, education, and social welfare programs.

Erosion of Autonomy - A shift from high tax devolution to grant-based transfers often come with central conditionalities. Excessive central control strains the spirit of cooperative federalism and undermines the fiscal autonomy of states to plan according to local needs.

Equity vs. Efficiency - While equity is necessary, the current trajectory risks alienating performing states. Balanced and predictable transfers are essential to maintain harmony while respecting both contribution (efficiency) and need-based (equity) principles.

Way Forward

Role of 16th Finance Commission - The Commission needs to revise the horizontal distribution formulae to better account for regional disparities while addressing the concerns of contributing states regarding revenue shortfalls.

Rationalization of Cesses - The Centre must limit the use of non-sharable cesses and surcharges or devise a mechanism to share a portion of these proceeds, preventing the erosion of the divisible pool.

Enhancing Revenue Efficiency - Both Union and State governments must focus on improving tax buoyancy and implementing efficient collection mechanisms to expand the overall resource base rather than fighting over a shrinking pie.

Transparency - Establishing a transparent and equitable transfer mechanism will reinforce trust, support sustainable economic growth, and strengthen the federal fabric

Conclusion

Ensuring a fair share for states in central transfers is not merely a fiscal imperative but a constitutional necessity for cooperative federalism. Protecting the fiscal space of states enables them to meet their specific developmental obligations and reinforces equitable growth across India. The path ahead requires a dual strategy - strengthening the overall tax base through economic growth and reforms, and rationalizing the transfer mechanism to sustain fiscal stability while respecting the twin principles of equity and contribution.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/give-states-their-fair-share-protect-their-fiscal-space-10396773/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 03.12.2025

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1. Speed breakers Ahead- On India's Economic Data (TH) -1

2. With Putin in Delhi, an Opportunity-With Old BFF Russia, Go Beyond Defence (IE) -2

1. Speed breakers Ahead- On India's Economic Data (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

The Indian economy is currently exhibiting a volatile performance pattern. While the Second Quarter (Q2) witnessed an impressive GDP expansion of 8.2%, leading to initial optimism, recent high-frequency indicators for the Third Quarter (Q3) reveal deep-seated vulnerabilities. A divergence has emerged between strong headline GDP numbers and weaker ground-level data in industrial output (IIP), manufacturing, and exports, suggesting that the recent economic highs may face significant "speed bumps" and may not be sustainable in the short term.

Economic Data Volatility- A Mixed Picture

Roller-Coaster Trend- The economic narrative has shifted rapidly from high optimism to emerging caution.

GDP vs. Realities- The robust 8.2% Q2 GDP growth significantly boosted government sentiment. However, this is juxtaposed against low nominal growth and a recent growth forecast downgrade by the IMF, indicating underlying structural softness.

Industrial and Manufacturing Slowdown

Sharp Decline in IIP- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth plummeted to 0.4% in October 2025, marking the lowest growth rate in 14 months.

The Manufacturing Divergence

GDP Data- Showed a robust 9.1% growth in manufacturing for Q2.

IIP Data- In contrast, October data revealed a slowdown to just 1.8%.

Base Effect- Part of the Q2 growth can be attributed to a low-base effect, as manufacturing had grown only 2.2% in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

Tariff Shock- A critical factor is the imposition of 50% tariffs by the U.S. *Initial Phase*- There was a rush to fulfill older orders before tariffs kicked in. *Current Phase*- This was followed by a sharp 12% contraction in exports in October as the full weight of tariffs was felt.

Weakening Export Momentum

PMI Contraction- The manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dropped to a nine-month low of 56.6 in November.

Order Book Stress- New export orders are growing at their slowest pace in over a year, directly pointing to disruptions caused by rising global tariffs and trade barriers.

Sectoral Strains- Supply-Side Constraints

Weather Impact-

Electricity- Output was reduced due to winter weather conditions.

Mining- Extended rains dragged down mining activities.

Primary Goods- The combination of these factors resulted in a net contraction in the primary goods sector in October.

Investment and Capital Goods Concerns

Conflicting Signals

GDP Data- Indicated a healthy 7.3% rise in investment during Q2.

IIP Data- Suggests a slowdown heading into Q3.

Capital Goods Slump- Growth in capital goods—a proxy for private investment activity—stood at a mere 2.4% (a 14-month low). This indicates a softening of investment momentum in the economy.

Consumption Weakness Breakdown

The Consumption Paradox-

GDP Data- Showed Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) growing at approximately 8% in Q2.

IIP Data- Conversely, recorded a contraction in both consumer durables and non-durables.

Performance Low- This contraction marks the worst performance for these segments in two years.

GST Indicators- Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections stood at ₹1.7 lakh crore in November. While substantial, this indicates that aggregate demand has not strengthened as rapidly as anticipated post-rationalisation.

Conclusion

The early trends for Q3 highlight growing economic headwinds. The economy is currently characterized by a dichotomy- strong past GDP figures versus fragile current industrial output, weakening exports due to external tariff shocks, and slowing consumption. With investment momentum moderating, the overall outlook signals a period of caution for policymakers. A sustained recovery will require stabilizing external demand, improving domestic consumption conditions, and ensuring growth remains broad-based rather than statistically skewed.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/speedbreakers-ahead-on-indias-economic-data/article70349466.ece#google_vignette

2. With Putin in Delhi, an Opportunity- With Old BFF Russia, Go Beyond Defence

GENERAL STUDIES 2- International Relation

TOPIC- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

President Vladimir Putin's scheduled visit to India in December 2025 serves as a critical juncture to recalibrate and modernize the India-Russia strategic partnership. Historically anchored in defence, the relationship currently faces stress tests from the ongoing Ukraine conflict, Russia's deepening ties with China, and India's need to balance its relations with the West. This visit offers a timely opportunity to transition the partnership from a purely buyer-seller defence dynamic to a multi-dimensional collaboration in economy and technology, thereby reinforcing India's strategic autonomy.

Current State of India-Russia Relations

Historical & Strategic Pillars-

Deep-Rooted Trust- The relationship enjoys political trust and strategic goodwill dating back to the Soviet era.

Defence Dominance- Russia remains a linchpin in India's defence architecture, supplying critical platforms like the S-400 missile systems and Su-57 fighter jets.

Energy Security- Cooperation extends significantly into the nuclear energy sector and, more recently, oil imports.

Economic Asymmetry-

Low Trade Volumes- Despite strong political ties, bilateral trade (excluding recent oil spikes) has historically hovered around $5 billion annually.

Comparative Weakness- This figure is notably lower than India's trade with smaller neighbours like Bangladesh (approx. $11 billion).

G2G Nature- The engagement is almost entirely Government-to-Government, with minimal participation from the private sector or civil society.

Geopolitical Complexities-

China Factor- Russia's isolation from the West has increased its dependence on China, a regional adversary of India, adding a layer of strategic complexity.

Western Friction- India's continued energy imports from Russia during the Ukraine war have drawn criticism from the US and Europe, challenging New Delhi's diplomatic balancing act.

Challenges and Risks

Geopolitical Sensitivity- India faces the difficult task of navigating relations with Russia without alienating key Western partners (US and Europe), whose capital and technology are vital for India's growth. Western concerns regarding India's ties with Moscow could spill over into unrelated trade and investment negotiations.

Economic Constraints- The current low base of trade limits immediate commercial gains. Geopolitical tensions and sanctions regimes restrict private sector enthusiasm and complicate payment mechanisms.

Global & Internal Uncertainty- The unpredictability of Ukraine peace negotiations makes long-term planning difficult. Russia's domestic economic constraints and internal priorities may limit its capacity to engage in robust new partnerships.

Opportunities for India

Diversification of Ties- There is an urgent need to move beyond the "defence-only" narrative. Potential exists to expand into trade, technology, scientific research, and infrastructure collaboration.

Joint Ventures & Innovation- Collaborative opportunities exist in emerging technologies, renewable energy, and joint research initiatives to ensure long-term engagement.

Post-Conflict Economic Participation- A potential peaceful resolution in Ukraine will likely trigger a reconstruction phase and economic expansion in Russia. India can position itself early to leverage opportunities in trade, investment, and technology transfer during Russia's recovery.

Reinforcing Strategic Autonomy- Engaging Russia prevents over-dependence on any single power bloc. Maintaining robust ties with Moscow, alongside Washington and Brussels, enhances India's leverage and validity as a truly multi-aligned global power.

Way Forward

Broadening the Agenda- The partnership must pivot toward energy security, renewable resources, space research, and digital technologies. Active efforts should be made to involve the private sector to reduce the reliance on G2G frameworks.

Strategic Diplomacy- Use the high-level visit to reaffirm India's commitment to global peace while staunchly protecting its multi-alignment policy. Diplomatic messaging must balance support for Russia's legitimate interests with India's adherence to the UN Charter and territorial integrity.
Long-Term Vision- India must prepare a strategy for Russia's eventual economic revival post-conflict. The goal is to build a partnership that is sustainable, mutually beneficial, and resilient against the fluctuations of global geopolitics.

Conclusion

President Putin's visit is not just a ceremonial engagement but a strategic necessity to transform a defence-heavy relationship into a comprehensive partnership. By expanding the basket of cooperation to include technology and commerce, India can convert historical goodwill into tangible economic gains. A modernized India-Russia tie is essential for India's global diplomatic influence, ensuring that New Delhi remains a key player in the emerging multipolar world order.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-with-putin-in-delhi-an-opportunity-with-old-bff-russia-go-beyond-defence-10398902/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 04.12.2025

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1. Taking the leap- on leprosy in India and discrimination (TH) -1

2. Rupee breaches the 90-mark-driving the slide against the dollar (IE) -2

1. Taking the leap- on leprosy in India and discrimination (TH)

General Studies 2- Social Justice

TOPIC- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Eliminating Legal Barriers for Persons with Leprosy

Introduction

Despite medical advancements making leprosy a non-infectious and fully curable disease, persons affected by it in India continue to face systemic oppression. This burden is driven by deep-seated stigma, misinformation, and archaic laws. An analysis of the current legal landscape reveals that discriminatory provisions deny basic rights and dignity to these individuals, necessitating urgent legal and social reforms to build a just society.

Background and Current Burden of Disease

Causative Agent- Leprosy is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*. It is one of the oldest known human infections, with evidence dating back to 2000 BCE.

Global Burden- India accounts for a staggering 57% of global leprosy cases.

Vulnerability Factors- High prevalence is attributed to factors such as genetic susceptibility and unsanitary living conditions.

Medical Reality- Modern medicine has rendered the disease fully curable and non-infectious, yet the social and legal treatment of patients remains stuck in the past.

The Nature of Stigma and Discrimination

Root Causes- Stigma stems from ancient beliefs, fear of contagion, and a lack of scientific temper regarding the disease.

Systemic Prejudice- The discrimination is not just social but institutional, requiring systematic efforts to uphold the dignity of affected individuals.

Judicial Intervention- The Supreme Court of India has intervened to address these injustices, pushing for immediate corrective actions to dismantle this prejudice.

Legal Discrimination- The Current Status

Extent of Discriminatory Laws- A report by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) highlighted that 97 Central and State laws still contain discriminatory provisions against persons with leprosy.

Rights Denied- These laws systematically exclude affected persons from- Accessing public transport. Entering public spaces.

Civic Rights- Eligibility to contest elections.

Economic Rights- Employment opportunities and the right to run independent businesses.

Judicial Scrutiny- The Court is currently examining petitions that challenge this widespread statutory discrimination.

NHRC Recommendations for Reform

Since 2021, the NHRC has been advocating for comprehensive reforms-

Holistic Approach- Focus on early detection, timely treatment, and rehabilitation.

Terminological Changes- Urged the Centre to replace derogatory terms used in old statutes to restore dignity to patients.

Technological Inclusion (Aadhaar)- A critical recommendation involves using Iris scans for Aadhaar enrolment. *Reason*- Leprosy often damages fingertips, making biometric fingerprint identification difficult or impossible for affected individuals.

Call for Immediate Remedial Action

Moral Imperative- Retaining antediluvian (ancient/outdated) provisions in the face of modern medical progress is unjust and unacceptable.

State Accountability- The Supreme Court has directed all States and Union Territories to submit reports on the steps taken to address these discriminatory laws.

Legislative Action- Governments must urgently repeal these archaic laws and implement robust remedial measures based on NHRC evidence.

Modern Context- It is unfathomable for a modern democracy to trap citizens in stigma generated by previous generations that lacked scientific understanding.

Conclusion

To ensure true equality, India must move beyond medical treatment and address the socio-legal dimensions of leprosy. This requires dismantling archaic legal barriers, removing social prejudice, and guaranteeing dignified access to rights and services. Decisive action is needed to uphold human rights and end the historical discrimination against persons with leprosy permanently.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/taking-the-leap-on-leprosy-in-india-and-discriminatioin/article70353527.ece

2. Rupee breaches the 90-mark-driving the slide against the dollar (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment**.**

Rupee Breaches 90-Mark- Drivers and Implications

Introduction

The Indian rupee has recently crossed the psychologically critical 90-per-dollar mark, signaling significant vulnerabilities in the country's external sector. This depreciation presents a paradox against a backdrop of strong domestic macroeconomic fundamentals, including a GDP growth of 8.2% in Q2 FY26, inflation below 1%, and softening crude oil prices. The situation highlights the complex interplay between structural trade challenges, external market dynamics, and capital outflows.

Key Drivers of Depreciation

Widening Trade Deficit

The primary pressure on the rupee stems from a distinct imbalance in trade.

Export Contraction- Merchandise exports contracted by 1.8% year-on-year in October 2025. Non-oil exports suffered a sharper decline of 12%, hitting an 11-month low.

Key Sectors Hit- Engineering goods, gems and jewellery, chemicals, and ready-made garments.

Import Surge- Imports rose by 16.6%, creating high demand for dollars.

Gold Imports- Tripled to $14.7 billion driven by festive demand and speculative buying.

Other Drivers- Silver, fertilizers, and industrial machinery.

Delayed US-India Trade Agreement

Uncertainty- Prolonged negotiations and lack of clarity on the India-US trade deal have dampened export sentiment and future planning.

Market Fear- Participants worry that continued delays will exacerbate the trade deficit, further weakening the local currency.

Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) Outflows

Capital Flight- FPIs have withdrawn a massive Rs 152 lakh crore from domestic equities since January 2025.

Reasoning- Investors are seeking higher returns in global markets. India's equity market underperformance relative to global peers has made it a convenient source for liquidity withdrawal.

RBI's Soft-Touch Intervention

Strategy- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opted for a strategy of gradual depreciation rather than aggressive defence.

Objective- To maintain the rupee at competitive levels to support export viability.

Risk- While this helps exporters, limited intervention increases risks for importers and exposes the economy to potential imported inflation.

Global Factors

External Drivers- The strength of the US Dollar Index, trends in global crude oil prices, and gold import volumes remain major external determinants of rupee volatility.

Implications for the Indian Economy

Area of Impact	Implications
Export Competitiveness	A weaker rupee theoretically makes Indian goods cheaper abroad, but it cannot fully offset structural weaknesses in key sectors like textiles and engineering.
Imported Inflation	Depreciation increases the landed cost of imports. Rising bills for gold and industrial machinery may push up domestic production costs and inflation.
Investor Confidence	High currency volatility combined with trade policy uncertainty can deter long-term Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
Macro Management	The RBI faces the difficult task of balancing export support (via weaker currency) with reserve preservation to prevent disorderly market movements.

Way Forward & Recommendations

Expedite Trade Agreements- The government must prioritize the immediate conclusion of the India-US trade deal to reduce uncertainty and boost export volumes.

Enhance FDI Inflows- To counter FPI outflows, India needs to attract stable long-term capital by- Improving the Ease of Doing Business. Upgrading infrastructure. Providing tax clarity. Strengthening local governance.

Diversify Export Basket- Reduce dependence on traditional markets (like the US) and sectors by promoting non-traditional and value-added exports.

Macroprudential Measures- The RBI may need to intervene cautiously—not to reverse the trend, but to prevent excessive volatility that harms business planning.

Conclusion

The rupee crossing the 90-mark is a reflection of both domestic structural issues (rising trade deficits, investment outflows) and global headwinds (strong dollar, gold demand). While moderate depreciation can offer a temporary competitive edge to exporters, ensuring long-term currency stability requires a coordinated policy approach focusing on finalizing trade deals, boosting FDI, and prudent macroeconomic management.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/rupee-breaches-90-mark-whats-driving-slide10400171-10400171/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 05.12.2025

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1. Freeze and thaw- On the winter session of Parliament(TH) -1

2. Census is about who we are. It cannot ignore caste and migration (IE) -2

1. Freeze and thaw- On the winter session of Parliament(TH)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures (Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.)

Parliament Winter Session- Issues and Agenda

Introduction

The Winter Session of Parliament, scheduled from December 1 to 19, 2025, has commenced amidst heightened friction between the Government and the Opposition. Spanning 15 sittings, this session is critical due to its heavy legislative agenda and the backdrop of sharp accusations regarding the erosion of parliamentary conventions and the shortening of schedules.

Overview of the Winter Session

Duration and Schedule- The session is relatively short, commencing on December 1 and concluding on December 19, comprising only 15 sittings.

Political Climate

Government Stance- The Prime Minister has cautioned against "political theatrics" while asserting the government's willingness to discuss any issue.

Opposition Grievances- The Opposition has criticized the truncated nature of the session. They have also alleged a break in convention regarding the exclusion of Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi from diplomatic engagements.

Role of the Chair- Expectations are placed on Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan (Rajya Sabha Chairman) to mediate and ease the strained relations between the treasury and opposition benches.

Legislative Agenda and Key Bills

The government has listed 14 Bills for consideration, several of which carry significant political and administrative implications-

Jan Vishwas (Amendment) Bill, 2025- Aims to further simplify criminal justice processes and decriminalize minor offenses to improve ease of doing business and living.

Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2025- Seeks to replace existing regulators like the UGC (University Grants Commission) and AICTE with a single overarching body. *Contentious Point-* States are likely to challenge this as it may infringe upon federal autonomy in education.

Health Security se National Security Cess Bill- Introduced by the Finance Minister, this bill aims to repackage/restructure the existing cess on tobacco products.

Other Significant Legislation- National Highways (Amendment) Bill, Atomic Energy Bill, Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill

Scheduled Debates and Electoral Issues

Electoral Reforms- A major focus will be on the Special Summary Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Government View- Prioritizing the push for "One Nation, One Election" (synchronised national elections).

Opposition View- Raising concerns regarding alleged malpractices in the maintenance of electoral rolls and the general conduct of elections.

Historical Commemoration- A special discussion is scheduled to mark 150 years of the composition of *Vande Mataram*.

Opposition Demands and Concerns

The Opposition is pushing for urgent debates on pressing national issues, specifically-
Internal Security- Discussions on the recent Delhi blasts.
Economic Distress- Rising prices (inflation) and agrarian/farmers' issues.
Environmental Crisis- Severe air pollution affecting major cities.
Institutional Integrity- Allegations regarding the misuse of federal investigation agencies against political opponents.

Conclusion

For the parliamentary system to function effectively, the focus must shift from political confrontation to substantive deliberation. Both sides need to engage constructively to address critical challenges like electoral integrity, national security, and economic stability. A productive session is essential to uphold the constitutional spirit of dialogue and ensure governance accountability.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/freeze-and-thaw-on-the-winter-session-of-parliament/article70357837.ece

2. Census is about who we are. It cannot ignore caste and migration (IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society
Topic- Population and associated issues, Poverty and developmental issues, Urbanization, their problems and their remedies

Governance Implications of the Delay

Historic Gap- The Census 2021 was postponed citing the COVID-19 pandemic, despite elections continuing in several states. This has resulted in a 16–17-year void without updated population data, blinding policy formulation.
Resource Misallocation
Welfare Schemes- Critical programs (e.g., PDS, Food Security) and Finance Commission transfers continue to rely on outdated 2011 data, excluding millions of eligible beneficiaries.
Urban Planning- Cities are severely under-planned as they fail to account for the rapid population surge of the last decade.
Constitutional & Electoral Impact-
Delimitation Freeze- Naming the exercise "Census 2027" ensures compliance with the 84th **Constitutional Amendment**, which froze delimitation until "the first Census taken after the year 2026" is published.
Women's Reservation- The implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill is constitutionally linked to delimitation. Since delimitation is a 4–6-year process, women's reservation in Parliament is unlikely to materialize before the mid-2030s.

Caste Enumeration- The Debate and Necessity

Historical Context- The last comprehensive caste enumeration occurred in 1931. Post-independence, Census data has been restricted to SCs and STs for constitutional reservation mandates. The SECC 2011 (Socio-Economic Caste Census) attempted full data collection but the data was never released due to quality concerns.
Necessity for Data-
Evidence-Based Policy- Essential for rationalizing OBC and SC/ST reservations and affirmative action policies.
Social Justice- Guides targeted resource allocation for education, employment, and poverty alleviation based on empirical backwardness rather than estimates.

Challenges & Risks

Political Polarization- Fears that detailed caste data could deepen social fissures and lead to caste-based political mobilization.

Administrative Complexity- enumerating thousands of castes, sub-castes, and clan names requires scientific rigor to avoid errors.

Editorial Stance- Ignoring caste reality is not a neutral act. Census 2027 must enumerate caste with the same scientific rigor applied to variables like age, literacy, and occupation.

Migration- The Crisis of "Invisibility"

Current Issue- Millions of migrants are statistically counted in their native villages rather than the cities where they live and contribute economically.

Structural Implications

Urban Governance Deficit- Municipalities struggle to provide services (water, sanitation, housing) to populations that officially do not exist in their records.

Electoral Distortion- Migrants often cannot vote in their city of residence, rendering them politically **invisible** and reducing the incentive for urban leaders to address their needs.

Rural Misallocation- Villages receive funds for populations that have long migrated away.

Proposed Solutions

Residency-Based Counting- Register migrants at their place of residence if they have lived there for more than 6 months.

Inter-State Coordination- Update voter rolls and coordinate between source and destination states to ensure migrants are enfranchised where they live.

Digital Census- Opportunities vs. Risks

Advantages

Efficiency- Faster enumeration, reduced manual errors, and quicker publication of final results.

Tracking- Enables real-time monitoring and district-wise progress tracking.

Risks & Privacy Concerns

Surveillance- The collection of personal, biometric, and socio-economic data raises fears of state surveillance.

Data Linkage- Potential linking with Aadhaar, NPR (National Population Register), or voter rolls could compromise citizen privacy and lead to profiling.

Essential Safeguards-

Purpose Limitation- Census data must be strictly used for statistical purposes, never for law enforcement or citizenship verification (NRC).

Independent Audits- Robust privacy protocols and independent audits are required to validate data security and anonymization.

Transparency and Federal Trust

State Access- State governments must have real-time access to enumeration data to trust the process.

Public Monitoring- Public dashboards should be established to track district-wise progress and ensure accountability.

Data Release- To maintain credibility, all collected variables—including caste—must be published transparently after independent validation.

Conclusion

Census 2027 represents more than a mere statistical update; it is the bedrock of Indian governance and democracy. To be effective, it must evolve into a comprehensive exercise that accurately counts caste and migration, ensuring representation for the marginalized. By balancing technological efficiency with democratic accountability and strict privacy safeguards, the Census can

empower evidence-based policymaking, ensure fair delimitation, and lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and just republic.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/s-y-quraishi-writes-census-is-about-who-we-are-it-cannot-ignore-caste-and-migration-10402996/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 06.12.2025

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1. Marked for Life- On Acid Attack Survivors(TH) -1

2. Delhi HC Rejected Semaglutide Patent Suit(IE) -2

1. Marked for Life- On Acid Attack Survivors(TH)

General Studies 1- Social Issues

TOPIC- Role of women and women's organization, social empowerment

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has recently issued a strong critique regarding the sluggish pace of justice for acid attack survivors, highlighting a specific case that has dragged on for 16 years. Terming such delays as a "mockery of the system," the Court emphasized that perpetrators of such heinous crimes deserve no sympathy. The observations underscore an urgent need for systemic reforms, including day-to-day hearings, stricter laws, and comprehensive rehabilitation measures to restore dignity to survivors.

Judicial Observations and Stance

"Mockery of the System"- The Supreme Court expressed deep shock over the 16-year delay in concluding the trial of an acid attack survivor, labelling the administrative and judicial lethargy as a mockery of justice.

Zero Sympathy Doctrine- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant explicitly stated that courts should not show any leniency or sympathy towards acid attackers.

Call for Firm Response- The Court urged the entire judicial ecosystem to respond with firmness and urgency to ensure that justice is not just theoretical but delivered in practice.

Case Study- The Struggle of Shaheen Malik

Timeline of Injustice

2009- Shaheen Malik was attacked at the age of 26 while pursuing her MBA.

2009–2013- The case saw zero progress, reflecting initial systemic apathy.

Current Status- The trial was transferred from Haryana to Rohini Court, Delhi. Despite the passage of 16 years, final arguments are still pending.

Physical and Social Toll- The survivor has undergone multiple reconstructive surgeries over the years to address severe disfigurement and health complications.

Advocacy and Rehabilitation- Turning her trauma into activism, Malik founded the NGO 'Brave Souls' in 2021 to provide medical and legal assistance to other survivors.

Issues Raised in the PIL (Public Interest Litigation)

Disability Recognition- The petition seeks the inclusion of acid attack survivors under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

Internal Injuries- The PIL highlighted a specific, often overlooked category of victims—those forced to ingest acid. These survivors suffer life-threatening internal injuries without visible external scarring, yet they struggle to receive formal acknowledgment and state support.

Demand for Dignity- The plea seeks formal recognition of the unique suffering of acid attack victims to ensure they receive adequate state-sponsored support and rehabilitation.

Supreme Court Directives and Government Response

Legislative Action- The CJI suggested that the Central Government consider bringing an ordinance to strengthen the legal response mechanism against acid attacks.

Government Support- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta supported the petition, asserting that perpetrators of such "inhuman" acts should face equal ruthlessness from the law.

Data Collection- The Court directed the Registrar-Generals of all High Courts to compile and furnish data regarding the number of pending acid attack trials across India.
Special Courts- To tackle delays, the Court proposed the establishment of special courts to conduct **day-to-day hearings**, ensuring trials are concluded swiftly.

Legal and Policy Landscape

Precedent (Laxmi vs. Union of India)- The summary recalls this landmark judgment where the SC had previously ordered strict regulations on the sale of acid, along with mandatory compensation and rehabilitation for victims.
Current Legal Provisions- Section 124 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) specifically outlines the punishment for acid attacks, replacing older provisions.
Implementation Gap- Despite the existence of these legal frameworks, conviction rates remain low, and trials are excessively lengthy.

Statistical Context (NCRB 2023 Data)

National Prevalence- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recorded 207 acid attack cases nationwide in 2023.
Regional Hotspots
West Bengal- Highest incidence with 57 cases.
Uttar Pradesh- Second highest with 31 cases.
Inference- The data indicates that despite legal deterrents, acid attacks remain a prevalent form of extreme gender-based violence.

Conclusion

Acid attacks persist as one of the cruellest forms of gender violence in India. While the legal framework exists, the ground reality is marred by delayed trials, low conviction rates, and inadequate victim support. The Supreme Court's latest intervention signals a critical pivot toward special courts and strictly enforced timelines. For justice to be meaningful, India must bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring survivors receive not just verdicts, but holistic rehabilitation and the dignity they are "marked for life" to be denied.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/marked-for-life-on-acid-attack-survivors/article70362175.ece

2. Delhi HC Rejected Semaglutide Patent Suit(IE)

General Studies 2- Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Introduction

The Delhi High Court has delivered a significant verdict allowing Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) to manufacture and export generic versions of Semaglutide, a breakthrough drug used for Type 2 diabetes and obesity. The Court rejected the plea of the patent holder, Novo Nordisk, which sought to restrain DRL based on a formulation patent. This ruling reinforces India's strict stance against "evergreening"—the practice of extending patent monopolies through minor modifications—thereby prioritizing public health and affordable access to essential medicines.

Key Details of the Case

The Drug Involved
Name- Semaglutide (a GLP-1 receptor agonist).
Market Names- Sold by Novo Nordisk as Ozempic (for diabetes) and Wegovy (for weight loss).
Function- It mimics the GLP-1 hormone to stimulate insulin secretion, inhibit glucagon, and suppress appetite.

The Patent Conflict

Patent No. 275964 (Composition Patent)- This covered the original chemical compound. It expired in September 2024, theoretically opening the market to generics.

Patent No. 262697 (Formulation Patent)- Novo Nordisk held this secondary patent on the specific delivery/formulation method, valid until March 2026.

The Dispute

Novo Nordisk's Argument- They claimed the formulation was novel and offered significantly higher efficacy, thus deserving protection.

DRL's Argument- They challenged the second patent, arguing it lacked "inventive step" and "novelty." DRL contended this was a classic case of evergreening prohibited under Indian law, as the changes were minor modifications of the known substance.

The Delhi High Court's Ruling

Verdict- The Court refused to grant an injunction against DRL, effectively allowing them to manufacture and export the drug**.**

Rationale- The Court found DRL's challenge to the patent to be *prima facie* (on the face of it) valid. It observed potential double patenting by Novo Nordisk, attempting to extend exclusivity beyond the expiry of the primary molecule patent.

Restriction- While manufacturing for export is allowed, domestic sales in India are restricted until the original composition patent issues are fully resolved or the patent term ends (though the primary patent has already expired in Sept 2024, the legal nuance lies in the formulation patent's validity).

Legal Context- Combating Evergreening

Section 3(d) of the Patents Act, 1970- This is the cornerstone of India's IPR regime regarding pharmaceuticals. It prevents the patenting of "mere use of a known substance" or "mere discovery of a new form of a known substance" unless it results in significantly enhanced efficacy**.**

Purpose- To stop pharmaceutical giants from making trivial changes to existing drugs just to keep generics off the market.

Constitutional Duty- The ruling aligns with Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health.

Precedent- This decision strengthens the jurisprudence established in the landmark Novartis vs. Union of India (Glivec case, 2013), where the Supreme Court rejected a patent for a cancer drug on similar grounds.

Implications for the Pharma Industry & Economy

Boost for Generics- Strengthens India's reputation as the "Pharmacy of the World." Encourages other major players like Cipla, Sun Pharma, and Mankind Pharma to enter the GLP-1 market.

Economic Impact

Exports- Allows Indian companies to tap into the massive global demand for obesity and diabetes drugs, contributing to the trade surplus.

Make in India- Reinforces domestic manufacturing capabilities and the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative.

Market Dynamics- Promotes competition, which inevitably drives down the cost of life-saving drugs for both domestic and international consumers.

Public Health & Science Perspective

Disease Burden- India faces a rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and obesity. Affordable access to advanced drugs like Semaglutide is critical for management**.**

Healthcare Access- Lower costs mean these drugs can potentially be included in broader public health programs under the National Health Mission. Aligns with WHO standards that advocate for access to generic versions of essential medicines**.**

Way Forward

Regulatory Vigilance- The Patent Office must remain vigilant to identify and reject frivolous patent applications that aim to "evergreen" monopolies.

Balance of Interests- India must continue to balance its TRIPS compliance (protecting genuine innovation) with its public health obligations.

Domestic Innovation- While promoting generics, policy frameworks should also incentivize genuine R&D within India to move from being a "volume" leader to a "value" leader in pharma.

Conclusion

The Delhi High Court's decision is a victory for public health over corporate monopoly. By enforcing strict checks against evergreening, the judiciary has ensured that patent laws serve their true purpose- rewarding genuine innovation without blocking access to essential, life-saving treatments. This ruling not only benefits Indian patients but also reinforces India's pivotal role in the global pharmaceutical supply chain.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/why-delhi-hc-rejected-semaglutide-patent-suit-10405013/**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 08.12.2025

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1. Balancing, not swinging- on India-Russia ties, Indian diplomacy(TH) -1

2. Economy beyond headline numbers – better jobs, green growth needed(IE) -2

1. Balancing, not swinging- on India-Russia ties, Indian diplomacy(TH)

General Studies 1- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

India's foreign policy is currently navigating a high-stakes geopolitical landscape, best exemplified by the recent visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi. This visit, marking the 25th year of the India-Russia strategic partnership, serves as a testament to India's pursuit of "Strategic Autonomy." By hosting the Russian President amid the ongoing Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions, India has signaled a commitment to continuity in its historic ties while cautiously managing its burgeoning relationship with the West.

Significance of the Visit

25th Anniversary- The visit commemorated 25 years of the Strategic Partnership between the two nations.

Timing- This was President Putin's first visit to India since the onset of the Ukraine invasion in 2022.

Geopolitical Pressure- The visit occurred despite an active International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against Mr. Putin. Intensified Russian attacks in Ukraine. Russia's rejection of new U.S. peace proposals, which has heightened European security concerns.

India's Resolve- Proceeding with the visit under these conditions underscores India's willingness to prioritize its national interest over external diplomatic pressure.

Diplomatic Signals- Continuity and Trust

Warm Reception- The Indian Prime Minister received President Putin personally, according him a full state visit. This visual symbolism conveys that New Delhi still regards Moscow as a "trusted partner," disregarding efforts by the West to isolate Russia.

Stance on Ukraine- India maintained its consistent position- It reiterated a general call for peace and dialogue. Crucially, it refused to directly criticise Russia for the war in Ukraine.

Resilience to Sanctions- Despite the looming threat of secondary sanctions and U.S. pressure on tariffs regarding oil trade, India demonstrated a clear intent to preserve and protect its economic engagement with Russia.

Key Economic Takeaways

The focus of the summit was heavily tilted toward economic cooperation rather than military engagement

Labour Mobility- A new agreement was discussed to facilitate labour mobility between the two nations.

Fertilizer Security- An MoU was signed to jointly establish a urea plant in Russia, securing a vital input for India's agricultural sector.

Economic Roadmap 2030- Both sides adopted the roadmap announced earlier in 2024 to deepen trade and connectivity.

Financial Infrastructure- Plans to explore national currency payment systems to bypass Western financial sanctions. Promotion of maritime corridors (e.g., Chennai-Vladivostok or INSTC routes) to streamline logistics.

Trade Goals- The leaders reiterated the ambitious goal of reaching $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

The Balancing Act- Managing Western Sensitivities

India displayed strategic caution to avoid antagonizing the U.S. and Europe, evident in what was *not* announced-

Strategic Omissions- There were no major announcements regarding- Defence hardware/deals. Nuclear energy projects. Space collaboration.

Reasoning- Avoiding these sensitive sectors signals India's awareness of Western "red lines."

Oil Imports- India avoided committing to *higher* volumes of oil imports. This makes the $100 billion trade target harder to achieve but helps avoid further friction regarding the trade deficit and sanctions.

"Dhruv Tara"- While the PM described Russia as a "Dhruv Tara" (Guiding Star), the overall conduct of the visit showed a prioritization of ties with the U.S. and EU alongside maintaining the Russian connection.

Defining Strategic Autonomy

Consistency is Key- The article argues that true strategic autonomy is about consistent engagement with all major power blocs (Russia and the West).

Avoiding "Swinging"- India must not "swing" back and forth based on momentary pressures but should maintain a steady equilibrium.

The Path Ahead- Sustaining this autonomy requires a careful blend of diplomacy where India defends its independent foreign policy without becoming a junior partner to any single bloc.

Conclusion

India's handling of President Putin's visit reflects a sophisticated exercise in realpolitik. By stripping the visit of controversial military deals and focusing on economic essentials like fertilizers and connectivity, India safeguarded its historic partnership with Russia while minimizing fallout with the West. The visit reinforces that for New Delhi, strategic autonomy is not about isolation, but about the capacity to engage multiple conflicting powers simultaneously to serve India's National Interest.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/balancing-not-swinging-on-india-russia-ties-indian-diplomacy/article70368877.ece

2. Economy beyond headline numbers – better jobs, green growth needed(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

India's economy has demonstrated resilience and strength, recording a robust headline GDP growth of 8.2% in Q2FY26. While this signals strong macroeconomic performance on the surface, beneath these figures lie significant structural challenges. Concerns raised by international bodies like the IMF regarding data quality, coupled with domestic issues of jobless growth and severe environmental degradation in North India, suggest that high growth rates alone are insufficient. True development requires a shift towards inclusivity, data transparency, and environmental sustainability.

The Paradox- High Growth vs. Data Credibility

While the growth numbers are impressive, the credibility of the data underpinning them is under scrutiny.

Strong Headline Numbers- The 8.2% growth rate in Q2FY26 positions India as a fast-growing major economy.

IMF's "C" Rating- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reportedly graded India's national accounts with a "C" rating for the quality of underlying data.

Outdated Base Year- A primary criticism is the continued reliance on the 2011-12 base year for GDP calculations. This old base fails to capture new economic activities, digital shifts, and modern consumption patterns.

The Invisible Informal Sector- With approximately 90% of the economy operating in the informal sector, current data collection methods chronically undercount this segment. This leads to a significant mismeasurement of- Actual GDP. Employment levels. True welfare standards of the population.

The Challenge of Jobless Growth & Structural Transformation

Economic expansion has not translated proportionately into formal employment, creating a phenomenon of "jobless growth."

Over-reliance on Agriculture- Despite the service sector boom, about 46% of India's workforce remains dependent on agriculture.

Contrast- The agriculture sector grew by only 3.5% in Q2FY26, indicating a disparity between where the growth is (Services/Industry) and where the people are (Agriculture).

Informality Trap- Government schemes and welfare transfers are providing relief but are not a substitute for high-quality, formal-sector jobs.

Stalled Structural Transformation- A healthy developing economy typically moves labor from low-productivity agriculture to high-productivity manufacturing. In India, this transition is slow, impeding sustainable structural transformation.

The Environmental Cost of Growth

The current growth model appears to be environmentally expensive, particularly in North India, undermining the quality of life.

Air Pollution Crisis- Cities like Delhi consistently rank among the most polluted globally. AQI levels frequently exceed 400, which severely impacts life expectancy and public health.

Water Toxicity- Groundwater contamination, particularly with heavy metals, poses long-term health risks that are not factored into GDP calculations.

"Defensive Consumption" Paradox- A portion of the GDP growth is fueled by people spending money to protect themselves from pollution (e.g., buying air purifiers, water filters, medical treatments). While this increases economic activity figures, it actually represents a decline in human welfare.

Recommendations for Meaningful Growth

To bridge the gap between GDP figures and ground reality, the following interventions are recommended

Area of Reform	Specific Actions
Job Creation	Accelerate private investment, improve Ease of Doing Business, and align Skill India programs with actual market demands to move workers to formal jobs.
Data Modernization	Immediately update the GDP Base Year (ideally every 5 years). Institutionalize high-frequency data collection to better capture the informal economy.
Environmental Action	Implement coordinated policies on Crop Residue Management, urban transport overhaul, and strict industrial emission norms.

Way Forward

Strengthen Employment Generation- Focus on MSME growth as they are labor-intensive. Encourage start-ups and industries that can absorb labor migrating out of agriculture**.**

Modernize National Accounts- Move towards real-time data tracking to build confidence among domestic and global investors. Transparency in data is crucial for effective policy formulation.

Promote Green and Sustainable Growth- Green GDP- Integrate environmental indicators into GDP measurement to get a "Holistic View" of growth. Invest heavily in urban public transport to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Policy Integration- Economic, labor, and environmental policies must not work in silos. PMO-level coordination is suggested to ensure strictly implemented monitoring across states.

Conclusion

India's growth story remains impressive on paper, but for it to be truly "developed" (Viksit) by 2047, the focus must shift from *quantity* of growth to *quality* of growth. Addressing the "Jobless" nature of expansion, fixing the "Data Deficit," and reversing "Environmental Degradation" are the three pillars required to make India's rise sustainable and inclusive**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/economy-beyond-headline-numbers-better-jobs-green-growth-needed-10408015/?ref=opinion_pg

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 09.12.2025

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2.India and the UK- A Defence Partnership with Potential to Make a Better World - 2

1. Prudent action- On RBI Interest rate cuts

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. (Monetary Policy (RBI), Inflation vs. Growth, Banking Sector & Interest Rates.)

Introduction

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has executed a strategic rate cut, reflecting a nuanced approach to monetary policy. Despite strong headline GDP numbers, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) remains cautious about the underlying strength of the economy and external headwinds. This move is a "careful balancing act" aimed at sustaining investment and protecting exporters while maintaining a neutral stance to allow for swift policy reversals if inflation risks re-emerge.

The MPC's Decision- Key Statistics

Rate Reduction- The MPC reduced the policy rate by 25 basis points (bps), bringing it down to 5.25%.
Cumulative Action- This adds up to a total reduction of 125 bps in the year 2025.
Historical Context- Such aggressive cumulative cuts were last witnessed in 2019, a period marked by a sharp slowdown in growth.

The Growth Paradox

There is a divergence between the rising GDP figures and the central bank's dovish policy action.
GDP Momentum- Growth has accelerated from 5.6% in Q2 of the previous year to 8.2% in Q2 of the current year.
Skepticism on Durability- The rate cut suggests the RBI is not fully convinced that this growth momentum is secure or self-sustaining.
The Deflator Factor- The analysis notes that real growth figures might look inflated due to a low GDP deflator (implying nominal growth might not be as robust as real growth suggests).

Rationale Behind the Rate Cut

The MPC's decision is driven by both domestic capacity issues and external threats.
Idle Capacity- Indian firms still possess ample idle capacity. This implies that stimulating demand will not immediately lead to overheating or inflation, making a rate cut a "safe" bet to push growth.
Supporting Investment- Cheaper credit is intended to encourage corporate investment, which is currently present but often funded by debt.
External Shocks (US Tariffs)- The MPC is preemptively cushioning the economy against the unfolding impact of 50% tariffs imposed by the U.S. on global supply chains, which threatens Indian exports.

Sectoral Impact- Focus on MSMEs

Credit Lifeline- Lower interest rates are specifically targeted to benefit Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
Competitiveness- Many MSMEs rely heavily on affordable credit for survival. Lower rates reduce their operational costs, enhancing their competitiveness in the export market amidst global trade volatility.

Inflation Dynamics and Future Risks

Current Forecast- The MPC has lowered its inflation forecast to a modest 2%.
Volatility Warning- Despite the low forecast, the committee remains alert to potential spikes in food or oil prices which could quickly reverse the low-inflation trend.

Lesson from History (2019)- The text cites a cautionary tale from 2019, where inflation surged from 2% to 7.6% within a year following rate cuts, highlighting how quickly the landscape can change.

Policy Stance- Flexibility Over Commitment

Neutral Stance- By maintaining a neutral stance, the RBI avoids committing to a long-term low-rate regime.

Preparedness- This signals readiness for a swift policy reversal (hiking rates) if global uncertainty alters the growth trajectory or if inflation suddenly spikes.

Conclusion

The RBI's latest policy action is a proactive measure to support an expansion that still feels fragile despite high headline growth. By prioritizing flexibility, the MPC has positioned itself to support the economy against external trade shocks and internal structural weaknesses while keeping its powder dry to fight inflation should it resurface.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/prudent-action-on-rbi-interest-rate-cuts/article70372583.ece

2. India and the UK- A Defence Partnership with Potential to Make a Better World

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

The India-UK defence partnership has evolved into a modern, comprehensive strategic relationship that goes beyond traditional buyer-seller dynamics. Rooted in shared democratic values, respect for sovereignty, and freedom of navigation, this partnership aims to bolster security in the Indo-Pacific region while fostering mutual economic growth through industrial collaboration and high-level strategic alignment.

Joint Military Exercises & Interoperability

The partnership focuses heavily on enhancing combat readiness and tactical coordination through regular military engagements.

Key Exercises-

Ajeya Warrior (Army)- Has evolved to simulate complex battlefield scenarios, allowing Indian and British forces to operate under unified command structures**.**

KONKAN (Navy)- Focuses on advanced maritime manoeuvres and air defence drills. Recent iterations have seen high-level assets like India's INS Vikrant and the UK's HMS Prince of Wales operating together.

Significance- Enhances multi-domain operational readiness. Fosters professional bonding and mutual trust, which is crucial for coordinated responses to regional security threats.

Defence Industrial Cooperation & Technology Sharing

A shift towards co-development and co-production marks the current phase of relations, aligning with India's domestic goals**.**

10-Year Roadmap- Both nations are guided by a Defence Industrial Roadmap that promotes joint Research & Development (R&D) and technology transfer.

Key Initiatives

Missile Systems- A £350-million deal for the supply of Lightweight Multirole Missiles.

Naval Technology- Collaboration on maritime electric propulsion systems, vital for the modernization of future Indian naval platforms.

Strategic Alignment- These initiatives support India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) vision by leveraging advanced UK expertise to modernize Indian defence capabilities.

Knowledge Sharing & Human Capital Development

The partnership places a strong emphasis on institutional exchanges and training to build long-term capacity**.** Institutional Training- Indian officers undergo training at prestigious UK institutions like the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Britannia Royal Naval College. Instructor Exchange- Future plans include integrating Indian Air Force Qualified Flying Instructors into UK training programs.

Impact- Standardizes training methodologies and enhances leadership skills. Promotes cross-cultural understanding and builds professional networks between the armed forces of both nations**.**

Strategic and Geopolitical Dimensions

The collaboration extends beyond bilateral ties to address broader geopolitical realities.

Indo-Pacific Focus- Both nations advocate for a free and open Indo-Pacific, emphasizing adherence to international law and respect for territorial sovereignty**.**

Global Security- The partnership acts as a counterbalance to emerging regional threats and reinforces multilateral security frameworks.

Proactive Stakeholders- By integrating defence with diplomacy, India and the UK position themselves as key contributors to global security governance.

Integration with Economic and Trade Cooperation

Security cooperation is designed to work in tandem with economic prosperity.

Synergy with CETA- The partnership is reinforced by ongoing negotiations for the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

Virtuous Cycle

Defence-industrial collaboration benefits from improved investment flows and trade facilitation. Conversely, economic growth is supported by a secure, stable, and rules-based regional environment maintained through defence cooperation.

Conclusion

The India-UK defence partnership is a multidimensional effort that successfully merges military readiness with industrial innovation and strategic vision. By deepening ties across security, technology, and training, both nations are not only addressing contemporary global challenges but are also securing their mutual economic and geopolitical interests for the long term.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-and-the-uk-a-defence-partnership-with-potential-to-make-a-better-world-10409885/?ref=opinion_pg

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 10.12.2025

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1.Note of harmony-On the debate on Vande Mataram(TH) -1

2. India's small enterprises hold key to job growth(IE) -2

1. Note of harmony-On the debate on Vande Mataram(TH)

General Studies 1- History

Topic- The Freedom Struggle- Contributions from different parts of the country**.**

Introduction

Vande Mataram, a timeless tribute envisioning the nation as "Mother India," served as a unifying force during India's freedom struggle. As the nation observes the 150th anniversary of this historic hymn, the focus must remain on its spirit of sacrifice and shared identity. However, recent events have sparked a debate on how best to honor this legacy—whether by reopening old historical wounds or by strengthening modern social cohesion.

The Historical Legacy of Vande Mataram

Origin and Authorship- The song was penned by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. It was published in his novel *Anandamath* in the early 1880s. This year marks the song's 150th anniversary.

Role in the Freedom Struggle- It served as a battle cry that inspired generations of freedom fighters. It successfully united diverse communities against colonial rule, fostering a collective national identity.

Political Adoption (1937)- In 1937, the Indian National Congress (INC) leadership officially adopted the **first two stanzas** of the song for use at its gatherings. This decision was rooted in a strategy of accommodation to respect the sensibilities of all communities while retaining the song's patriotic core.

Constitutional Status- Post-independence, the Constitution of India recognized these stanzas as the **National Song**. It stands equal to the National Anthem in stature, symbolizing nation-building and collective identity.

The Recent Parliamentary Controversy

A parliamentary session intended to commemorate the 150th anniversary devolved into a partisan debate, highlighting contrasting interpretations of history.

The Ruling Party's Argument (BJP)- Argued that the historical decision to limit the song to only two stanzas was an act of appeasement. Claimed that this specific concession contributed to the rise of separatist sentiments, ultimately leading to the Partition of India.

The Opposition's Counter-Argument (INC/Opposition)- Leaders like Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Mallikarjun Kharge contended that the historical context was being misrepresented.

Question of Relevance- They questioned the utility of debating settled historical matters in the present day.

Focus on Governance- Ms. Vadra emphasized that Parliament should prioritize current issues affecting citizens rather than excavating old divisions.

Critical Historical Lessons

To avoid repeating past errors, it is essential to draw the correct lessons from the freedom movement rather than rewriting it.

Unity through Accommodation- The national movement succeeded because it built unity across religious, linguistic, and cultural lines within a shared political space. The adoption of specific stanzas of *Vande Mataram* highlights a tradition of mutual respect, not the imposition of a singular cultural identity.

Shared Heritage- Historical records show that for decades, Hindus and Muslims together chanted **Vande Mataram** during mass mobilizations against the British.

Fragility of Unity- While the unity project was remarkable, the eventual Partition exposed its fragility. This underscores the danger of promoting specific identities that overshadow the broader, secular, and constitutional Indian commonness.

Reaffirming National Purpose (Way Forward)

Avoid Weaponizing Symbols- Twisting a symbol of harmony (*Vande Mataram*) into a source of political division serves no constructive purpose for the nation.

Strengthen Constitutional Values- The truest tribute to Mother India is to uphold unity, harmony, and mutual respect.

Future Outlook- India must renew its sense of national purpose by ensuring that the legacy of *Vande Mataram* continues to inspire future generations toward cohesion, not conflict.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/note-of-harmony-on-the-debate-on-vande-mataram/article70376936.ece

2. India's small enterprises hold key to job growth(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Employment- Growth, formalisation, and issues relating to employment

Small Enterprises, Big Jobs- Transforming India's Employment Landscape

Introduction

India's employment challenge extends beyond mere job creation; it is fundamentally about enhancing productivity and growth within the millions of small and unincorporated enterprises. While policy often favors large industries, the true engine for inclusive and broad-based economic growth lies in empowering the unorganized sector to formalize, access credit, and adopt technology.

Current Employment Structure in India

Understanding the composition of the workforce is crucial to diagnosing the employment challenge.

Scale of the Sector- As of 2023-24, over 12 crore workers are employed across 7.3 crore non-agricultural enterprises dominance of Self-Employment (OAEs)

Own Account Enterprises (OAEs)- These are units that *do not* hire paid workers. They constitute 87% of all enterprises.

Nature of Work- This statistic highlights that a significant portion of self-employment in India is driven by necessity (survival) rather than entrepreneurial dynamism**.**

Role of Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs)- Although HWEs form a small fraction of total enterprises, they contribute disproportionately to Gross Value Added (GVA). This disparity indicates that enterprises with hired labor are significantly more productive than single-person operations.

The Link Between Growth and Employment

Data suggests a strong correlation between enterprise growth (productivity) and job creation.

Productivity-Employment Elasticity- A 10% increase in GVA (Gross Value Added) among small enterprises correlates with a 4.5% rise in hired workers**.**

The Transition Opportunity- Since nearly 9 out of 10 enterprises currently hire *no* workers, upgrading even a fraction of OAEs into HWEs can trigger a massive expansion in employment opportunities**.**

Structural Challenges Faced by Small Enterprises

Despite their potential, small enterprises face three critical hurdles that stifle growth ("The Missing Middle" problem).

Low Formalisation- Many micro-enterprises avoid registration (e.g., Udyam portal) because they perceive the compliance costs to be higher than the potential benefits. Impact- This exclusion prevents them from accessing government schemes and formal market linkages**.**

Limited Access to Credit

The Credit Gap- Only 10–12% of unincorporated enterprises have access to formal institutional loans. Productivity Multiplier- Access to credit is transformative. For medium-sized enterprises, formal credit can boost GVA by 72%. For large enterprises, GVA can increase more than threefold.

Poor Technology Adoption- The use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools is low. Gains from tech adoption (digital payments, online marketplaces) are highly pronounced, yet micro-enterprises lag in utilizing basic IT tools which could enhance efficiency.

Policy Implications & Initiatives

To unlock the potential of this sector, policy must shift from "protection" to "promotion of growth."

Ease of Doing Business- Simplify regulatory norms to encourage voluntary formalisation.

Differentiated Credit- Move beyond simple microloans. Providing stage-appropriate credit is vital *Subsistence credit* for tiny units. *Working & Growth capital* for expanding units.

Digital Inclusion Programs- Expansion of digital infrastructure through

1. Digital MSME Scheme
2. ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce)
3. UDYAM Registration
4. DISHA (Digital Saksharta Abhiyan)

Note- These require local handholding and skills training to be effective.

Way Forward- A Roadmap for Transformation

Formalisation Drive- Incentivize the move from informal to formal by reducing compliance burdens and offering tangible benefits for registration**.**

Graded Credit Expansion- Link credit availability to the maturity stage of the enterprise (Micro $\rightarrow$ Small $\rightarrow$ Medium).

Technology & E-Commerce- Aggressively promote digital tools and platforms with mentorship to help micro-units access wider markets.

Skill Development Integration- Align vocational education with enterprise needs, focusing on-

1. Digital Literacy
2. Financial Management
3. Market Linkages

Integrated Ecosystem Approach- Ensure coordination between the Ministries of MSME, Skill Development, Finance, and IT to create a cohesive support system.

Monitoring & Evaluation- Utilize surveys like ASUSE (Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises) to assess impact and ensure policies are results-oriented.

Conclusion

India's path to creating "Big Jobs" lies in the transformation of its "Small Enterprises." By facilitating the transition of Own Account Enterprises (OAEs) into Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs) through credit, technology, and formalisation, India can unlock sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-small-enterprises-hold-key-to-job-growth-10411882/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. Childcare Isn't Just a Social Safety Net. It's a Lever for Growth(IE) -2

1. A Verdict That is an Abdication of Judicial Function(TH)

General Studies 2- Polity/Governance

Topic- Role of Governor- Discretionary powers, Article 200, relation with State Legislature.

A Verdict of Abdication- Timelines for Constitutional Functionaries

Introduction

The Supreme Court's recent judgment in the 16th Presidential Reference regarding the setting of timelines for constitutional authorities (President, Governors, Speakers) has sparked significant debate. While the Court's refusal to prescribe strict timeframes reflects judicial restraint, critics argue it constitutes an "abdication of judicial function." The central concern is that this reluctance allows constitutional silence to be weaponized, undermining the spirit of the Constitution and the doctrine of Constitutional Morality

The Constitutional Context- "Silence" on Timelines

Lack of Specificity- The Constitution of India does not prescribe specific time limits for actions required by high authorities like the President, Governors, or Speakers of Houses.

Open-Ended Nature- The framers left these provisions open-ended, trusting the high constitutional functionaries to act with dispatch and responsibility.

Judicial Restraint- The Supreme Court's reasoning in the recent verdict adheres strictly to the text—arguing that since the Constitution does not explicitly state a timeline, the Judiciary should not infer or impose one.

The Anomaly of the Speaker (Anti-Defection Law)

A major critique of the "no timeline" stance is visible in the functioning of the Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law).

Quasi-Judicial Role- Speakers function as quasi-judicial authorities when deciding disqualification petitions.

The Loophole- Assemblies have a fixed five-year term. However, the adjudication process for defection is open-ended.

Consequence- An elected member can defect and complete their entire term without facing disqualification simply because the Speaker delays the decision.

Undermining Democracy- This renders the anti-defection law ineffective and subverts the mandate of the electorate.

The Governor's Role- Weaponizing Article 200

The judgment effectively validates the growing trend of Governors delaying legislative business.

Indefinite Delays- Governors have increasingly withheld assent or delayed Bills passed by State Legislatures.

The "Pocket Veto" Issue- While Governors can return a Bill for reconsideration, they cannot constitutionally withhold assent *indefinitely*. Doing so acts as a "pocket veto," effectively neutralizing a law passed by an elected legislature.

Separation of Powers- The power to strike down a law as *ultra vires* belongs solely to the Constitutional Courts, not the Governor. By stalling bills, Governors are effectively usurping this judicial power.

Critique of the Verdict- An Irony of Interpretation

Legitimizing Inaction- By ruling that "no text means no timeline," the Court has unintentionally validated the partisan delays by Governors and Speakers.

Failure of Interpretation- The author argues the Court missed an opportunity to interpret "constitutional silence" in a way that protects the system from abuse.

Abdication of Duty- As the ultimate guardian of the Constitution, the Court is expected to intervene when constitutional processes are stalled, rather than hiding behind textual silence.

The Doctrine of Constitutional Morality

The analysis invokes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision to critique the judgment.

Ambedkar's Warning (1948)- He warned that the Constitution could be subverted not just by changing the text, but by altering administrative practice**s** (e.g., deliberate delays). He emphasized that "Constitutional Morality" is not a natural sentiment but must be cultivated.

Modern Application- Recent landmark judgments (e.g., Sabarimala, LGBTQIA+ rights) have relied on Constitutional Morality to interpret the text in harmony with evolving public conscience. The current verdict is seen as a regression from this progressive trend.

The Core Argument- The administrative details were left out of the Constitution because the framers trusted future generations and the Courts to uphold the *spirit* of the law. The Court's refusal to set timelines betrays that trust.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's reluctance to evolve a timeframe for constitutional functionaries' risks normalizing the subversion of democracy through administrative delay. By failing to check the "constitutional distortion" caused by partisan Speakers and Governors, the verdict weakens the very system it is meant to protect, highlighting a significant gap in internalizing the Constitutional Morality envisioned by the founding fathers.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-verdict-that-is-an-abdication-of-judicial-function/article70381516.ece

2. Childcare Isn't Just a Social Safety Net. It's a Lever for Growth(IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society

Topic- Role of Women and Women's Organizations**-** Challenges faced by working women, constraints on female labour force participation

The Unavoidable Growth Lever- Childcare as Soft Infrastructure

Introduction

India's ambition to achieve 8-10% annual economic growth faces a significant, often overlooked hurdle- the lack of robust childcare infrastructure. Moving beyond the traditional view of childcare as a mere social safety net, this analysis argues for its recognition as critical "soft infrastructure"—an economic springboard. By addressing the productivity drag caused by women leaving the workforce due to care duties, and by fostering early human capital development, investing in childcare is a non-negotiable strategy for securing India's demographic dividend.

The Economic Imperative- Childcare as Infrastructure

The absence of affordable childcare is not just a family issue but a systemic economic bottleneck.

Addressing Productivity Drag- Millions of women are forced to scale back work hours or exit the workforce entirely due to inaccessible or unaffordable childcare. This creates a "hidden" drag on national productivity, stalling growth ambitions.

Unlocking Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)- Reliable childcare enables women to take up jobs that match their skills and aspirations rather than settling for flexible but low-paying work.

Evidence from Southern States- States like Tamil Nadu and Telangana that invested in social infrastructure (hostels, childcare) now account for nearly three-fourths of women in manufacturing, proving the direct link between infrastructure and employment.

Improving Job Quality- Global evidence (e.g., Vietnam, Rio de Janeiro) demonstrates that accessible childcare does not just increase employment numbers; it shifts women into formal employment and increases productive working hours.

Institutional and Demographic Urgency

Institutional Anchor (NMECC)- To treat childcare as market-shaping infrastructure, a unified approach is required.

Proposal- Establish a National Mission on Early Childhood Care (NMECC) to converge efforts across the Ministries of Women & Child Development (WCD), Labour, Education, Health, and Industry.

The Demographic Deadline

Shrinking Window- Fertility rates are already below replacement levels in several states.

Aging Population- By 2050, one in five Indians is projected to be over 60.

Risk- Without immediate intervention, the demographic dividend risks turning into a deficit—a future workforce with poor capabilities and too few productive workers supporting an aging population.

A Hybrid Model for the Way Forward

The proposed strategy combines physical upgrades with digital innovation to ensure holistic development for both the child and the economy.

Component	Intervention Strategy	Real-world Examples & Evidence
Physical Infrastructure	Convert existing Anganwadis/crèches into full-day facilities, focusing on industrial belts and service hubs.	Telangana- Increased stipends to extend Anganwadi hours. Tamil Nadu- Added half-time workers to double instructional time for preschoolers.
Human Capital Support	Mobilize para-professionals (SHG members, local youth) to assist Anganwadi workers, reducing their burden.	Meghalaya- Used short-term fellowships. Chandigarh- Utilized internships to bridge the gap.
Early Stimulation (0-3 Years)	Focus on simple parent-child interactions, recognizing that 80% of brain development happens in the first 1,000 days.	Odisha- A study showed that weekly digital/peer learning sessions (mothers' groups) significantly improved children's cognitive skills.
Digital Tools	Use "bite-sized" media and personalized nudges (via WhatsApp/Poshan Tracker) to turn daily routines into learning moments.	Poshan Tracker- Government leveraging this tool to provide early learning guidance directly to parents.

Conclusion

Childcare is the "missing link" that bridges social justice with economic ambition. Treating Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as essential soft infrastructure is a strategic necessity. A unified, hybrid approach involving government mandate, business innovation, and civil society outreach is required to support women's employment today while building the capabilities of the workforce of tomorrow.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/childcare-isnt-just-a-social-safety-net-its-a-lever-for-growth-10413871/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. The Stark Reality of Educational Costs in India(TH)

General Studies 2- Education

The NSS 80th Round (2025) findings highlight a troubling trend in India's basic schooling landscape- despite constitutional guarantees the Right to Free and Compulsory Education for all children aged 6 to 14 years under Article 21A and policy ambitions (National Education Policy 2020), household expenditure on education is rising, and access is becoming increasingly unequal due to growing reliance on private schools and coaching .

Key Findings from the NSS 80th Round Survey

Enrolment Trends (Public vs. Private Education)- At the national level, enrolment remains divided between government and private schools 55.9% in government schools; 11.3% in private aided schools; 31.9% in private unaided schools.

Urban–Rural Divide

Urban areas- 51.4% of students attends private schools.

Rural areas- Only 24.3% attend private schools.

The gender gap in private school enrolment is modest, 34% of boys versus 29.5% of girls.

Rising Private Enrolment Over Time- Private enrolment has increased at all education levels, both in rural and urban areas, compared with the 75th NSS Round (2017–18). It underscores a growing preference for private education often associated with better perceived quality but higher costs.

Cost of Education

Rural government schools- 25.3% of students pays fees.

Urban government schools- 34.7% pays fees.

In contrast, 98% of private school students, rural or urban, pay course fees.

Household Consumption Expenditure (HCES 2023–24)- Pre-primary private school costs equal the monthly income of the poorest 5% of households. Higher secondary private school costs match the income of households in the third income decile. It clearly demonstrates that education has become a heavy financial burden, even at the basic level.

Private Coaching- Hidden Cost of Learning

Incidence of Private Tutoring- Private tuition, now a parallel education system, is widely prevalent

Rural areas- 25.5% of children takes private coaching.

Urban areas- 30.7% of children does so.

Participation increases with grade level, from around 10–13% at pre-primary to over 40% at higher secondary.

Expenditure on Private Coaching- The average annual cost of private coaching is ₹7,066 in rural and ₹13,026 in urban areas, which add significantly to the already high cost of schooling.

Socio-Economic Correlates of Private Tutoring

Cost Burden and Inequality- 80th Round of NSS shows that private school students pay up to 9 times more than those in government schools. Urban households, especially in states like Telangana and Delhi, spend significantly more on education, including tuition, transport, and digital devices. The financial burden is disproportionately high for lower-income families, who often cut back on essentials to afford private schooling or coaching.

Policy Blind Spots- There is limited regulation or oversight of the coaching industry, while the **NEP (2020)** acknowledges the issue of private tutoring. The lack of affordable, high-quality public education options pushes families toward private alternatives, reinforcing socio-economic divides.

Parental Aspirations and Social Mobility- Families with higher household income, parental education, and urban residence view coaching as an investment in academic success and social prestige. Many private school teachers are underpaid and underqualified despite high private school fees, compelling parents to spend even more on private tutoring.

Inequality and the Decline of Public Schooling- Free education is a constitutional right. But costly private education is increasingly the norm, perpetuating inequality. Affluent families can afford private schools and coaching, poorer families rely on underfunded public schools, leading to divergent learning outcomes.

Ongoing Efforts to Improve Public Schooling in India

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018)- Integrates three earlier schemes- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE). It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-primary to Class XII.

PM SHRI Schools (2022)- To develop over 14,500 model schools across India. It focuses onModern infrastructure with smart classrooms;

1. Holistic, inquiry-based pedagogy aligned with NEP 2020;
2. Emphasis on environmental sustainability and experiential learning;

National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR)- It aims to create a unified digital infrastructure for education. It includes

1. DIKSHA platform for e-content and teacher training;
2. UDISE+ for real-time school data;
3. Digital learning resources in regional languages;

Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM POSHAN)- It aims to improve nutritional status and school attendance.

1. Over 11 crore children in government and government-aided schools.
2. Inclusion of pre-primary children and fortified food in some states.

Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme (Union Budget 2025–26)- It aims to provide digital-format textbooks in Indian languages to enhance comprehension and accessibility.

Way Forward- Strengthening Publicly Funded Schools

Addressing inequities requires urgent systemic reforms. Strengthening public education is crucial to ensure that education remains a right, not a privilege. The Journal of Development Studies (2024) finds that private tuition is negatively associated with school quality, students in better schools depend less on tutoring. Improving teaching standards, infrastructure, and accountability in government schools can reduce dependence on private tuition and restore public confidence in free education.

Conclusion

India's constitutional vision of free and universal education remains far from reality. Education is becoming one of the largest household expenditures for many Indian families with rising private school enrolment, high tuition costs, and increasing reliance on private coaching. India needs to urgently revitalize public schooling, ensure equitable funding, and uphold the constitutional promise of 'education for all' to realize the NEP 2020 goal of universal education by 2030.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-stark-reality-of-educational-costs-in-india/article70385413.ece

2. The U.S. has released its first National Security Strategy under Trump's second term.

General Studies 3- International Relations

About National Security Strategy

Legal Basis- The U.S. National Security Strategy is mandated by the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986.

Nature of the NSS- It is a grand strategy that reveals how the US views the world for the coming years.

1. The strategy exhibits a paradox the desire to maintain Global Dominance while pursuing Isolationism.
2. This approach is termed Transactional Realism**,** meaning the US seeks to assert dominance but is unwilling to bear the cost or security burden for its allies.

Foreign Policy Priorities Outlined in the Strategy

End of Mass Migration- Washington has identified that the era of mass migration has ended.

Protection of Core Rights and Liberties- Core rights and liberties, including freedom of speech and religion, need to be protected more than ever.

Reduced Global Burden- The U.S. will no longer carry the full burden of global security**.**

Atlas Syndrome- The feeling of carrying the weight of the world on one's shoulders, especially in the context of reducing responsibilities or retrenchment. Derived from the story of the Titan Atlas from Greek mythology, who is forced to hold up the sky.

Shepherding Peace Deals- It will continue brokering peace deals worldwide to solidify U.S. influence abroad.

Economic Security- Economic security is a top foreign policy priority. Key measures include balanced trade, secure access to critical materials, reindustrialisation, stronger defence and energy infrastructure, and leveraging Wall Street and global digital finance.

Concerns Regarding Europe

Patronising Tone- The NSS warns Europe of possible civilizational erasure due to its economic decline It faults Germany and EU countries with unstable minority governments whose policy actions do not match their stated desire for peace in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Germany's Pushback- Germany's Foreign Minister stated that issues of freedom and governance in Germany do not belong in the U.S. NSS and that the country does not need external advice.

Implications of NSS

Anxiety About the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)- The NSS has raised concerns about NATO's effectiveness and cohesion**.**

Risk of Autocracy- By making allies take greater regional responsibility, the U.S. may reduce its own role, giving autocrats more freedom to act aggressively and violate international norms.

Conclusion

The new U.S. National Security Strategy signals a shift toward transactional realism, combining assertive global ambitions with reduced burdens. While prioritising economic security and selective engagement, it risks weakening alliances, unsettling Europe, and emboldening autocratic powers worldwide.

Source- https-//timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/trumps-national-security-strategy-2025-released-india-crucial-era-of-mass-migration-is-over/articleshow/125795567.cms

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

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2. From Licence Raj to Jan Vishwas, What We Need to Set Our Entrepreneurs Free(IE) -2

1. A Critical Story that a Chunk of the Media Missed(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment

IMF's Assessment of India's National Accounts Data

Introduction

The recent release of India's Quarter 2 national accounts data has brought to light a significant contradiction. While the official data showed an unexpectedly strong 8.2% growth, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) simultaneously raised serious concerns about the methodology used to compile these statistics. The IMF assigned India's national accounts—including GDP and GVA—a 'C' grade, the second-lowest rating possible. This analysis highlights the structural flaws in India's economic data and the media's failure to adequately report on it.

Media Coverage- A Crisis of Silence

Despite the severity of the IMF's observation, the issue received minimal public attention due to inadequate media coverage.

Limited Reporting- Most media outlets ignored the IMF's reservations. The Hindu was the notable exception, featuring the story prominently on its front page ("IMF gives 'C' grade for India's national accounts statistics", November 28, 2025).

Silence of Financial Press- The "pink papers" (business newspapers), which are expected to scrutinize economic data, largely overlooked the report.

Buried News- A few outlets that did carry the story relegated it to the inside pages, making it difficult for the public to notice.

Impact- This lack of coverage leaves citizens uninformed and ill-equipped to understand the true state of the economy, reflecting a failure of journalism to act as a watchdog.

The Core Methodology Issue

The primary concern raised by the IMF revolves around how India calculates the growth of its vast informal (unorganized) sector.

The Proxy Problem- India estimates growth in the unorganized sector by using the formal organized sector as a proxy.

Scale of the Sector- Even after excluding agriculture, the unorganized sector contributes nearly 30% of India's GDP.

Fundamental Question- The reliance on proxies raises doubts about whether India has a reliable measurement framework for such a large economic segment or if the GDP figures are merely "informed approximations."

Reliability Concerns- The Divergence of Sectors

Experts like Pronab Sen and Arun Kumar argue that using the organized sector to represent the unorganized sector is fundamentally flawed, especially during economic shocks.

False Assumption- The methodology assumes that both sectors move in the same direction at the same speed.

Reality of Shocks- During major disruptions—such as Demonetization, the GST rollout, and the COVID-19 pandemic—the organized sector often grew (or recovered faster) while the unorganized sector declined or stagnated.

Overestimation- Because the proxy (organized sector) was growing, the data likely overestimated the performance of the shrinking unorganized sector.

Caution on Headline Numbers- Consequently, impressive figures like the 8.2% quarterly growth must be viewed with caution, as they rely heavily on assumptions rather than comprehensive data.

Structural Challenges and Future Outlook

The text suggests that these data issues are structural and unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

Institutional Limitations- The IMF's 'C' grade reflects deep-rooted issues that cannot be fixed quickly.

New Series Update- The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is working on updating the GDP base year and methodology, with a new series expected by February 2026.

Persisting Doubts- However, experts remain skeptical. Pronab Sen frankly states, "I don't think we can" adequately address the IMF's concerns immediately, primarily because robust, real-time data collection for the unorganized sector does not exist.

Conclusion

The IMF's 'C' grade serves as a critical warning about the structural weaknesses in India's economic data system. Updating the base year alone will not solve the problem of accurately measuring the unorganized sector. The situation is compounded by the media's under-reporting, which weakens informed public debate and policy scrutiny. True economic accountability requires both better data infrastructure and a media that acts as a vigilant watchdog.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-critical-story-that-a-chunk-of-the-media-missed/article70389725.ece

2. From Licence Raj to Jan Vishwas, What We Need to Set Our Entrepreneurs Free(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Investment models; Ease of Doing Business.

Jan Vishwas Siddhant – Unlocking Entrepreneurial Potential

Introduction

India's entrepreneurial ecosystem has historically struggled under the weight of "Regulatory Cholesterol"—a legacy of the Licence Raj characterised by excessive prior approvals, complex compliance, and disproportionate punishments. Despite the economic liberalisation of 1991, structural bottlenecks remain. The proposed Jan Vishwas Siddhant aims to dismantle these barriers, shifting the governance model from one of suspicion and control to one of trust and facilitation, thereby unlocking the potential of millions of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Regulatory Pathologies Hindering Entrepreneurship

The text identifies specific structural flaws (pathologies) in the current regulatory framework that act as barriers to entry and growth.

The Burden of Prior Approval

Permission Culture- Entrepreneurs are forced to seek thousands of permissions, No Objection Certificates (NOCs), and licences from various central and state ministries.

Stifled Innovation- Innovation is inherently "permissionless," yet administrative hurdles curtail the fundamental right to practice any profession (Article 19).

Instrument Proliferation

Bureaucratic Overload- Beyond Acts and Rules, the administrative state churns out thousands of non-legislative instruments (circulars, guidelines, SOPs).

Scale- Estimates suggest employers face over 12,000 such instruments, creating deep confusion and inefficiency.

Compliance Blind Spot

Cumulative Burden- Policymakers often ignore the aggregate weight of regulations. As of 2025, compliance obligations reached over 69,000.

Need for Rationalisation- There is a critical need to replicate reforms like the 75% reduction in labour law compliance to decrease regulatory friction.

Enforcing the Unenforceable

Breeding Corruption- Laws that are practically unenforceable inevitably lead to corruption and administrative inefficiency.

Requirement- Effective regulation demands realistic enforcement capabilities and performance management of civil servants.

The Punitive Process

Over-criminalisation- Minor economic offences (e.g., cheque bouncing) are often criminalised, clogging the judicial system and penalising honest errors.

Solution- A shift towards proportional punishments and risk-based inspections is necessary.

Absence of a 'Single Source of Truth'

Opacity- There is no comprehensive, unified database of all applicable Acts, rules, and notifications, leading to compliance errors and harassment.

Jan Vishwas Siddhant- Transformational Reforms

The Jan Vishwas Siddhant proposes a fundamental overhaul of the regulatory architecture.

Perpetual Self-Registration

Paradigm Shift- Moving to a principle where "Everything is permitted until prohibited."

Mechanism- Replacing licences with self-registration for all sectors except those affecting national security, public safety, human health, and the environment.

Risk-Based Inspections & Decriminalisation

Reduced Interference- Inspections will be randomised, risk-based, and potentially third-party to minimize bureaucratic harassment.

Proportionality- Universal application of decriminalisation principles to ensure penalties match the offence.

Digitisation and Transparency

Digital Backbone- All regulatory filings to be digital.

Single Truth- Establishing IndiaCode and e-Gazette as the authoritative "single source of truth" for all laws.

Accountability- Annual Regulatory Impact Assessments to track compliance burdens and punishments.

Empowering Entrepreneurs

From *Ijaazat* to *Koshish*- Shifting policy focus from seeking permission (*ijaazat*) to enabling effort and experimentation (*koshish*).

Outcome- Fostering an iterative business culture that nurtures innovation and job creation.

Way Forward

To fully realise the potential of these reforms, the text suggests a comprehensive roadmap.

Expand Trust-Based Regulation- Extend perpetual self-registration to more sectors, strictly maintaining exceptions only for critical areas (security, health, environment). Cultivate a culture of voluntary compliance.

Digital Governance Integration- Fully integrate IndiaCode and e-Gazette to create a live, verifiable repository of all legal obligations. Ensure all compliance requirements are transparent, dated, and verifiable.

Standardise Decriminalisation- Implement proportionate penalties across all sectors. Decriminalise minor administrative and commercial offences to clear court backlogs and boost investor confidence.

Institutionalise Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)

Mandatory Review- Ministries must conduct annual reviews of compliance burdens and enforcement efficiency.

Goal- Use these assessments to simplify rules and remove obsolete regulations.

Capacity Building- Train civil servants to shift from a mindset of "control" to "facilitation." Link performance metrics to Ease of Doing Business outcomes.

Encourage Entrepreneurial Mindset- Provide mentoring, financial facilitation, and skill support to SMEs. Shift the ecosystem to support "freedom to try."

Feedback Loops- Establish a framework for stakeholder consultation with fixed timelines. Continuously monitor implementation to ensure reforms remain adaptive.

Conclusion

The Jan Vishwas Siddhant is not just a policy tweak but a paradigm shift from control to trust. By aggressively removing the regulatory "cholesterol" that stifles enterprise, it seeks to transform India into a hub of innovation. The ultimate goal is to replace the "fear of permission" with the "freedom to try," thereby strengthening India's global economic competitiveness and fostering non-farm job creation.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/from-licence-raj-to-jan-vishwas-what-we-need-to-set-our-entrepreneurs-free-10417633/

Editorial of the Day – 15.12.2025

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2. From Brazil, a lesson on antibiotic use for India(IE) -2

1. Time to pause- On retail inflation, data takeaways(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment (Monetary Policy, Inflation targeting, and Consumer Price Index (CPI) reforms.)

Introduction

In late 2025, India's retail inflation has plummeted to historically low levels. This decline is not necessarily a signal of permanently low prices but is driven primarily by favorable base effects and the disproportionate influence of food prices within the current Consumer Price Index (CPI) framework. While this environment has allowed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to execute an aggressive monetary easing cycle, the current economic landscape suggests that a cautious "pause" is now necessary. The central bank must account for the temporary nature of these trends and impending structural changes to inflation measurement.

Retail Inflation- Trends and Statistical Drivers

The recent inflation data reflects a sharp downward trajectory, largely influenced by statistical anomalies rather than a purely structural cooling of prices.

Record Lows- Retail inflation in November 2025 dropped to 0.7%, marking the second-lowest level ever recorded. This followed October 2025, which saw the lowest inflation in the series.

The Role of Base Effects- The primary driver for this dip is the High Base Effect. Inflation was significantly high in the previous year (6.2% in October 2024 and 5.5% in November 2024). When current prices are compared against these high historical values, the resulting inflation percentage appears artificially low.

Future Outlook- This statistical advantage is temporary. The base effect is expected to fade gradually by **July 2026**, after which inflation numbers are likely to normalize and trend higher.

Issues with CPI Composition and Food Prices

The current CPI structure is heavily skewed, making headline inflation highly sensitive to volatile components.

Food Dominance- The current CPI basket assigns a massive weight of roughly 46% to food and inflation figure.

Recent Contraction- In November 2025, food prices contracted by 2.8%. This single factor significantly pulled down the overall inflation rate.

Statistical Illusion- Much like the headline number, this food price decline is largely statistical, measured against a very high base of 8.2% food inflation recorded in November 2024.

Upcoming Structural Reforms- The New CPI Series

To address the limitations of the current framework, the government is poised to introduce structural changes to how inflation is calculated.

Timeline- A new CPI series is expected to be released in Q1 of 2026–27.

Base Year Revision- The base year will be updated from the outdated 2012 to 2024. This is crucial for correcting the mismatch between the index and current consumption patterns.

Weightage Correction- The new series will revise weightages to reduce the over-dominance of food. This will provide a more accurate reflection of how Indian households actually spend their income today.

Impact- The new base year will help neutralize extreme base effects, significantly improving the quality and reliability of inflation measurement.

Monetary Policy Implications and Actions

Despite the known flaws in the current data, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has used these

low readings to support growth.
Aggressive Easing- In December 2025, the MPC cut policy rates by 25 basis points, bringing the rate down to **5.25%**.
Cumulative Impact- Throughout 2025, the RBI has delivered cumulative rate cuts totaling 125 basis points, marking the most significant easing cycle since 2019.

The Argument for a Policy "Pause"

The analysis suggests that the RBI should now halt further rate cuts for the following strategic reasons-
Assessment of Transmission- A pause is required to observe how the 125 basis points of cuts already delivered are transmitting through the economy. The MPC needs time to see if these cuts are effectively stimulating demand and investment.
Fiscal Policy Synergy- With the Union Budget 2026 recently passed, the MPC should wait to see the inflationary or expansionary effects of fiscal policy before making further monetary adjustments.
Waiting for New Metrics- Before cutting rates further, it is prudent to study the new CPI series. The revised weightages could fundamentally alter how future rate changes impact inflation, and acting on old data might be premature.

Conclusion

The sharp decline in retail inflation to below 1% in late 2025 should be viewed as a temporary statistical phenomenon rather than a permanent conquest of price pressures. As base effects wane and the new CPI series reshapes the inflation narrative, price pressures may re-emerge. Having already delivered substantial stimulus, the prudent course for the RBI is to pause, monitor the transmission of previous cuts, and recalibrate its strategy once the impact of the 2026 Budget and the new inflation metrics becomes clear.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/time-to-pause-on-retail-inflation-data-takeaways/article70395261.ece#google_vignette

2. From Brazil, a lesson on antibiotic use for India(IE)

General Studies 2- Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Introduction

India has emerged as the global epicenter of the Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) crisis, driven largely by the rampant and unchecked preventive use of antibiotics. While Indian medical practices often rely on antibiotics for routine viral ailments, Brazil offers a contrasting model of strict regulation and disciplined medical practice. The comparison highlights that curbing AMR is not a matter of medical expertise, but rather of effective enforcement and a systemic shift from "preventive" to "curative" antibiotic usage.

The Crisis of Antibiotic Misuse in India

Current practices in India reveal a systemic reliance on antibiotics for conditions where they are medically ineffective or unnecessary.
Rampant Prescription for Viral Infections- There is a widespread trend of prescribing antibiotics for common viral infections like coughs, colds, and flu. Since antibiotics act only against bacteria, their use in viral cases offers no benefit and accelerates resistance.
The "Preventive" Mindset- Doctors and patients often favor the preventive use of antibiotics out of fear of potential secondary infections. This leads to a culture of "quick fixes" rather than evidence-based medical observation.
Agricultural and Environmental Contamination- Misuse is not limited to humans; antibiotics are extensively used as growth promoters in livestock.This allows drug-resistant bacteria to survive in animals and enter the human food chain, compounding the resistance crisis.

Lessons from Brazil- A Model of Discipline

Brazil provides a successful case study in managing antibiotic consumption through strict regulatory

frameworks and disciplined healthcare delivery.

Mandatory Regulation- Unlike the easy availability of drugs in India, Brazil enforces a strict policy where a local doctor's prescription is mandatory for purchasing antibiotics. Over-the-counter sales are effectively banned.

Curative vs. Preventive Approach- Brazilian healthcare providers prioritize curative use (treating an established infection) over preventive use. There is a medical discipline to allow minor bacterial growth or viral infections to resolve naturally via the body's immune system, intervening only when serious symptoms arise.

Systemic Enforcement- The success of Brazil's model lies in the efficient enforcement of prescription norms, ensuring that the rational use of drugs is not just a guideline but a practice.

India's National Response- The NAP-AMR

India has recognized the threat at a policy level, but implementation remains the bottleneck.

The National Action Plan (NAP-AMR)- Formulated initially for 2017–2021 and recently revised for the **2025–2029** period. It adopts a multi-sectoral approach covering human health, agriculture, and environmental waste management.

Barriers to Implementation- Despite the plan, execution has been weak due to-

1. **Regulatory Gaps-** Lack of stringent checks on pharmacy sales.
2. **Limited Surveillance-** Inadequate monitoring of resistance trends.
3. **Cultural Factors-** A healthcare culture that prioritizes immediate symptom relief over long-term antibiotic stewardship.

Significance and Threat Assessment

Long-Term Public Health Risk- AMR threatens to render antibiotics ineffective for serious infections, potentially taking modern medicine back to a pre-antibiotic era where minor injuries could be fatal.

The Necessity of Behavioral Change- The key takeaway from the Brazil comparison is that regulations must be paired with a shift in mindset. Public awareness and doctor discipline are as vital as government policy.

Way Forward- A Roadmap for India

To combat the AMR crisis effectively, India must move beyond policy formulation to strict ground-level execution.

Strict Enforcement of Regulations- Immediate crackdown on over-the-counter (OTC) antibiotic sales without valid prescriptions.

Operationalizing NAP-AMR- Effective implementation of the revised NAP-AMR (2025–29) across all sectors (Human, Animal, Environment).

Behavioral Modification- Launch extensive public awareness campaigns to educate patients that antibiotics do not cure viral fevers. Train physicians to resist patient pressure for quick-fix prescriptions.

Adopting the 'One Health' Approach- Integrate monitoring systems to control AMR emerging from livestock, poultry, and environmental sources, acknowledging that human health is linked to animal and environmental health.

Conclusion

The editorial concludes that India's struggle with Antimicrobial Resistance is not a failure of medical knowledge but a systemic failure of regulation and enforcement. To safeguard public health, India must mirror the Brazilian approach- enforcing strict prescription laws, ending the practice of preventive dosing, and fostering multi-sectoral cooperation to ensure antibiotics remain effective for future generations.

Source- https-//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251215/282162182549218?srsltid=AfmBOooGOoGPxwwPA42c5UUKHdDiMqgqaE7bX4lE7_GmUcFwo8Glxuzt

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 16.12.2025

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2. MGNREGA needs reform but changes fray the safety net -2

1. A broad-based development models

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment. (Inclusive growth; Investment models; Industrial policy; Infrastructure (Energy, Ports, Roads)

Tamil Nadu – A Broad-Based Development Model

Introduction-Tamil Nadu (T.N.) has emerged as a national benchmark for a "broad-based development model," successfully integrating robust industrial growth with extensive social welfare and environmental sustainability. With a diversified economy and progressive governance, it has become the second-largest state economy in India, demonstrating that economic efficiency and social equity can coexist.

Macro-Economic Performance (GSDP)

The state has demonstrated resilience and high growth, outperforming national averages significantly.

Nominal Growth- The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices expanded by 16% in 2024–25, rising from ₹26.88 lakh crore (2023–24) to ₹31.19 lakh crore.

Real Growth (Constant Prices)- T.N. clocked an impressive 11.2% growth in 2024–25, making it the fastest-growing state in India (significantly higher than the national average of 6.5%).

Sustained Momentum- The state has maintained consistency over the last three years 2021–22- 15.91%, 2022–23- 14.47%, 2023–24- 13.34%

Sectoral Analysis- The Engines of Growth

Manufacturing and Industrial Powerhouse- The secondary sector is the core driver, characterized by high employment and export capabilities.

Comparative Advantage- In the last four years, manufacturing GSDP rose by ₹1.46 lakh crore, which is nearly double the increase recorded by Maharashtra (₹0.71 lakh crore).

Growth Rate- Ranked 1st nationally in four-year average real manufacturing growth (9.38%).

Employment Hub- Hosts 40,121 factories. Employs 24.75 lakh factory workers (Top national position in factory employment).

MSME Ecosystem- Ranks 3rd nationally with over 39 lakh Udyam-registered MSMEs.

Export Leadership- Merchandise exports nearly doubled from $26.15 billion (2020–21) to $52.07 billion (2024–25).

Sectoral Leader- Electronics, Textiles, and Leather.

Runner-up- Engineering exports.

Infrastructure & Energy

Industrial Corridors- The only state where *every* district is covered under one or more industrial corridors.

Power Capacity- Installed capacity rose from 35,139 MW to 42,772 MW (2021–25), ensuring energy security for industries.

Services Sector & Investment Climate

The services sector complements the industrial base, transitioning towards a knowledge economy.

GVA Contribution- Services contribute 53.6% to the State's Gross Value Added (GVA).

Growth (2024–25)- Recorded a real growth of 11.3%.

Key Sub-sectors- Public Administration- 14.2%, Real Estate- 12.42%, Transport & Communication- 11.29%

FDI Inflows- Consistently ranks among top states for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). FDI Equity inflows increased to **$3,681 million** in 2024–25, defying the national trend of declining FDI.
Global Investors Meet 2024- Signed 631 MoUs worth ₹6.64 trillion.
Overseas Outreach- Commitments of ₹23,000 crore secured from the U.S., U.K., and Germany.

Human Capital and Social Welfare (The "Dravidian Model")

The state's unique selling point is its "Welfare-Led Social Development," ensuring that economic gains translate into human development.

Key Welfare Schemes

Women's Empowerment- Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam (Financial assistance), Magalir Vidiyal Payanam Thittam (Free bus travel for women).
Education & Youth- *Naan* Mudhalvan Thittam (Skill development), *Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme* (Nutrition/School attendance).
Social Security- Mudhalvarin Kaakkum Karangal *Scheme*.

Human Development Outcomes

Education

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)- Ranks 1st in higher education at 47% (National Avg- 28.4%).
Female GER- Ranks 3rd at 47.3%.
Institutions- Highest number of technical institutions (955) in India.

Health

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)- Low at 12 per 1,000 live births.
Life Expectancy- Ranks 3rd nationally at 73.4 years.
Poverty- One of the lowest Multidimensional Poverty levels in India at 1.43%.

Fiscal Stability and Rankings

Despite high welfare spending, the state has maintained fiscal prudence.

Rankings

1st- Export Preparedness Index.
2nd- Credit-Deposit Ratio (120.5%), indicating high lending for economic activity.
3rd- Per Capita NSDP Income (₹3.62 lakh).

Fiscal Health

Fiscal Deficit- Projected at 3% of GSDP (2025–26), adhering to fiscal discipline targets.
Debt Management- Debt-to-GSDP ratio declined from 27% (2021–22) to 26% (2024–25), despite reduced central transfers.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's trajectory offers a blueprint for inclusive capitalism. By leveraging a highly skilled workforce, robust infrastructure, and a welfare-oriented governance structure, the state has insulated itself from global uncertainties. With sustained growth in manufacturing and services, alongside controlled inflation and fiscal deficits, Tamil Nadu is firmly on course to achieve its ambitious target of becoming a $1 trillion economy by 2031.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-broad-based-development-model/article70399703.ece#-~-text=It%20also%20ranks%20first%20in,in%20achieving%20broad%2Dbased%20development.

2. MGNREGA needs reform but changes fray the safety net

General Studies 2- Polity/Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Introduction

The Government of India has proposed a significant structural overhaul of the rural employment landscape by introducing the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Grameen (VB-

GRAMG) Bill. This bill seeks to replace the existing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The primary objective is to modernize rural employment by increasing guaranteed workdays and integrating advanced technology. However, the proposed shift from a "demand-driven" model to a "normative allocation" model, coupled with changes in fiscal federalism (funding patterns), has sparked a debate on balancing efficiency with the sanctity of the social safety net.

Key Features of VB-GRAMG

The VB-GRAMG Bill introduces four major pillars of reform

Expanded Guaranteed Employment

Increased Duration- The bill promises 125 days of guaranteed wage employment per rural household annually, a significant increase from the statutory 100 days provided under MGNREGA.

Agricultural Synchronization- It introduces a 60-day restricted period during the peak sowing and harvesting seasons.

Rationale- This is designed to prevent labor shortages in the agricultural sector, ensuring that government schemes do not compete with private farming needs during critical crop cycles.

Advanced Technology Integration

To align with the vision of a "Digital India" and reduce system leakages, the bill mandates

Biometric Authentication- Mandatory for worker verification**.**

Real-time Monitoring- Utilization of GPS monitoring and mobile-based tracking of worksites**.**

Artificial Intelligence (AI)- Deployment of AI tools specifically for fraud detection and data analysis.

Objective- To enhance transparency and ensure accountability in the disbursement of wages, addressing long-standing complaints of ghost beneficiaries.

Restructured Fiscal Design (Funding Pattern)

A major shift in "Fiscal Federalism" is proposed

Centre-State Split- Unlike MGNREGA, which was primarily centrally funded, VB-GRAMG proposes a 60-40 cost-sharing ratio between the Centre and States.

Special Category Exceptions- The Centre will retain 90% funding only for Northeastern and Himalayan states.

Implication- This significantly increases the financial burden on state exchequers.

Allocation Mechanism (Top-Down Approach)

Normative Allocation- The bill envisages a model where the Centre allocates funds based on norms/estimates rather than real-time demand.

Shift from Legacy Model- This reverses the core ethos of MGNREGA, which was a bottom-up, demand-driven scheme where funds were released based on work demanded by the Gram Sabhas.

Critical Analysis and Implications

Strengths (The Case for Reform)

Enhanced Income Security- The provision of 125 days of employment directly translates to higher potential income for rural households, addressing rural distress more aggressively.

Reduction in Leakages- The alignment with NITI Aayog's recommendations for e-governance (AI, GPS) is expected to curb corruption, ghost workers, and fund misappropriation.

Support for Agriculture- By restricting public works during the 60-day sowing/harvesting window, the bill protects the agricultural supply chain, ensuring farmers have access to labor when it is most needed for food production**.**

Concerns (The Challenges)

Fiscal Burden on States- States with weaker fiscal health may struggle to meet the 40% matching grant.

Precedent- Similar issues were observed in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), where delays in state subsidy payments led to scheme failures. If states cannot pay their share, wage payments to workers will be delayed.
Centralization Risks- Moving away from a demand-driven model to centralized (normative) allocation risks a mismatch between resources and needs.
Impact- High-demand districts might face under-provisioning of funds, undermining local planning. This contradicts the Ministry of Rural Development's own past evaluations favoring bottom-up planning.
Erosion of the Safety Net- Critics argue that repealing MGNREGA—a rights-based statute—dilutes the legal guarantee of work.
Political Optics- There is apprehension that this may weaken the safety net for marginalized groups (SC/ST/Women) who rely heavily on this scheme for survival.

Way Forward

To ensure VB-GRAMG succeeds without compromising social security, the following measures are recommended-
Flexible Funding Model- The Centre should consider retaining full or majority funding (beyond 60%) for economically backward states to prevent wage delays that could cripple the scheme's credibility.
Hybrid Planning Approach- Balance the top-down allocation with local demand sensitivity. Mechanisms must be in place for districts and Gram Sabhas to communicate real-time spikes in employment demand to the Centre.
Inclusive Technology- While expanding AI and biometric oversight, safeguards must be introduced to ensure technology does not become an exclusion error for illiterate, elderly, or digitally unskilled workers.
Livelihood Safeguards during Restricted Periods- Careful monitoring is required to ensure the 60-day agricultural restriction does not leave landless laborers (who do not own farms) without income during those months. Complementary skill development and alternative livelihood programs should be introduced to build rural resilience.
Institutionalized Accountability- Establish an independent monitoring body to conduct periodic social audits. Reports on employment generation, fund utilization, and social impact should be made publicly accessible to maintain trust.

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill represents a bold step towards modernizing India's rural employment framework through technology and increased workdays. However, the shift in fiscal burden to states and the centralization of allocation pose significant risks. For the reform to be truly effective, it must adopt a balanced approach that combines administrative efficiency with the flexibility of local demand, ensuring that the safety net for the most vulnerable remains intact.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/nrega-needs-reform-but-changes-fray-safety-net-10422041/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 17.12.2025

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2. Indian Communism is 100 Years Old and It's Too Early to Write its Obituary(IE) -2

1. The Three Revolutions Reshaping American Power(TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests**.**

Introduction- The Architecture of Cruelty

The text argues that the United States is undergoing a fundamental transformation in its statecraft, characterized by a unifying thread called the "Architecture of Cruelty." This framework is defined not as accidental harm, but as a system where harm is foreseen, normalised, and deliberately deployed.

This shift is driven by the alignment of three major developments-

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's Proposal- A suggestion to reshape the G-20 into an exclusive inner caucus, marginalising emerging economies.

The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS)- A formal document reflecting a shift towards ideological exclusion and security-first logic.

The Heritage Foundation's Blueprint (Restoring America's Promise 2025–26)- A policy roadmap providing the ideological foundation for these changes.

Together, these signal a coordinated restructuring of political morality, foreign policy, and global economic governance.

Revolution I- The Shrinking of Civic Space (Internal Rupture)

This revolution fundamentally alters the domestic moral and bureaucratic landscape of the U.S.

Dismantling Moral Foundations- The political project of Mr. Trump has replaced traditional civic restraint and responsibility. Transgression is now viewed as authenticity, and the erosion of shame is utilised as a political asset.

The New Security Doctrine (2025 NSS)- Cultural cohesion, ideological alignment, and demographic stability are redefined as national security imperatives. Domestic culture is framed through a security lens, treating independent institutions not as correctives but as obstacles to sovereign autonomy.

Bureaucratic Overhaul-The Heritage blueprint advocates for a massive institutional remake. This includes ideological vetting and large-scale personnel turnover to ensure alignment with the new agenda.

Permissive Cruelty- Hardship resulting from administrative purges and punitive regulations is absorbed into governance. Suffering is met with indifference rather than recognised as harm.

Revolution II- Foreign Policy Based on Conditionality (External Shift)

The 2025 NSS marks a sharp departure from the traditional U.S. role of providing institutional stability.

Transactional Alliances-Alliances are no longer assumed permanent; they are treated as conditional contracts. Obligations are constantly reassessed based on immediate utility rather than shared long-term values.

Revival of the Monroe Doctrine- Prioritisation of the Western Hemisphere over traditional focuses like Europe or the Indo-Pacific. Signals a return to regional dominance rather than global management.

Migration as Security- Migration is elevated from a domestic policy issue to a core national security threat, reshaping foreign policy priorities to focus on border control.

Institutional Downgrading- International bodies (e.g., UN, WTO) are recast as constraints on U.S. sovereignty rather than amplifiers of U.S. power. Multilateralism is viewed as a violation of sovereignty; allied cooperation is judged by ideological conformity rather than capability.
Selective Dominance- The strategy is neither pure isolationism nor realism. It is assertion where leverage is high and retreat where costs rise.
Systemic Impact- This leads to fragile alliances, emboldened revisionist powers, and a fragmented global order.

Revolution III- Economic Restructuring (Inequality by Design)

The economic revolution seeks to institutionalise a tiered global economy.
Concentrated Governance- Rubio's G-20 proposal signals a division between "rule-makers" (powerful states) and "rule-takers" (emerging economies). Decision-making on critical issues like debt relief, trade, and climate finance is narrowed to a small, exclusive group.
Hemispheric Economics & Sovereignty- The NSS promotes reshoring and industrial sovereignty, aiming to anchor growth within North America. Tariffs are used as leverage, and globalisation is treated as a strategic risk.
Unequal Burdens- Countries with weak bargaining power face harsher debt terms, politicised supply chains, and restricted capital access. The burden of inflation and export disruption falls disproportionately on workers globally.
Systemic Cruelty- Economic pain is deliberately uneven; it functions as a tool to stabilise a hierarchical global order.

The Return of Imperial Logic

All three revolutions are underpinned by a mindset that echoes colonial logic, though updated for the modern era.
Colonial–Imperial Mindset- A return to a hierarchical worldview where power confers entitlement. The strong impose costs, while the weak are expected to absorb them.
Structural Domination- Unlike territorial colonialism, this is an order built on exclusion and unequal burdens.
Institutional Codification- The 2025 NSS provides the bureaucratic language. The Heritage 2026 blueprint provides the ideological justification.
Cruelty as Logic- Suffering is not accidental; it is designed and embedded within policy execution as an organising principle.
The Emerging Order- The U.S. seeks to protect sovereignty through contraction, project power through hierarchy, and reshape governance through exclusion.

Conclusion

The restructuring of American power creates a global architecture of cruelty. The irony of this transformation is the universality of its harm. The victims of this reordering are not just in distant locations like Maputo or Dhaka, but also within the U.S., in places like Harlan, Kentucky. The effects of this policy shift extend outward across borders but ultimately return home, damaging the very populace the policies claim to protect.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-three-revolutions-reshaping-american-power/article70404219.ece

2. Indian Communism is 100 Years Old and It's Too Early to Write its Obituary(IE)

General Studies 1- History
Topic- Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present – significant events, personalities, issues.

Indian Communism at 100- Unfinished Business

Introduction

The year 2025 marks the centenary of the Communist Party of India (CPI), a milestone that stands in sharp contrast to the public fanfare surrounding the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Once a formidable force capable of influencing national policy and ruling key states like West Bengal and Tripura, the Left now faces severe political marginalisation. Despite this decline, the movement leaves behind a complex legacy of land reforms and secularism, while the persistence of inequality suggests its core issues remain relevant.

Historical Trajectory of Indian Communism

Origins & Global Context- Indian communism was born out of the global political and intellectual upheavals following World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the rising tide of anti-colonial nationalist movements.

Key Leaders- The movement was shaped by foundational figures such as M.N. Roy, Singaravelu Chettiar, and S.A. Dange**.**

Early Influence (Pre-Independence)- Despite facing severe repression under British colonial rule, the CPI successfully mobilised diverse sections of society, including workers, peasants, students, and intellectuals. It played a significant role in shaping political and cultural discourse through robust mass organisations.

Peak Electoral Strength (Post-Independence)- The movement reached a zenith in 2004, commanding approximately 60 Lok Sabha seats. It held influential sway over national policy during the UPA government era. It maintained prolonged governance in strongholds like West Bengal and Tripura.

Reasons for Decline

The text attributes the steep decline of the Left to three primary structural and strategic failures-

Political Missteps- The decision to withdraw from the UPA coalition in 2008 is highlighted as a critical error. Tactical alliances, including occasional alignment with the BJP in opposition, weakened its ideological credibility**.**

Factionalism & Rigidity- Internal divisions and ideological rigidity prevented the formation of effective coalitions with other democratic forces, including the Congress.

Failure to Adapt- The Communists struggled to recalibrate their strategy in response to major geopolitical and domestic shifts, including The Sino-Soviet split. The trauma of Partition. The political rise of the BJP. The economic reforms of the liberalisation era.

Enduring Legacy

Despite its political contraction, Indian communism has left an indelible mark on the socio-political fabric of the nation

Land Reforms- The Left pressured governments to implement land redistribution, which fundamentally reshaped rural power structures and empowered the landless.

Secularism & Federalism- It has been a consistent defender of pluralism and decentralisation, offering staunch resistance to communal mobilisation.

Welfare & Social Justice- The movement played a pivotal role in the expansion of social welfare programmes and the codification of labour rights**.**

Cultural Impact- Beyond politics, it fostered a vibrant cultural ecosystem in literature, theatre, and cinema. It promoted rationalist thought and amplified the voices of the marginalised through egalitarian values.

Future Prospects

Persistent Relevance of Core Issues- The systemic conditions that originally gave rise to communism are still acute in 21st-century India- agrarian distress, widening income inequality, precarious labour conditions, and global economic instability.

Global Context- There is a renewed interest in socialist and left-wing ideas globally, offering a potential tailwind for revival.

Path Forward- Revival depends on three strategic pillars

1. Ideological flexibility to adapt to modern realities.
2. Strategic unity among the currently fragmented Left parties.
3. Coalition-building with progressive democratic forces.

Conclusion

Indian communism is currently facing its gravest crisis, battling existential marginalisation. However, its historical contributions to socio-economic reform and secular discourse cannot be erased. If Left parties can pivot from rigid dogma to strategic adaptation, the movement retains the potential to play a meaningful role in India's evolving political landscape**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-indian-communism-is-100-years-old-and-its-too-early-to-write-its-obituary-10424059/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. SC Advisory Opinion on Governor's Role is Flawed, let it Stay Advisory(IE) -2

1. Rearguard Action- On Weather Change and Consistent Action(TH)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topic- Environmental pollution and degradation.

The Annual Fog–Pollution Crisis- From Seasonal Emergency to Chronic Failure

Introduction

India's winter fog season has ceased to be a mere weather phenomenon; it now heralds the return of an annual air pollution crisis. This recurring emergency exposes deep-rooted failures in urban air quality management. While the fog—driven by low temperatures and moisture—is natural, its toxicity is man-made. The season acts as a magnifier, revealing that the severe pollution spiking after the monsoon is not an isolated event but a symptom of chronic, year-round administrative negligence that affects millions across the Indo-Gangetic plains and beyond.

The Fog–Pollution Nexus

The Seasonal Cycle- The onset of the annual fog cycle triggers chaos across northern India. It is characterized by a sharp surge in Particulate Matter (PM) levels immediately following the monsoon.

Geographical Expansion- The crisis is no longer limited to Delhi-NCR. It encompasses the entire Indo-Gangetic plain and is expanding to coastal urban clusters like Mumbai and Kolkata, indicating a nationwide systemic failure.

The Mechanism- Fog formation is driven by low temperatures combined with high moisture. This moisture acts as a trap for residual emissions (pollutants), preventing them from dispersing. Consequently, AQI levels deteriorate sharply, turning a visibility issue into a toxicity crisis.

Crisis Magnitude and Public Impact

AQI Escalation- Base levels of Air Quality Index (AQI) hover between 300–400 (Very Poor). During fog episodes, these levels frequently escalate to 400+ (Severe and Severe+).

Psychological and Health Impact- While fog itself reduces visibility, its combination with pollutants compounds health risks. This intensifies public panic among citizens who are already suffering from prolonged exposure to chronic toxic air. Daily life and mobility are severely crippled during peak episodes.

The Cost of Inaction- Accidents and Disruptions

The pollution-induced fog has tangible, deadly consequences for transport and safety-

Road Tragedies

Uttar Pradesh- Reported at least 25 deaths and 59 injuries directly linked to fog-related accidents.

Yamuna Expressway- A catastrophic multi-vehicle pile-up in Mathura resulted in a deadly inferno, highlighting the danger of high-speed travel during low-visibility periods.

Aviation Paralysis- Delhi's aviation sector faced a meltdown with 228 flights cancelled (131 departures and 97 arrivals). Hundreds of flights faced delays, leaving thousands of passengers stranded and paralyzing air connectivity.

Policy Response- Governance Gaps and Reactive Measures

The administrative response follows a predictable, reactive pattern rather than a proactive strategy.

Emergency Protocols (GRAP-4)- Implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP-4) includes bans on construction/demolition, shifting schools online, and restricting vehicle movement.

Symbolic Enforcement- Measures such as "fuel denial without PUC" and curbs on BS-6 vehicle entry are criticized as symbolic threats rather than effective deterrents.
The Core Failure- Current measures ignore residual emissions trapped by moisture—the primary driver of the AQI collapse. Central high-level meetings often result in repeating unimplemented advisories rather than enforcing strict compliance.
Institutional Role (CAQM)- The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) is urged to assert its independence. The goal must be to maintain AQI below 350 through year-round controls, rather than scrambling only when weather conditions worsen.

Conclusion

The recurring fog–pollution emergency is a clear indictment of India's current environmental governance. It underscores those reactive bans and symbolic threats are insufficient against a crisis of this magnitude. To prevent further visibility-related deaths, flight disruptions, and health hazards, there must be a shift towards systemic, year-round action. An empowered and independent CAQM must focus on curbing emissions at the source throughout the year, ensuring that adverse weather does not automatically translate into a public health disaster.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/rearguard-action-on-weather-change-and-consistent-action/article70407515.ece#-~-text=The%20Centre%20announces%20a%20spate,Delhi's%20AQI%20stays%20below%20350.

2. SC Advisory Opinion on Governor's Role is Flawed, let it Stay Advisory(IE)

General Studies 2- Polity & Constitution
Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.(Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.)

Governor's Role in Granting Assent to Bills (Supreme Court Advisory Opinion 2025)

Introduction

The role of the Governor in granting assent to State Bills has recently come under judicial scrutiny following an Advisory Opinion of the Supreme Court delivered under Article 143. This opinion addresses the "constitutional silence" regarding time limits in Article 200. While the Court maintained judicial restraint by refusing to fix rigid timelines, the decision has sparked a debate on whether it inadvertently legitimises executive inaction, thereby undermining the federal balance and the supremacy of elected legislatures in a parliamentary democracy.

Background to the Dispute

Pattern of Delayed Assent- There has been a recurring trend of Governors delaying assent to Bills for extended, undefined periods. These delays are often perceived as politically selective, disproportionately affecting Opposition-ruled States, which exacerbates Centre-State friction.
The Tamil Nadu Episode- Governor R.N. Ravi withheld assent to multiple Bills for nearly three years. The State government challenged this in the Supreme Court, arguing it violated democratic norms and constitutional morality.
Preceding Judgment (April 2025)- A two-judge Bench ruled that Governors cannot indefinitely withhold Bills. It suggested a "reasonable timeframe" (generally three months) and introduced the principle of "deemed assent" if the Governor remains inactive.
Presidential Reference- Seeking clarity on this judgment, the Union government invoked Article 143, asking if courts have the power to mandate timelines for high constitutional authorities like the Governor or President.

Key Observations of the Supreme Court (Advisory Opinion)

No Fixed Judicial Timelines- The Court ruled that prescribing mandatory, fixed timelines would constitute judicial overreach into the domain of constitutional functionaries.

Constitutional Options Under Article 200- The Governor has three specific courses of action

1. Grant assent to the Bill.
2. Withhold assent and return the Bill to the legislature (with a message), provided it is not a Money Bill.
3. Reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President.

Scope for Limited Judicial Intervention- Courts can issue a "limited mandamus" directing the Governor to act only in cases of "prolonged, unexplained, and indefinite inaction." However, the Court cannot examine the merits or wisdom of the Governor's decision itself. *Note*- As an advisory opinion, this is non-binding in nature.

Issues and Concerns Raised

Ambiguity Surrounding 'Reasonable Time'

Lack of Definition- The opinion fails to define objective parameters for what constitutes "prolonged" delay or set an outer limit.

Consequences- This ambiguity perpetuates uncertainty. For instance, Bills have been pending for nine years in West Bengal and three years in Tamil Nadu.

Departure from Constituent Assembly Intent- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision (May 31, 1949)- He explicitly stated that the Governor is a "nominal and ornamental head" with no independent discretion.

Executive Subservience- All executive functions must be performed on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

Critique- The advisory opinion seemingly elevates the Governor above this design, diluting legislative primacy.

Democratic and Federal Implications

Legitimacy Deficit- Governors are unelected Centre nominees, whereas State legislatures hold a popular mandate.

Undermining Federalism-** Prolonged delays act as an "informal veto," allowing indirect central influence over State legislation and weakening cooperative federalism**.**

Contradiction of Precedents- Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974)- Governor must act on ministerial advice. Nabam Rebia v. Deputy Speaker (2016) - Gubernatorial discretion must be narrowly interpreted.

Analysis of the Opinion

Arguments Supporting the Opinion- Separation of Powers It prevents the judiciary from intruding into the functioning of high constitutional offices.

Respect for Silence- It respects the specific "constitutional silence" left by the framers regarding timelines.

Arguments Critiquing the Opinion

Constitutional Paralysis- It risks enabling paralysis through deliberate inaction.

Lack of Accountability- It weakens the accountability of an unelected office.

Politicisation- It risks converting the Governor's office into a political tool against opposition-ruled states.

Way Forward

Judicial Clarification- A future Constitution Bench needs to establish measurable, objective standards for "reasonable time" to prevent abuse.

Legislative Reform- Parliament could consider codifying timelines for assent within the Constitution to ensure clarity while preserving the federal balance.

Reinforcing Constitutional Morality- Governors must operate as impartial heads, guided by democratic norms rather than political expediency.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's advisory opinion reflects institutional restraint but stops short of resolving the core issue- indefinite gubernatorial inaction. By failing to engage deeply with the Constituent Assembly's intent, the opinion risks normalising executive delay as a legitimate constitutional tool. In a parliamentary democracy, the silence of an unelected authority cannot be permitted to override the will of an elected legislature. Clear guidance—whether constitutional or legislative—is imperative to safeguard federalism and democratic accountability.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/sc-advisory-opinion-on-governors-role-is-flawed-let-it-stay-advisory-10425829/**

Editorial of the Day – 19.12.2025

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1. Temporary relief- On trade performance, deeper distress ahead(TH) -1

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1. Temporary relief- On trade performance, deeper distress ahead(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth (Export-Import Policy).

India's Export Surge and Trade Deficit Dynamics (December 2025)

Introduction- Recent trade data for India presents a paradoxical scenario. While merchandise exports have surged significantly, providing short-term economic relief, this growth rests on fragile foundations. The reduction in the trade deficit, driven partly by a weakening rupee and contracting imports, masks deeper structural vulnerabilities such as unsustainable cost-absorption by exporters and slackening domestic demand.

Strong Headline Numbers vs. Underlying Reality

Significant Export Growth- Merchandise exports witnessed a sharp rise of 19.4% in November 2025, reaching $38.1 billion—the highest figure for this month in a decade.

Resilience in the US Market- Despite steep tariffs, exports to the United States grew by 22.6% year-on-year to $6.98 billion (a 10.7% increase from October).

Cautionary Note- While these figures offer relief to the government, they should not lead to complacency as the underlying drivers are precarious.

The Hidden Cost of Tariff Resilience

Absorbing the Tariff Shock- The surge in US-bound exports is occurring despite 50% tariffs. This is largely because Indian exporters are absorbing the extra costs rather than passing them on to buyers.

Strategic Rationale- Exporters are maintaining this strategy in hopes that the tariffs are temporary; they fear that passing on costs now would lead to a permanent loss of customers.

Sustainability Concerns- This financial buffer is finite. If high tariffs persist, exporters will run out of capacity to absorb losses, threatening future volumes.

Structural Stress on MSMEs and Supply Chains

Vulnerability of Small Players- A significant portion of India's exporters are Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operating in labour-intensive sectors. They lack the deep pockets required to sustain prolonged losses.

Limited Impact of Currency Depreciation- While the weakening rupee helps export competitiveness, it offers only partial relief. It is insufficient to offset the massive tariff disadvantages India faces compared to global competitors.

Supply Chain Rigidity- Reorienting supply chains to new markets takes time and cannot happen overnight. Early indicators suggest a potential drop in orders for January, signalling upcoming stress.

Import Contraction and Domestic Demand

Narrowing Trade Deficit- The reduction in the trade deficit is primarily due to a 1.9% fall in imports (down to $62.7 billion), rather than a structural improvement in export capabilities.

Sign of Weak Demand- Since India has limited domestic manufacturing capabilities for many goods, a drop in imports typically signals slackening domestic consumption and industrial demand.

Worrying Trend- This contraction is particularly concerning as it follows recent GST rate cuts, which were expected to boost consumption.

Policy Imperatives- Urgency Over Assurances

Need for Action- The government has acknowledged the distress through the Export Promotion Mission, but detailed schemes are still pending.

Specific Recommendations

Credit Guarantee Schemes- Implementation of credit guarantees (similar to those used effectively during COVID-19) is preferred over simple loan repayment moratoriums to provide liquidity.

Contingency Planning- Given the unpredictability of US trade policy, India must prepare for a "worst-case scenario" rather than relying solely on diplomatic resolution.

Conclusion

Sustaining India's export momentum requires moving beyond temporary resilience measures. The convergence of prolonged tariff pressures, weakening domestic import demand, and financial stress on MSMEs demands swift and targeted policy interventions. Prudence lies in balancing the optimism of recent data with rigorous contingency planning to support the export ecosystem.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/temporary-relief-on-trade-performance-deeper-distress-ahead/article70411979.ece#-~-text=India's%20merchandise%20exports%2C%20hit%20by,in%20the%20last%2010%20years.

2. A Bold Step Amid an Ambitious Nuclear Energy Target(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

The SHANTI Bill, 2025 and India's Nuclear Roadmap

Introduction - Human development has historically tracked closely with energy consumption. As mapped by Earl Cook in his 1971 *Scientific American* paper, energy use has escalated through stages of human progress—from primitive hunting (food energy) to agriculture, industry, and technology. Today, we stand at a new frontier- the digital era, where the digitalization of the economy is creating massive, additional energy demands. The SHANTI Bill, 2025, represents a strategic legislative step to meet these demands through a robust nuclear energy roadmap.

The Correlation- HDI and Energy Consumption

Development Metrics- The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of income, education, and health.

Energy-HDI Link- There is a strong correlation between HDI and per capita Final Energy Consumption (FEC). This relationship allows policymakers to estimate the energy required to achieve specific development goals.

India's Aspiration- As a G-20 member, India aims to reach an HDI above 0.9 (comparable to developed nations).

Projected Requirement- To achieve an HDI of 0.9, India needs to generate approximately 24,000 TWh of energy annually.

Breakdown- About 60% of this will be consumed as electricity. The remaining portion will likely be used to produce hydrogen via electrolysers.

Role of Hydrogen- Essential for decarbonising "hard-to-abate" sectors like steel, fertilisers, and plastics. Future electricity needs for hydrogen may decline if alternative low-carbon hydrogen technologies scale up.

Current Status- In 2023–24, India's total electricity generation was ~1,950 TWh with a CAGR of 4.8%. Sustaining this rate would take 4–5 decades to reach the target.

The Dual Challenge- Decarbonisation and Electrification

Transitioning to a high-energy future faces two simultaneous hurdles-

1. Decarbonising the energy mix.

2. Expanding end-use electrification- Currently, electricity accounts for only 22% of Final Energy Consumption (FEC); this must rise significantly.

Limitations of Renewables & Need for Nuclear

India's existing energy mix is heavily fossil-fuel dependent. While low-carbon sources like hydro, solar, and wind are vital, they have inherent limitations-

Resource Constraints

Hydro & Wind- Potential is geographically limited.

Solar- High population density restricts the availability of vast land tracts required for solar photovoltaic deployment.

Intermittency & Storage- Solar and wind are intermittent. Managing seasonal variability requires large-scale storage, which is currently too expensive to be a standalone solution.

Baseload Requirement- To ensure affordable and reliable electricity, the grid requires baseload **capacity** (sources that operate independently of weather/time).

Conclusion- Nuclear power is the only low-carbon source capable of providing reliable baseload electricity to support renewable integration.

India's Indigenous Nuclear Capabilities

The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Indian industry have successfully indigenised the nuclear supply chain

Self-Reliance- Uranium is the only major input requiring imports due to insufficient domestic reserves. India has capabilities in fuel fabrication, heavy water production, and reactor equipment manufacturing.

PHWR Mastery- The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) has mastered the design and operation of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) up to 700 MW capacity.

Status- 3 units operational, 1 nearing completion, 2 in advanced construction.

Expansion- 10 additional 700 MW units were approved in 2017 and are under progress.

Institutional Strength

Regulation- A dedicated regulatory body (AERB) established in the 1980s ensures safety.

Waste Management- Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has developed technologies for reprocessing spent fuel and managing nuclear waste safely.

The SHANTI Bill, 2025

To back the ambitious target of 100 GW installed nuclear capacity by mid-century, Parliament passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025.

Consolidation of Laws- It is an overarching legislation that consolidates provisions from The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010

Key Provisions

Legal Continuity- Deems the existing Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) as constituted under this new Act.

Liability- Clearly assigns primary responsibility for safety, security, and safeguards to the licensee operating the nuclear facility.

Significance- The Bill represents a bold policy signal of political commitment, providing the legal stability necessary to transition India into a developed nation.

Conclusion

Achieving high human development requires energy that is reliable, affordable, and clean. Given India's geographical constraints regarding renewables, nuclear power is not just an option but a necessity for deep decarbonisation. The SHANTI Bill, 2025, provides the critical institutional framework

and policy confidence required to scale nuclear capacity and realize India's developmental aspirations sustainably.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bold-step-amid-an-ambitious-nuclear-energy-target/article70412631.ece#google_vignette

3. The Teacher's Red Pen Should Open Minds, Not Shut Doors(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources**.**

Rethinking Teacher Authority for Inclusive Education

Introduction- The changing landscape of education demands a re-evaluation of the teacher's role, shifting from an authoritarian figure to a facilitator of inquiry. The metaphor, *"The teacher's red pen should open minds, not shut doors,"* encapsulates this necessary transition. While the "red pen" traditionally symbolizes evaluative power, discipline, and control, its rigid application can stifle curiosity and critical thought. This transformation is pivotal as India implements systemic reforms to make education more inclusive and inquiry-based.

Knowledge, Power, and Social Hierarchies

Historical Context- Thinkers like Francis Bacon and Michel Foucault have long established the link between knowledge and power. Historically, education has often served as a tool to reinforce power dynamics rather than dismantle them**.**

Inequality in Access- Unequal access to knowledge has entrenched social hierarchies, limiting social mobility for marginalized groups. In India, these disparities are visibly evident across lines of caste, gender, language, and region.

Assessment as Exclusion- Rigid assessment practices that focus binary "right or wrong" outcomes tend to reproduce existing hierarchies. When teachers function solely as evaluators, education risks becoming a mechanism of exclusion rather than a means of empowerment.

Pedagogical Shift- From Instructor to Facilitator

Alternative Tradition- The text advocates for a pedagogical approach where teachers act as facilitators, fostering an environment of inquiry, dialogue, and independent thinking.

Alignment with NEP 2020- This shift is in direct consonance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which prioritizes Development of critical thinking and conceptual understanding. Significant reduction of rote learning. Adoption of formative and competency-based assessments. Establishment of a learner-centric education model.

Assessment for Learning- NEP 2020 explicitly mandates using assessment as a tool for learning improvement rather than mere judgment or gatekeeping.

The Ethical Dimension of Teaching

Core Values- From an ethical standpoint, the profession of teaching is rooted in responsibility, empathy, and fairness.

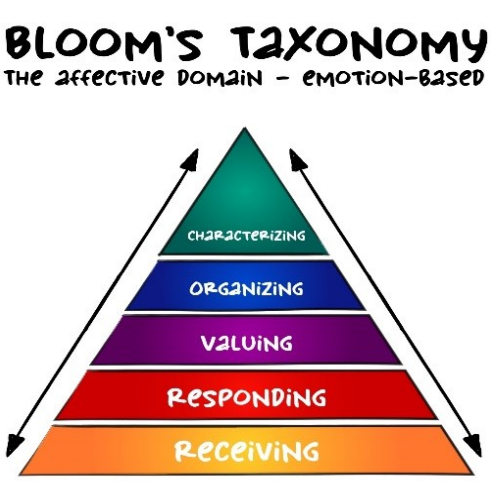
Dangers of Authoritarianism- Excessive reliance on authority figures discourages moral courage and intellectual autonomy in students.

Democratic Values- A respectful and balanced teacher–student relationship is essential for enhancing student dignity and confidence. This aligns with UNESCO's advocacy for education that promotes freedom of thought, scientific temper, and social responsibility—pillars essential for a pluralistic democracy like India.

Relevance in Contemporary Times

Combating Misinformation- In an era defined by information overload, misinformation, and conformity, the teacher's role is more critical than ever.

Breaking Conditioning- If learners are conditioned "not to question or disrupt," education loses its transformative potential.



Nurturing Key Traits- To prepare citizens who can uphold constitutional values (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), teachers must actively nurture Curiosity and a questioning attitude. Social awareness. The confidence to challenge unjust norms.

Conclusion

The discourse serves as a timely reminder that the ultimate goal of education is to liberate, not to discipline blindly. The "red pen" of authority must evolve into a tool for guidance rather than a mechanism for gatekeeping. As envisioned by the NEP 2020 and global frameworks, fostering a humane, inclusive, and dialogic education system is indispensable for India's continued social and democratic progress.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-teachers-red-pen-should-open-minds-not-shut-doors-10427737/lite/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 20.12.2025

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1. The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base(TH) -1

2. Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAMG)(IE) -2

1. The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base(TH)

General Studies 3- Security/Economy

Topic- Security challenges and their management in border areas; Effects of liberalization on the economy.

The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base

Introduction- India's vision to emerge as a developed nation by 2047 rests on two pillars- socio-economic transformation and robust strategic capabilities. At the heart of this strategic framework lies the Defence Industrial Base (DIB**)**. Historically, India's defence sector suffered from a "policy imbalance" where domestic private participation was restricted while foreign imports were freely permitted, creating structural vulnerabilities. Today, a decisive shift is underway to reverse this trend, ensuring both economic growth and national security.

A Shift After Reforms- From Dependence to Resilience

Historical Context- For decades, restrictive policies curtailed the domestic private sector, fostering an overdependence on imports. This undermined national security and economic self-reliance.

Key Policy Reforms- Opening of the defence sector to private participation. Easing of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms. Corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB). Expansion of procurement under the 'Make' procedure. Active promotion of innovation within the sector.

Visible Outcomes- Steady rise in domestic defence production. Exponential expansion of exports to over 80 countries. Emergence of a maturing ecosystem capable of integrating into global supply chains.

The Strategic Imperative- Why Self-Reliance is Non-Negotiable

Global Instability- Ongoing conflicts in Europe, West Asia, and Asia highlight the severe risks associated with global supply-chain disruptions.

Security Challenges- Facing persistent border and maritime challenges, self-reliance (Aatmanirbharta) in defence has become indispensable, not optional.

Emerging Opportunities

Geopolitical Shifts- Increased defence spending in Europe creates new demand.

Cost-Efficiency- There is a growing global demand for cost-effective defence platforms.

Strategic Location- India's position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its growing diplomatic footprint enhance its credibility as a global supplier.

Simplifying Procedures- The Path to ₹50,000 Crore Exports

To achieve the export target of ₹50,000 crore by 2029, reform momentum must be sustained.

Addressing Regulatory Complexities- Current regulations constrain private sector participation, particularly for MSMEs and Startups. Processes for export licensing, Joint Ventures (JVs), and Technology-Transfer (ToT) approvals need to be faster and clearer.

Building Investor Confidence- Long-term demand projections are essential to enable large-scale private investments.

Redefining DRDO's Role

DRDO Focus- Should shift exclusively to frontier research.

Industry Role- Production, scaling, and commercialization should be handed over to the industry.

Significance- This aligns with global best practices and enhances competitiveness.

Dedicated Facilitation Agency- Need for a dedicated defence export facilitation agency staffed with professionals.

Function- Provide a single-window interface for global partners, addressing inter-ministerial coordination gaps.

Key Steps to Strengthen the Ecosystem

Comprehensive reforms are needed in financial, testing, and certification frameworks to support manufacturing.

Financial Reforms

Issue- Indian firms face constraints due to limited access to competitive credit.

Solution- Introduce specialised export financing instruments to ease capital constraints.

Strategic Financing- Greater use of Lines of Credit (LoC) and Government-to-Government (G2G) agreements to build buyer confidence.

Testing and Certification

Infrastructure- Expanding integrated testing facilities will reduce delays and lower compliance costs for private players.

Standards- Overly stringent domestic standards should be rationalized. Adopting international certification protocols is crucial for global acceptability.

Service Commitments- Offering long-term service commitments alongside hardware sales strengthens India's reputation as a reliable partner.

Conclusion

A strong defence industrial base does more than ensure security; it reduces import dependence, creates high-skilled employment, and enhances India's geopolitical leverage. While recent progress is encouraging, the moment demands consistent efforts to deepen reforms. Building an ecosystem that actively promotes innovation and investment is a defining stride in India's journey toward becoming a confident and influential global power.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-significance-of-a-strong-defence-industrial-base/article70416769.ece#-~-text=The%20pursuit%20of%20a%20strong,capable%20and%20influential%20global%20power.

2. Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAMG)(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Before criticising VB-G RAM G, Punjab gave only 26 days' work this year under MGNREGS, says BJP's Sunil Jakhar

Introduction

The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), abbreviated as VB-GRAMG, represents a significant reform in India's rural employment landscape. It aims to modernize and strengthen social protection by addressing the structural limitations of the existing MGNREGA framework. By providing statutory guarantees for wage employment and explicitly linking work to the creation of productive assets, the mission seeks to balance immediate livelihood security with long-term rural resilience.

Key Features and Reforms

Legal Guarantee of Employment

Enhanced Mandate- The Bill statutorily guarantees 125 days of wage employment per rural household annually (an increase from the traditional 100 days).

Unemployment Allowance- It introduces a mandatory unemployment allowance if work is not provided within 15 days of application.

Removal of Disentitlement- The Bill actively removes earlier disentitlement clauses present during the MGNREGA era, ensuring that rights are enforceable rather than discretionary.

Integration with Rural Asset Creation

Productive Focus- Employment generation is strictly linked to the creation of productive public assets.

Target Areas-Water security (water conservation and harvesting). Core rural infrastructure (roads, connectivity). Livelihood-related infrastructure. Climate resilience works.

Dual Benefit- This approach ensures that expenditure leads to both immediate income support for workers and long-term developmental capital for the village.

Addressing Structural Weaknesses

Governance Reform- The framework focuses heavily on transparency, grievance redressal, and accountability.

Global Best Practices- It aligns with recommendations from the World Bank (2022) and NITI Aayog by institutionalizing timely grievance resolution mechanisms and robust monitoring systems.

Local Planning and Cooperative Federalism

Decentralized Planning- Gram Panchayats retain the primary authority over planning works based on local needs, supported by state and district administration.

National Stack- Works are aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack. This digital infrastructure enhances visibility and coordination without centralizing the decision-making power.

Synergy with Agriculture- States are empowered to notify peak agricultural periods. During these times, public works can be adjusted to avoid labor shortages for farming activities, ensuring harmony with the local agrarian economy.

Technology and Accountability

Digital Enforcers- The Bill mandates the use of- Biometric authentication for workers. Geo-tagging of assets. Real-time monitoring dashboards.

Ghost Worker Prevention- Public disclosure serves as a check against "ghost workers" and leakages.

Participatory Oversight- Social audits conducted by Gram Sabhas are strengthened to ensure community oversight, balancing high-tech monitoring with grassroots democracy.

Fiscal and Policy Flexibility

Objective Allocation- Normative allocations are determined through objective criteria rather than arbitrary decisions.

State Flexibility- States are allowed to operationalize schemes within the statutory framework, promoting equitable resource distribution and the spirit of cooperative federalism.

Critical Analysis

Strengthening Social Protection

Enforceable Rights- Contrary to fears of dilution, VB-GRAMG enhances worker rights by making entitlements legally enforceable and closing existing loopholes.

Poverty Alleviation- By enhancing livelihood security, it contributes directly to poverty alleviation and inclusive growth, aligning with findings from the ILO (2023) and Economic Survey 2025.

Balancing Employment and Productivity

Resilience over Relief- By linking wages to asset creation, the scheme shifts from mere relief work to building rural resilience.

Labor Harmony- The provision to pause works during peak agricultural seasons addresses the long-standing complaint of farmers regarding labor unavailability during sowing and harvesting.

Modern Governance and Efficiency

Tech-Enabled Inclusion- It incorporates technology for transparency while maintaining flexibility for exception handling, ensuring legitimate beneficiaries are not excluded due to technical glitches.

Aggregation- The "Stack" approach prevents the fragmentation of works, addressing chronic inefficiencies often observed in rural schemes.

Fiscal Prudence and Decentralization

Rules-Based- The move towards rules-based fiscal allocation ensures financial discipline.

Empowerment- It strikes a pragmatic balance between central oversight (for standards and funding) and decentralized planning (for implementation and relevance).

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill is not a retreat from the state's responsibility but a renewal and modernization of the rural employment guarantee. By combining a legal mandate for 125 days of work with a focus on productive assets, technology-driven accountability, and cooperative federalism, the Bill seeks to transform rural wage employment into a mechanism that is effective, dignified, and sustainable for the future.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/vb-g-ram-g-punjab-26-days-work-mgnregs-sunil-jakhar-10429064/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 22.12.2025

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1. Unlocking the Potential of India-Africa Economic Ties(TH) -1

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE) -2

1. Unlocking the Potential of India-Africa Economic Ties(TH)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Topic- Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. (India-Africa Relations, South-South Cooperation)

Introduction- A Paradigm Shift in Engagement

India's engagement with Africa is undergoing a strategic transformation, moving from historical cultural and political solidarity to a pragmatic, economics-driven partnership. This shift aims to create durable and sustainable long-term collaborations rather than short-term transactional interactions.

Renewed Momentum- The relationship has gained significant traction over the last decade, highlighted by the African Union (AU) becoming a permanent member of the G20 in 2023 under India's presidency.

Diplomatic Outreach- Recent high-level engagements include Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Namibia and Ghana (July 2025) and Ethiopia (December 2025). Note- The July itinerary also included Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, and Brazil, signaling a broader "Global South" outreach.

The Strategic Necessity- Diversifying beyond the West

Dependence on traditional Western markets poses economic risks, necessitating a pivot toward Africa.

Over-reliance on the West- In FY24, nearly 40% of India's exports were directed to the United States and the European Union.

Rising Volatility- Reliance on these markets exposes India to slowdown risks, demand fluctuations, trade protectionism, and policy uncertainty in the West.

Africa as an Alternative- African economies offer a vital avenue for export diversification due to their expanding markets and potential for sustained long-term demand.

Current Trade Dynamics and the Chinese Challenge

While India is a significant player, there is a substantial gap compared to China's dominance.

India's Position- India is Africa's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade approaching $100 billion.

1. Export Volume- $38.17 billion in FY24.
2. Top Markets- Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania.
3. Key Exports- Petroleum products, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, rice, and textiles (constituting ~6% of Africa's total imports).

China's Dominance- China controls over $200 billion in bilateral commerce, supplying 21% of Africa's imports.

Key Chinese Sectors- Dominance in HSN 84 and 85 categories (machinery, electrical equipment, semiconductors).

Strategic Imperatives for 2030

To bridge the trade gap and deepen ties, India has set specific strategic goals.

Trade Targets- A clear goal to double trade with Africa by 2030.

Policy Measures- Reduction of trade barriers. Negotiating Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) and Comprehensive Economic Partnerships with African regional blocs.

Value Addition- A critical shift is required from low-value exports to value-added manufacturing, joint ventures, and cross-border production.

Leveraging AfCFTA- Utilizing the African Continental Free Trade Area platform to access a larger, integrated market rather than fragmented national markets.

Opportunities for MSMEs (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises)

The African market presents a lower barrier to entry for Indian MSMEs compared to hyper-competitive Western markets, but specific support is needed.

Financial Support- Prioritize expanding Lines of Credit. Improve access to affordable trade finance to enable MSMEs to enter and scale.

Risk Mitigation- Implementation of local currency trade mechanisms to bypass dollar volatility. Creation of a joint insurance pool to mitigate political and commercial risks, encouraging participation from banks and smaller firms.

Logistics- Reducing freight costs through port modernization, better hinterland connectivity, and robust India–Africa maritime corridors.

Services Sector- Leveraging India's strengths in IT, healthcare, professional services, and skill development to generate high-value exports and catalyze digital commerce.

The Role of the Indian Public Sector (PSUs)

Private sector investment faces hurdles such as bureaucratic delays, political instability, and high financing costs. The public sector must act as a catalyst.

Current Investment Flaws- Existing investment footprints are often distorted by flows via Mauritius, driven more by tax avoidance than by genuine productive investment on the continent.

PSU Leadership- Public Sector Units must lead in high-risk, capital-intensive sectors, specifically mining and mineral exploration.

The "Crowding-In" Effect- PSUs can secure critical resources and reduce risk perceptions, effectively paving the way for subsequent private sector investment.

Conclusion

India's strategy must evolve from transactional trade to a multipolar economic partnership. As global supply chains reconfigure, Africa is central to India's global ambitions. The focus must be on recalibrating strategies to include investment in manufacturing, agro-processing, and critical technologies to ensure a "Long-term, Durable, and Sustainable" partnership.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/unlocking-the-potential-of-india-africa-economic-ties/article70423170.ece

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance / Polity

Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Introduction

The passing of the VB-GRAMG Bill in December 2025 marks a significant pivot in India's rural welfare landscape, replacing the historic Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). While the original act was a lifeline for millions, providing demand-based wage employment, the new legislation introduces fundamental structural changes. However, the bill has sparked intense debate not just for its content, but for the hasty manner of its parliamentary passage, raising questions about legislative scrutiny, fiscal federalism, and democratic accountability.

Procedural and Democratic Concerns

The legislative process adopted for the bill has drawn criticism for undermining deliberative democracy.

Lack of Scrutiny- The Bill was passed via voice vote without being referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee. This bypassed the critical stage of detailed study, expert consultation, and clause-by-clause analysis.

Absence of Leadership- The debate saw the absence of key parliamentary figures, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, signaling a lack of high-level bipartisan engagement on a crucial issue.

Historical Parallels- The expedited nature of the passage mirrors the enactment of the controversial Farm Laws, highlighting a recurring trend where legislation is fast-tracked at the expense of transparency and consensus building.

Major Policy Shifts & Implementation Challenges

The Bill fundamentally alters the operating model of rural employment guarantee.

From Demand-Driven to Supply-Driven- *Old Model (MGNREGA)*- Legally guaranteed work based on rural household demand ("Right to Work"). *New Model (VB-GRAMG)*- Introduces "normative allocation", where funds are allocated top-down based on set norms rather than actual local demand.

Centre-State Fiscal Strain- The new framework mandates a 60-40 funding split (Centre covers 60%, States cover 40%). This marks a shift from the previous structure (where the Centre bore 100% of unskilled wage costs), potentially straining fiscally weaker states and leading to uneven implementation across the country.

Politicization of Funds- A centralized, normative allocation model risks political bias, where fund distribution could be influenced by political considerations rather than objective necessity.

Socio-Economic Implications

The reforms threaten the stability of the rural safety net that supports nearly 6 crore households.

Livelihood Security- MGNREGA acted as a shock absorber during crises (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) by generating hundreds of crores of person-days of employment.

Distress Migration- By guaranteeing local work, the scheme curbed distress migration to cities. A supply-constrained model may reverse this gain.

Rural Economy- Wage payments support rural purchasing power and asset creation. Abrupt policy shifts without safeguards could disrupt the fragile rural economic ecosystem.

Governance, Efficiency, and Technology

While the need for reform is acknowledged, the approach is contested.

Technological Legacy- The previous administration successfully integrated Aadhaar-linked payments and geo-tagging of assets to streamline the scheme and reduce leakages.

The Reform Dilemma- While streamlining and ensuring fiscal sustainability are valid goals, a consultative approach would have preserved these operational efficiencies while addressing the new fiscal targets.

Political Context and the Path Forward

Bipartisan Erosion- Rural employment guarantees have historically enjoyed bipartisan support. The lack of dialogue with opposition parties has fueled political polarization.

Risk of Policy Reversal- Rushing legislation without public feedback risks repeating the Farm Laws scenario, where lack of consensus eventually forced a policy rollback.

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill represents an ambitious attempt to restructure rural employment but is marred by "procedural haste" and potential threats to fiscal federalism. By shifting from a demand-based right to a supply-based allocation, the state risks weakening the safety net for the rural poor. For the reform to be successful and sustainable, it requires a balanced approach that restores the demand-driven character of employment, ensures adequate funding support for states, and respects the democratic process of parliamentary scrutiny.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/new-job-law-is-not-a-retreat-from-social-protection-it-aims-to-reform-10429491/

Editorial of the Day – 23.12.2025

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1. Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost(TH) -1
2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE) -2

1. Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost(TH)

General Studies 3- Governance

Topic- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost- Valuing Ecosystem Services

Introduction

The State of Himachal Pradesh (HP) acts as a critical ecological custodian for India, preserving vast forest covers that provide benefits far beyond its borders. However, this stewardship comes at a significant financial cost to the state. This analysis explores the imbalance where mountain states bear high environmental costs while delivering national benefits, arguing for a fiscal correction that recognizes and compensates for these "Ecosystem Services."

The Core Argument- National Benefits vs. State Burden

The "Free Rider" Problem- Mountain states like HP protect forests that regulate climate, water flow, and biodiversity for the entire nation (especially the plains).

Disproportionate Burden- While the benefits are national (positive externalities), the costs—such as restricted land use, maintenance of slopes, and higher infrastructure costs—are borne almost exclusively by the state exchequer.

Early Insights- The narrative draws from the long-standing local sentiment that building infrastructure in fragile hills is cost-intensive and that the state is effectively subsidizing the nation's ecological security without adequate reimbursement.

Quantifying Forest Wealth- The Economic Case

Recent data supports the argument that HP's ecological contribution is massive and undervalued.

Total Forest Wealth- A 2025 report by the Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, estimates HP's total forest wealth at ₹9.95 lakh crore.

Annual Economic Value- The annual flow of benefits is pegged at ₹3.20 lakh crore.

Key Services Valued- Carbon Sequestration (mitigating climate change). Water Provisioning (critical for downstream states). Biodiversity Conservation. Regulatory functions like flood control and soil stabilization.

Policy Gaps and Fiscal Constraints

Despite the obvious value, current policies fail to translate ecological value into financial capital for the state.

Recognition without Compensation- India's regulatory framework acknowledges the importance of forests but lacks instruments to comprehensively compensate states for the "opportunity cost" of conservation.

Eco-centric Development Paradox- HP is expected to follow an eco-friendly model, but this restricts industrial revenue generation, leaving the state financially constrained.

FRBM Act Constraints- The FRBM Act, 2005, limits the state's borrowing capacity (fiscal flexibility) without accounting for the unique high-cost, low-revenue nature of an agrarian, mountainous economy.

The Loss of Special Category Status

A historical shift in fiscal federalism has exacerbated HP's financial woes.

Historical Context- HP was granted Special Category State status in 1971 due to its difficult terrain and strategic location. This ensured preferential financial assistance (higher grant-to-loan ratio).

The 2015 Shift- Following the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission in 2015, this special status was effectively withdrawn/diluted, reducing the flow of central funds.
Impact- Although some later adjustments were made, the core financial gap persists, leaving the state unable to fund development while maintaining ecological safeguards.

Evolution of Finance Commission Criteria

The criteria for tax devolution have evolved but remain insufficient for mountain states.
Green Bonus & Incentives- Previous commissions introduced concepts like "Green Bonuses" and incentive-based grants.
15th Finance Commission- It introduced a specific criterion for "Forest and Ecology" with a 10% weightage in the devolution formula.
The Gap- This calculation often relies on "dense forest cover," ignoring other vital ecological assets common in HP, such as Glaciers and Snowfields. Cold Deserts. Alpine Pastures. Rivers and Water Bodies.

Recommendations for the 16th Finance Commission

To ensure sustainable development and equity, the 16th Finance Commission must correct these historical limitations.
Enhance Weightage- Increase the weightage assigned to "Forest and Ecology" in the tax devolution formula beyond the current 10%.
Inclusive Methodology- Revise the definition of "forest" or "ecology" to include non-forest ecological assets (glaciers, alpine meadows) that contribute to national ecological security.
Compensate for Stewardship- Explicitly view financial transfers not as "aid" but as "compensation" for the ecosystem services provided to the rest of India.

Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh's forests are a national asset, but their preservation should not be a state liability. The path forward requires a shift from narrow fiscal formulas to a holistic valuation of natural capital. By empowering the 16th Finance Commission to recognize and pay for these ecosystem services, India can ensure a "Green Federalism" that rewards ecological stewardship and secures the environmental future of the nation.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/himachal-pradesh-needs-a-financial-boost/article70425669.ece

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE)

General Studies 3- Environment
Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

Environmental Governance Failure- Symbolism vs. Substance

Introduction- The Paradox of Priorities

The current parliamentary session highlights a disturbing disconnect in Indian democracy- a fervent focus on the historical and cultural symbolism of *Vande Mataram* contrasted against a deafening silence on the substantive issue of India's toxic air. While the House debates a song that celebrates India's clean air and fertile soil, the reality outside involves a hazardous "Airpocalypse," particularly in Delhi. This raises critical questions about legislative priorities, accountability, and the gap between performative nationalism and actual governance.

The Disconnect- Cultural Symbolism vs. Environmental Action

Hollow Nationalism- *Vande Mataram* conceptualizes India as a nurturing motherland rich in nature (Sujalam, Suphalam). However, limiting the debate to historical interpretation without addressing the contemporary degradation of that very "motherland" renders the nationalism symbolic rather than substantive.

Missed Opportunity- Parliament failed to leverage India's cultural heritage as a moral foundation to drive modern environmental policy. The ideal of the "sacred geography" is being eroded by policy inaction.

Public Health- A Chronic Emergency

Air pollution has transitioned from a seasonal nuisance to a perennial public health catastrophe.
Grim Statistics- Citing *The Lancet*, the analysis notes that air pollution causes over 1.6 million premature deaths annually in India.
Global Warnings- The World Health Organization (WHO) has repeatedly flagged that India's pollution levels far exceed safe limits.
Legislative Apathy- Despite these figures, parliamentary discussions remain sporadic, indicating that public health is not yet a top-tier political priority.

Institutional and Governance Failures

The crisis is not due to a lack of laws, but a failure of implementation and institutional capacity.
Weak Regulators- State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) suffer from chronic understaffing and a lack of technical expertise.
Data Gaps- Air quality monitoring infrastructure is unevenly distributed, leading to data blind spots in rural and semi-urban areas.
Regulatory Non-Compliance- Major polluters, specifically thermal power plants, continue to violate emission norms with impunity, exposing the lack of teeth in regulatory enforcement.

Debunking the Economy–Ecology Trade-off

The editorial challenges the traditional view that environmental protection hampers development.
False Dichotomy- Narratives suggesting that job creation and infrastructure must come at the cost of the environment are flawed.
Economic Cost of Pollution- Poor air quality directly degrades labour productivity, increases the national healthcare burden, and reduces the quality of life, ultimately hurting the economy. Environmental protection is, therefore, an economic investment.

Constitutional Obligations and Rights

The state's inaction is a violation of the social contract and the Constitution.
Article 21- The Supreme Court has interpreted the Right to Life to explicitly include the right to a clean and healthy environment. Legislative inaction thus amounts to a constitutional failure.
Intergenerational Equity- By destroying the ecological base today, the state is violating the rights of future generations to inherit a livable country.

Flaws in Current Policy Approaches

Short-Termism- Reliance on emergency measures like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), temporary bans, or AQI-based school closures are merely "band-aids."
Need for Structural Reform- Real solutions require long-term continuity Urban planning reforms. Energy transition to renewables. Massive expansion of public transport.
Democratic Feedback- Citizen protests (e.g., "Save Aravalli" or Delhi clean air protests) are democratic signals. Parliament must view these not as dissent but as feedback for policy correction.

Way Forward

Parliamentary Ownership- Establish regular, structured debates on climate and pollution, moving beyond the "Question Hour" formalities.
Institutional Autonomy- Empower Pollution Control Boards with financial independence, adequate staffing, and legal authority.

Airshed Management- Move beyond city-centric plans to an Airshed approach (managing pollution across regional geographic boundaries, e.g., the Indo-Gangetic Plain).

Clean Mobility- Accelerate Electric Vehicle (EV) adoption and public transport infrastructure.

Strict Enforcement- Implement time-bound, non-negotiable compliance for industrial emissions.

Conclusion

India's environmental crisis represents a governance failure as much as an ecological one. For India to be truly "Viksit" (Developed), Parliament must transition from symbolic debates to substantive leadership. True national pride is not found in rhetorical defense of the past, but in securing a healthy, breathable, and sustainable future for the citizens of the present.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/new-job-law-is-not-a-retreat-from-social-protection-it-aims-to-reform-10429491/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 24.12.2025

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1. **End the exploitation - On the Supreme Court judgment, child trafficking-(TH) - 1**
2. **OTPs, FASTag, food orders - How digital breadcrumbs are reshaping policing in India-(IE) - 2**

1. End the exploitation - On the Supreme Court judgment, child traffick-ing(TH)

General Studies 1 - Indian Society **Topic -** Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism (specifically issues relating to women and children).

1. Introduction

Child trafficking stands as one of the most brutal manifestations of modern slavery, revealing a stark chasm between legal protections and the lived reality of vulnerable children. A recent December 19 judgment by the Supreme Court of India has brought this issue to the forefront, labeling it a "deeply disturbing reality." The Court's observations highlight the persistence of organized crime, sexual exploitation, and systemic enforcement failures, calling for urgent, coordinated action from both the State and civil society.

2. The Judicial Perspective - A "Deeply Disturbing Reality"

Context of the Judgment - The Supreme Court's observations arose from a case involving a minor who was sexually exploited by a trafficking gang in Bengaluru.

The Verdict - The Court upheld convictions under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, reinforcing that such crimes are not just legal violations but assaults on human dignity, bodily integrity, and constitutional rights.

Organized Nature of Crime - The Bench explicitly recognized the complex, layered structure of trafficking syndicates. These networks operate through distinct phases—recruitment, transport, harbouring, and exploitation—making detection difficult and prosecution complex.

3. Critical Guidelines on Child Testimony

The Supreme Court laid down significant directives regarding how courts should handle the testimony of trafficked minors to ensure justice is not derailed by technicalities.

Judicial Sensitivity - Courts must exercise extreme sensitivity and latitude when recording a child's statement.

Understanding Trauma - Minor inconsistencies in a child's narrative should *not* undermine their credibility. The Court recognized that children often struggle to narrate traumatic events with precise chronological accuracy.

Status of the Victim - A trafficked minor must never be viewed as an accomplice. Her testimony should be accorded the same evidentiary value and credence as that of an injured witness.

4. Systemic Failures - Data and Enforcement

Despite the existence of laws, the gap between legislation and implementation remains a primary hurdle.

Conviction Deficit - Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs reveals a glaring "deterrence gap." Between 2018–2022, while 10,659 trafficking cases were recorded, the conviction rate stood at a dismal 4.8%.

Need for Reform - Strengthening of Anti-Trafficking Units. Urgent need to pass a comprehensive Anti-Trafficking Bill to close legal loopholes.

5. Rehabilitation and Prevention

The response to trafficking must extend beyond the courtroom.

Holistic Rehabilitation - Post-rescue efforts must go beyond monetary compensation. True rehabilitation involves long-term psychological care, social reintegration, and skill development.

Education as a Shield - Prevention is the first line of defense. Ensuring children remain in school until age 14, as mandated by the Right to Education (RTE) Act, is critical to reducing vulnerability to traffickers.

6. New Age Challenges - The Digital Threat

Adaptive Crime - Trafficking is no longer limited to physical kidnapping; it has become "shape-shifting" and adaptive in the digital era.

Cyber-Exploitation - The internet is increasingly used for recruitment and exploitation. Authorities and social organizations must upgrade their capabilities to counter these evolving forms of cyber-enabled trafficking and forced child labour.

7. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's judgment serves as a wake-up call for systemic reform. To dismantle these entrenched networks, India needs stronger investigations, significantly higher conviction rates, and a judicial process that is sensitive to the trauma of victims. However, the ultimate solution lies in a societal shift—prioritizing prevention through education and protection. Only through the sustained resolve of the government and the active engagement of civil society can the dignity of children be truly safeguarded.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/end-the-exploitation-on-the-supreme-court-judgment-child-trafficking/article70429918.ece#google_vignette

2. OTPs, FASTag, food orders - How digital breadcrumbs are reshaping policing in India(IE)

General Studies 3 - Internal Security **Topic -** Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

Digital Residue and Crime Investigation in India

1. Introduction - The Era of Electronic Evidence

The rapid proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally altered crime detection in India. Every online interaction creates a "digital footprint" or residue, creating a vast trail of electronic evidence. High-profile cases like the BlueChip scam and massive GST frauds have demonstrated that traditional policing is evolving into technology-enabled policing. Law enforcement now relies heavily on digital identifiers—from OTPs to food delivery logs—to trace suspects who are otherwise elusive.

2. Digital Footprints as Investigative Tools

Triangulation via Data - Criminals often switch phones, SIM cards, or locations to evade capture. However, they leave unavoidable traces through everyday transactions.

Sources of Evidence - Police utilize OTPs, ride-hailing app logs, food delivery history, and telecommunication tower data to triangulate movements.

Breaking Anonymity - Even if a suspect discards a SIM card, their login on a delivery app or a digital payment on a new device acts as a beacon for investigators.

International Parallels - The shift is global. For instance, in the 2025 Palisades fire case (USA), interactions with AI models like ChatGPT were utilized as admissible evidence, setting a precedent for AI-generated digital footprints in court.

3. The Rise of Sophisticated Cyber-Financial Crime

Scale of Frauds -

BlueChip Scam - A massive ₹1,000 crore fraud.

GST Frauds - Large-scale tax evasion schemes amounting to ₹5,300 crore.

Modus Operandi - These crimes leverage digital anonymity to move funds and coordinate logistics. The interconnectedness of cybercrime and traditional crime means that digital tools are now central to both the commission of the crime and its subsequent detection.

4. Regulatory and Legal Evolution (2025)

The government is proactively adapting the legal framework to close surveillance gaps.

SIM-to-Device Binding - The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has mandated that messaging platforms and banking apps bind the SIM card to the specific device, making it harder for fraudsters to clone accounts or use stolen SIMs on different phones.

Telecommunication Cybersecurity Amendment Rules, 2025 -

TIUE Framework - Introduces the concept of Telecommunication Identifier User Entity (TIUE).

Scope Expansion - This potentially brings app-based platforms (like Zomato, Swiggy, Amazon) under stricter regulatory oversight, recognizing them as critical data points for crime investigation.

5. The Privacy vs. Security Dilemma

The Trade-off - While digital evidence improves detection efficiency (high conviction potential), it raises significant concerns regarding Article 21 (Right to Privacy).

Data Access - Most platforms have privacy policies that allow data sharing with law enforcement. However, the lack of a "data protection law" specific to surveillance raises fears of -

1. Arbitrary access by police.
2. Lack of judicial oversight in data retrieval.
3. Potential misuse of personal data for profiling.

6. Way Forward

Robust Legal Framework - Establish clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the admissibility of electronic evidence in courts (under the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) to prevent technical acquittals.

Specialised Cybercrime Units - Create dedicated units focused on blockchain tracing (for crypto frauds) and cyber threat intelligence, equipped with AI tools to analyze massive datasets.

Privacy Safeguards - Introduce checks and balances to ensure data access is lawful, necessary, and proportionate. Transparency in how digital evidence is accessed is vital for public trust.

Regulatory Compliance - Strictly enforce the TIUE framework and SIM-to-device binding across all digital service providers, including e-commerce.

Preventive Policing - Move from reactive investigation to preventive policing using AI and predictive analytics to flag suspicious transaction patterns in real-time.

Public Awareness - Educate citizens on Cyber Hygiene—the risks of digital footprints and secure online practices.

7. Conclusion

The digital age demands a paradigm shift in policing. The BlueChip and GST fraud cases serve as case studies for the necessity of data-driven investigation. However, as the state expands its surveillance capabilities through mechanisms like TIUE, it must simultaneously strengthen privacy safeguards. The goal is a balanced ecosystem where technology enhances justice without compromising civil liberties.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/digital-breadcrumbs-reshaping-policing-10434859/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.12.2025

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1. New Labour Codes, The Threats to Informal Workers(TH) -1

2. Aravallis Need the Supreme Court's Shield(IE) -2

1. New Labour Codes, The Threats to Informal Workers(TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

New Labour Codes- Threats to Informal Workers (Summary & Analysis)

Introduction

The enactment of the four new labour codes in 2019 and 2020—covering Industrial Relations, Wages, Social Security, and Occupational Health & Safety—has drawn consistent opposition from trade unions. These codes were passed without the traditional tripartite consultation (Workers, Employers, Government) at the Indian Labour Conference (ILC). While the impact on the organised sector is widely debated, the unorganised sector, which constitutes 90% of India's workforce and contributes nearly 65% to the GDP, faces grave existential threats. This analysis highlights the specific dangers posed to informal workers, particularly in the context of Tamil Nadu.

The Myth of Universalisation and Consolidation

Misleading Claims- The Union Government claims the codes aim to consolidate laws and universalise social security. However, unorganised workers are largely excluded from all codes except the Social Security Code.

Repeal of Protections- "Consolidation" has led to the repeal or weakening of sector-specific laws that previously offered targeted safeguards.

BOCW Dilution- The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act, 1996, a critical safeguard for construction workers, has been undermined, increasing vulnerability in the informal sector.

Erosion of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Protections

Removal of Safety Rules- Approximately 180 safety rules under the BOCW Act have been omitted from the new Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code.

Weakened Enforcement- The shift from mandatory physical inspections to a web-based inspection system weakens the enforcement of safety standards and minimum wage laws, violating international labour standards.

Neglect of Occupational Diseases- The OSHWC Code ignores specific occupational diseases prevalent among informal workers, such as Silicosis (Construction workers). Cancer from pesticide exposure (Agricultural workers). Chronic ailments (Salt workers).

Lack of Policy- There is no comprehensive occupational health policy for the identification, treatment, and rehabilitation of work-related illnesses.

No ESI Coverage- With sector-specific laws repealed, unorganised workers lose access to Employees' State Insurance (ESI) coverage, leaving them without state-backed health mechanisms.

Unequal Social Security Framework

Disparity in Benefits- Organised Workers Receive clearly defined social security benefits. Informal Workers Relegated to vaguely worded "welfare schemes" without concrete legal guarantees.

Dismantling of Funding Sources- Post-GST reforms led to the abolition of sector-specific cesses (taxes dedicated to welfare). This has cut off funding for workers in beedi, salt, and mining sectors without any effective replacement.

Lack of Assured Funds- There is no longer a mandate for employer contributions or specific Union government support dedicated to informal worker welfare.

Centralisation and Threat to State-Level Welfare Boards

One-Size-Fits-All Approach- The Social Security (SS) Code proposes a single welfare board for all unorganised workers (excluding construction and gig workers), ignoring the unique needs of diverse sectors.

Central Control of Funds- The centralised e-Shram registration system raises fears that the Union Government aims to take control of accumulated welfare funds, estimated at ₹1 lakh crore.

Threat to Existing Boards- In Tamil Nadu, 39 sector-specific welfare boards face dissolution.

Absence of Saving Clauses- The new codes lack "saving clauses" to legally preserve existing State-level boards or benefits like old-age pensions, maternity support, and educational assistance.

The Tamil Nadu Context- A Model Under Threat

Robust Framework- Tamil Nadu has a pioneering welfare architecture under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Act, 1982, built through decades of union struggle.

Coverage- The state has approximately 3 crore informal workers, with nearly 2 crores already registered across various welfare boards.

Contrast with Other States- While states like Andhra Pradesh have shut down welfare boards following the introduction of the new codes, Tamil Nadu has remained cautious and delayed framing rules to protect its system.

Conclusion & Way Forward

Preserve State Autonomy- To protect informal workers, State governments must safeguard their specific welfare boards and labour laws.

The Kerala Model- Tamil Nadu should emulate Kerala's approach by refraining from notifying rules under the new codes.

Demand for Saving Clauses- States must insist on legal provisions (saving clauses) that explicitly protect the existing, functional state-level welfare architecture from being dismantled by the central codes.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/new-labour-codes-the-threats-to-informal-workers/article70434603.ece

2. Aravallis Need the Supreme Court's Shield(IE)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topic- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

The Aravalli Verdict- Implications of the New "100-Metre" Definition

Introduction- The Aravalli Significance

The Aravalli Mountain range is one of the oldest geological formations in the world, stretching approximately 692 km across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi. It is not merely a physical feature but a critical ecological backbone for Northwest India.

Ecological Functions- It acts as a natural "Green Wall," preventing the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Hydrology- It is a vital recharge zone for groundwater in the water-stressed North Indian belt.

Climate Regulation- Acts as the "green lungs" for the Delhi-NCR region, mitigating pollution and regulating local climate**.**

Judicial History- The Supreme Court has historically played a proactive role in protecting this region from illegal mining and encroachments.

The Core Controversy- The 100-Metre Criterion

The Supreme Court recently accepted a new definition of the Aravalli hills, restricting the classification to only those landforms above 100 metres in elevation. This shift has generated significant concern among environmentalists and scientists**.**

Critical Issues Highlighted in the Verdict

Massive Exclusion of Hill Areas (Data by Forest Survey of India - FSI)- The 20-Metre Baseline- Traditionally, hills above 20 metres were considered part of the ecological landscape**.**

Drastic Reduction- Under the new 100-metre rule, 91.3% of the 12,081 surveyed hills (above 20m) are excluded from protection.

Near Total Loss- If the total 1,18,575 identified hill structures are considered, over 99% fail to meet the new definition.

Result- The continuous mountain range is legally reduced to a few "scattered hills," stripping the vast majority of the range of its legal forest status.

Environmental & Ecological Implications

Accelerated Desertification- By losing protected status, the hills can no longer effectively serve as a barrier against the Thar Desert, threatening the fertile plains of North India.

Biodiversity Loss- The fragmentation of the range disrupts wildlife corridors and destroys habitats. Groundwater Crisis- The Aravallis function as a watershed; opening these areas to development or mining will severely impact the water table in Haryana and Delhi**.**

Health Hazards- Ignoring occupational diseases (like silicosis) and pollution impacts contradicts the role of the hills in mitigating air pollution in the NCR.

Contradiction with Expert Opinions

Internal Disagreement- The verdict contradicts the warnings raised by the Court's own Amicus Curiae and the Central Empowered Committee (CEC).

Ignoring Past Damage- The CEC's 2018 survey highlighted that the Aravallis have already lost 25% of their hills due to illegal mining. The new definition validates further destruction rather than arresting it.

Broader Legal and Policy Context

Constitutional & Legal Principles- Article 21- The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental right. Allowing the degradation of the Aravallis potentially violates this constitutional guarantee**.**

'Polluter Pays' Principle- The verdict risks diluting the strict accountability established in landmark cases like *MC Mehta v. Union of India (1996)*.

Weakening Statutory Protections- Environment Protection Act (1986) & Forest Conservation Act (1980) Limiting the geographical definition of "Aravalli" shrinks the area where these strict laws apply.

Open Season for Encroachment- The redefinition effectively regularises existing illegal encroachments and incentivizes new mining and real estate projects in ecologically fragile zones.

Way Forward

Judicial Review- The Supreme Court must reconsider the 100-metre criterion, prioritizing scientific evidence and Ecological Impact Assessments (EIA) over administrative convenience.

Holistic Definition- A definition based on ecological function (vegetation, hydrology, geology) is needed, rather than an arbitrary height limit.

Integrated Conservation- Afforestation- Aggressive greening projects along the Aravalli stretch.

Community Involvement- Strengthening community-based monitoring to check illegal mining.

Coordinated Urban Planning- A unified approach between Rajasthan, Haryana, and NCR authorities to prevent urbanization from consuming the hill range.

Conclusion

The Aravalli range is a hydrological and ecological lifeline for Northwest India. The acceptance of the "100-metre criterion" is a retrograde step that threatens to undo decades of environmental jurisprudence. To prevent inevitable desertification and ecological imbalance, the state and judiciary must adopt a science-based, holistic approach to conservation, rather than reducing nature to arbitrary numerical definitions**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/aravallis-need-the-supreme-courts-shield-10437688/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 26.12.2025

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1. Doping Menace- On Indian Sport and Dope Positive Cases(TH) -1

2. After Year of Successes, ISRO Set for Big Leaps(IE) -2

1. Doping Menace- On Indian Sport and Dope Positive Cases(TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.(Sports Governance, Statutory Bodies (NADA), Health and Integrity in Sports.)

Doping Menace- A Credibility Crisis for Indian Sports

Introduction- The Paradox of Indian Sports

India aspires to become a global sporting powerhouse, aiming to host prestigious events like the 2036 Olympics. However, this ambition is severely compromised by a persistent doping crisis. India has repeatedly topped global charts for dope-positive cases, undermining its credibility. This issue is not merely about individual athletes erring but reflects deeper structural weaknesses in incentives, enforcement, and awareness within the country's sports ecosystem.

Doping as a Strategic Barrier

Credibility Crisis- India has been ranked as the country with the highest number of dope-positive cases for the third consecutive year.

Threat to Hosting Aspirations- India is preparing to host the 2029 World Police and Fire Games and the 2030 Centenary Commonwealth Games. High doping rates weaken the geopolitical leverage required for a successful 2036 Olympics bid. Reputational Damage- Persistent doping scandals erode international trust and cast doubt on the legitimacy of Indian athletes' achievements.

Statistical Reality- What the Data Reveals

WADA Report (2024)- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) data presents a grim picture

India- Recorded 260 Adverse Analytical Findings (AAFs) out of 7,113 tests, resulting in a 3.6% positivity rate.

Global Comparison- India far exceeded other nations like France (91 cases) and Italy (85 cases).

Testing Volume- Despite the high number of positive cases, India ranked only seventh in total testing volume, suggesting the problem might be even more widespread if testing were scaled up further.

Post-COVID Trends- The positivity rate has remained stubbornly high 2022- 3.2%, 2023**-** 3.8%

Official Response vs. Ground Realities

NADA's Stance- The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) defends the numbers, arguing that higher positivity is a result of expanded targeted testing. They highlight a dip to 1.5% positivity in 2025 (up to Dec 16) as a sign of improvement.

Initiatives Taken- Launch of the 'Know Your Medicine' app to help athletes check banned substances. Increased awareness drives across sporting camps.

Systemic Failures- Despite these measures, ground realities indicate a "systemic malaise" Frequent incident of athletes literally evading tests (running away from collection officers). Suspensions of support staff, indicating an organized culture of doping rather than isolated incidents.

Structural Incentives & The Root Cause

Perverse Incentives- The current reward system encourages "win at all costs"

Sports Quota Jobs- Guaranteed government employment for medal winners.

Cash Rewards- Massive financial incentives for podium finishes. These benefits often push athletes to take health risks and shortcuts via doping.

Legal Framework- The National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025 aims to strengthen the legal framework. However, laws are ineffective without strict enforcement.

Way Forward- Necessary Reforms

Institutional Independence- India must ensure NADA operates with institutional independence, free from political or administrative interference, a key requirement under International Olympic Committee (IOC) scrutiny.

Adequate Funding- Increased budget allocation for NADA to upgrade testing facilities and expand the testing pool.

Scientific Advancement- Investment in scientifically advanced controls and forensic intelligence to detect sophisticated doping methods.

Realigning Incentives- The sports ecosystem needs to value long-term athlete health and ethics over immediate medal tallies.

Conclusion

To secure its status as a sporting nation and protect its Olympic aspirations, India must treat doping as a systemic challenge rather than a peripheral lapse. A combination of a truly independent NADA, robust funding, and scientific capacity is non-negotiable. Ultimately, aligning athlete incentives with ethics and health is essential to sustain trust, performance, and legitimacy on the global stage.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/doping-menace-on-indian-sport-and-dope-positive-cases/article70437025.ece

2. After Year of Successes, ISRO Set for Big Leaps(IE)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topic- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention**.**

ISRO Set for Big Leaps- Technological Milestones & Future Outlook

Introduction- A Year of Strategic Evolution

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has concluded the year with landmark successes that underscore India's transition into a major global space power. Moving beyond isolated successes, ISRO has demonstrated a system engineering approach with incremental yet strategic advancements. From the LVM3-M6 heavy-lift launch to the collaborative NISAR mission, these achievements reflect a long-term vision focused on commercial dominance, international partnership, and the ambitious goal of independent human spaceflight through the Gaganyaan programme.

Key Technological Achievements

Heavy-lift Launch Capability (LVM3)

Record Payload- The successful LVM3-M6 mission deployed a 6,100 kg commercial satellite, marking ISRO's highest payload delivery to Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

Dual-Orbit Mastery- Consecutive successes (LVM3-M5 and M6) prove ISRO's ability to launch heavy satellites to both LEO and Geosynchronous Orbit (GEO)—a capability previously limited to a few elite space agencies.

Technological Maturity- This signifies self-reliance in launching heavy communication and observation satellites, reducing dependence on foreign launch providers like Arianespace.

Commercial Space Leadership

Global Provider- ISRO has successfully launched 434 foreign satellites from 34 countries, establishing itself as a reliable, cost-effective global launch hub.

Policy Synergy- These milestones align with reforms under IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre) and NSIL (NewSpace India Limited), which aim to commercialise space activities and boost private sector participation.

Strategic Innovation & Scientific Missions

SpaDeX (Satellite Docking Experiment)

Capability- Tests autonomous docking and undocking of spacecraft**.**

Significance- This technology is the foundational building block for the future Bharatiya Antariksha Station (Indian Space Station), on-orbit satellite servicing, and interplanetary sample return missions.

NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar)

Collaboration- A high-end joint mission with NASA using dual-frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar.

Applications- Critical for disaster management, monitoring climate change, agriculture, and water resource management.

Stature- Elevates India from a "beneficiary" of space data to an equal partner in high-end global space science**.**

The Gaganyaan Programme

Objective- To demonstrate independent human spaceflight capability.

Upcoming Focus- Uncrewed missions will validate the Crew Module safety, Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS), and human-rated launch vehicles.

Broader Policy & Economic Context

National Space Policy 2023- Recent achievements validate the policy's focus on capacity building and global competitiveness.

Strategic Autonomy- Enhanced launch capabilities reduce reliance on foreign systems for critical communication, navigation, and security needs.

Economic Potential- With the global space economy projected to exceed $1 trillion by 2040, India aims to capture a larger share through downstream applications (data usage) and space startups.

Challenges Ahead

Safety vs. Frequency- Balancing the high operational tempo of commercial launches with the zero-error tolerance required for human missions (Gaganyaan) is a significant operational challenge.

Space Debris & Sustainability- Increased launch frequency exacerbates orbital congestion. India must strictly adhere to UN COPUOS guidelines and debris mitigation policies.

Private Sector Integration- While frameworks exist, effectively managing regulatory oversight, intellectual property (IP) rights, and national security concerns within the private sector remains complex.

Resource Constraints- Deep-space and heavy-lift missions require continuous massive investment in cryogenic technology and ground infrastructure.

Way Forward

Human Spaceflight Readiness- Prioritize rigorous testing of crew escape systems and life support to ensure astronaut safety for Gaganyaan.

Reusable Technology- Accelerate development of reusable launch vehicles (RLV) and high-thrust propulsion to drastically reduce launch costs.

Space Diplomacy- Leverage the success of NISAR to forge further high-value partnerships for earth observation and climate monitoring**.**

Sustainability- Formulate national guidelines for active debris removal and end-of-life satellite disposal to ensure long-term orbital sustainability.

Talent Pipeline- Invest in academic collaborations to train the next generation of mission specialists and scientists to sustain this growth**.**

Conclusion

ISRO's recent trajectory is not just a series of launches but a calculated rise in technological depth. By mastering heavy-lift capabilities, entering the domain of space docking, and preparing for human spaceflight, India is firmly positioning itself as a dominant space power for the coming decade.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/after-year-of-successes-isro-set-for-big-leaps-10439210/lite/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 27.12.2025

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1. Social scourge- On India and child marriages(TH) -1

2. Rebuilding Trust in Police, in Shadow of Doubt, Under Scrutiny(IE) -2

1. Social scourge- On India and child marriages(TH)

General Studies 1- Society

Topic- Role of women and women's organizations, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

Child Marriage in India- A Social Scourge

Introduction

Child marriage remains a critical barrier to development in India, undermining health, disrupting education, and perpetuating intergenerational poverty. While India has aligned its goals with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate child marriage by 2030, the gap between policy intent and ground reality persists. Despite a decline in national figures, regional disparities and socio-economic vulnerabilities continue to challenge the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

India's Commitment and Policy Framework

Global Alignment- India is a signatory to the UN SDGs, explicitly committing to ending child marriage by 2030.

National Campaigns- The Union government recently marked the one-year anniversary of the Bal Vivah Mukt Bharat Abhiyan (Child Marriage Free India Campaign) with a focused 100-day nationwide awareness drive.

Intent vs. Reality- While there is strong policy intent backed by multiple schemes, achieving the zero-marriage target is still a "work in progress" due to implementation bottlenecks.

Trends and Progress

Statistical Decline- According to data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS**)**, the prevalence of child marriage has seen a significant steady decline

1. 2005–06- 47.4%
2. 2019–21- 23.3%

Uneven Progress- While national averages have improved, the progress is not uniform across all regions or social groups, masking deep-rooted issues in specific pockets of the country.

Regional Disparities

High Prevalence Zones- The practice remains alarmingly high among women aged 18–29 in specific eastern and northern states.

Critical States- West Bengal, Bihar, and Tripura.

States of Concern- Significant numbers are also reported in Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Root Causes- These geographical patterns are indicative of entrenched regional inequalities, cultural norms, and local socio-economic realities that differ vastly from better-performing states.

Poverty and Education Linkages

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has established a strong correlation between socio-economic deprivation and early marriage.

The Wealth Gap

1. Poorest Quintile- 40% of girls from the poorest families marry before age 18.
2. Richest Quintile**-** Only 8% of girls from the wealthiest families face the same fate.

The Education Shield

1. No Education- 48% of uneducated girls are married early.
2. Higher Education**-** The figure drops drastically to 4% for those with higher education, proving that schooling is a potent deterrent.

Legal Framework and Gaps

Primary Legislation- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is the central law governing this issue.

Enforcement Issues- Low Conviction- Enforcement remains weak, with crime records data indicating infrequent application of the law and low conviction rates.

The POCSO Conflict- The strict application of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has led to unintended consequences, often criminalizing consensual relationships among adolescents rather than targeting forced child marriages.

Health and Social Consequences

Maternal & Child Health- Child marriage is directly linked to poor health outcomes for both the young mother and her child, including higher risks of stunting and maternal mortality.

Unsafe Healthcare- Fear of criminal prosecution (under POCSO or PCMA) often pushes underage girls toward unsafe, unregulated, and clandestine health services for reproductive needs.

Cycle of Vulnerability- These health risks compound existing social vulnerabilities, trapping families in a cycle of poor health and poverty.

Schemes and Implementation Challenges

Incentive Limitations- Cash-transfer schemes aimed at encouraging girls' education exist, yet states like West Bengal (which has such schemes) still report high incidence rates, suggesting financial incentives alone are insufficient.

Central Schemes- The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign needs to be recalibrated to better reach the most marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Infrastructure Deficit- Retaining girls in school requires more than just fees; it demands supportive infrastructure, including Clean and functional toilets. Safe transport options. Secure school environments.

Global and Developmental Implications

SDG Interdependence- According to the organization *Girls Not Brides*, 9 out of the 17 Sustainable **Development Goals** cannot be achieved without ending child marriage.

Holistic Approach Required- The policy-practice divide will persist unless India addresses the interconnected issues of poverty, education gaps, health risks, and gender inequality simultaneously.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Ending child marriage requires moving beyond legislation and singular schemes.

Multi-Pronged Strategy- Success depends on simultaneously addressing poverty, strengthening educational retention, and improving health access.

Infrastructure- Ensuring safe infrastructure for girls is non-negotiable.

Governance- Stronger implementation of existing laws, deep community engagement, and gender-sensitive governance are essential.

Final Goal- Only by aligning policy intent with ground-level practice can India protect the rights of the girl child and sustainably achieve its SDG commitments.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/social-scourge-on-india-and-child-marriages/article70440466.ece

2. Rebuilding Trust in Police, in Shadow of Doubt, Under Scrutiny(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Governance, Transparency, and Accountability; Role of Civil Services in a Democracy.(Police Reforms, Institutional Trust, and Accountability Mechanisms.)

Rebuilding Trust in Police- A Democratic Necessity

Introduction

Public trust is the cornerstone of democratic policing, essential for internal security and law enforcement legitimacy. Currently, Indian policing stands at a crossroads, striving to balance coercive authority with public engagement. The decline in public confidence, exacerbated by allegations of internal discrimination—highlighted by incidents like the suicide of a senior officer in Haryana—underscores deep systemic challenges. Rebuilding this trust requires a dual approach- addressing citizen expectations for service delivery and ensuring internal organizational fairness**.**

Policing and Democratic Accountability

Source of Authority- In a democracy, police authority is derived from public trust and consent, not merely from the power of the uniform or state coercion.

Citizen Expectations- Modern citizenry demands high standards of transparency, fairness, and responsiveness from law enforcement agencies.

Internal Accountability- Accountability is not just external; it also involves ensuring that officers within the force feel protected, valued, and judged solely on performance and merit, rather than identity or caste.

Operational Measures and Significance

Targeted Operations- Initiatives such as "Operation Trackdown" and "Hotspot Domination" are critical for curbing crime.

Focus- These target habitual offenders, illegal arms suppliers, and high-crime zones.

Symbolism of Action- Such operations serve a dual purpose- they demonstrate the state's presence and effectiveness while signaling a strong commitment to public safety.

Role of Technology- While technology is a force multiplier in policing, it cannot substitute ethical leadership and sound human judgment.

Structural and Cultural Challenges

Internal Discrimination- Allegations of bias within the force highlight the urgent need for fairness in administrative decisions, including postings, promotions, and performance evaluations.

Balancing Hierarchy- The traditional, rigid command structure must be balanced with mechanisms that allow for open feedback and effective grievance redressal for junior officers.

Institutional Reform- Sustainable reform requires embedding transparency, consistency, and accountability into the organizational culture to prevent alienation within the ranks.

Policy and Legal Frameworks

Key Mandates- Reforms must be guided by historical recommendations

National Police Commission (1979)- Emphasized the need to insulate police from political interference. Supreme Court Directives (Prakash Singh vs. Union of India, 2006) Mandated structural reforms, citizen oversight bodies, and merit-based tenures**.** Constitutional Alignment- Operational policing must align with constitutional values of equality, dignity, and impartiality to strengthen its legitimacy.

Global and Developmental Implications

Global Best Practices- Following UNODC (2023) guidelines, successful models worldwide rely on community policing and citizen engagement.

Key Pillars- Visibility, clear communication, and ethical conduct.

Developmental Impact- Internal reforms and fair practices lead to reduced corruption, improved law enforcement legitimacy, and enhanced social cohesion, which are vital for economic and social development.

Conclusion

Restoring trust in India's police force is not merely an administrative task but a democratic imperative. It demands a shift beyond traditional law enforcement to ethical leadership and citizen-centric policing. By combining operational success (like cracking down on crime) with internal fairness and external accountability, the police can rebuild their institutional credibility. Ultimately, the police must align their values and actions with public expectations to uphold democratic ideals and earn the "consent of the governed."

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rebuilding-trust-in-police-in-shadow-of-doubt-under-scrutiny-10440773/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 29.12.2025

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1. Linked civilisations, a modern strategic partnership(TH) -1

2. SC has role in clean-up, not in GST on purifiers(IE) -2

1. Linked civilisations, a modern strategic partnership(TH)

General Studies 1- Society

Topic- Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. (India–Iran Relations (Historical ties, Energy Security, Connectivity Projects, and Strategic Partnership).

Introduction

The relationship between India and Iran is unique in international relations; it goes beyond standard diplomatic statecraft, rooting itself in a "living civilisational relationship." While ancient ties provide the foundation, modern engagement is increasingly driven by hard economic realities, energy security, and the need for regional stability in West Asia.

The Civilisational & Literary Continuum

The historical bond between the two nations is defined by shared ancestry and deep cultural osmosis.

Common Ancestry- Both civilisations trace their roots to the Aryan peoples before they branched out one settling in the Iranian plateau and the other in the Indus–Ganga plains.

Linguistic & Spiritual Roots- There are deep parallels between the Avesta (Zoroastrian scripture) and the Rigveda, confirming a shared spiritual imagination and civilisational origin. This shared linguistic and mythological background has fostered a resilience in the relationship that has survived centuries of political flux.

Persian Influence in India- Persian endured for centuries as the language of art, diplomacy, and poetry in India.

Sabk-e-Hendi (Indian Style)- The cross-cultural milieu gave birth to a specific style of Persian literature known as the "Indian Style."

Cultural Icon- The text highlights Mirza Abdul-Qadir Bedil Dehlavi, a poet whose philosophical depth represents the creative brilliance of this shared heritage.

Pillars of Contemporary Strategic & Economic Convergence

In the current geopolitical landscape, historical sentiment is insufficient; the partnership is now anchored in tangible strategic and economic interests.

Energy Security

Natural Alignment- Iran possesses vast hydrocarbon reserves, while India has rapidly growing energy demands. This creates a natural, symbiotic supplier-consumer relationship.

Connectivity and Trade

Chabahar Port- India's involvement in the development of the Chabahar Port is a strategic anchor, allowing India to bypass Pakistan to access Afghanistan and Central Asia.

INSTC (International North–South Transport Corridor)- Iran holds a central geographical position in this corridor. The INSTC offers a shorter, cheaper, and more efficient route for Eurasian commerce compared to traditional routes (like the Suez Canal).

Security Cooperation & Geopolitics

As the world shifts toward a multipolar order, India and Iran are positioning themselves to influence regional stability.

Counter-Terrorism- Both nations face threats from the spread of extremism and terrorism across West and South Asia.

Intelligence Sharing- Consequently, intelligence cooperation has become a "quiet but vital pillar" of the relationship.
Strategic Autonomy- Despite external pressures (often implying Western sanctions), India has managed its ties with Iran by prioritizing Strategic Autonomy and national interest.
Financial Resilience- To insulate the partnership from external constraints (sanctions), there is a push for flexible financial arrangements, specifically local-currency trade.

Future-Oriented Engagement- Beyond Transactional Ties

The article suggests moving from a buyer-seller relationship to an innovation-driven alliance.
Knowledge-Based Diversification- The future of the partnership lies in diversifying into high-tech sectors, including Information Technology (IT), Nanotechnology, Medical Sciences
Diplomatic Milestone- As the nation's commemorate 75 years of diplomatic relations, the goal is to convert historical goodwill into a modern, forward-looking partnership.

Conclusion

India and Iran are described as "one soul in two bodies**,"** bound by history and aligned by geography. A revitalised alliance offers mutual prosperity and contributes significantly to long-term stability in West Asia. The moment is ripe to shape a collaborative, resilient, and autonomous future that resonates with their ancient harmony.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/linked-civilisations-a-modern-strategic-partnership/article70446666.ece

2. SC has role in clean-up, not in GST on purifiers(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary. Separation of Powers between various organs (Legislature, Executive, Judiciary). Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Overreach.

Judicial Overreach Limits- The Debate on Fiscal Intervention

Introduction

The Indian Constitution relies on a delicate balance of power between the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. While the Judiciary is the guardian of Fundamental Rights and the environment, its recent intervention in fiscal matters—specifically the Delhi High Court's suggestion to reduce GST on air purifiers—has reignited the debate on Judicial Overreach. This incident highlights the tension between judicial activism in public interest and the exclusive domain of the Executive in economic governance.

Judicial Activism vs. Constitutional Boundaries

Role of Courts- Courts often step in to correct "executive inaction," particularly when public interest is at stake (e.g., environmental protection).
Risk of Overreach- Intervention becomes problematic when courts enter policy domains strictly reserved for elected representatives.
Legislative Prerogative- Fiscal decisions, such as taxation, require detailed legislative deliberation, balancing of budgets, and political consensus, which are beyond the court's expertise and mandate.

The Constitutional Role of the GST Council

The power to determine tax rates is constitutionally codified and federal in nature.
Article 279A- The GST Council is a constitutional body established under Article 279A to govern Goods and Services Tax.
Composition & Consensus- It includes representatives from both the Centre and States. Decisions require a three-fourths majority, ensuring a federal consensus**.**
Unilateral Limits- Because of this federal structure, neither the Judiciary nor any single government authority has the power to unilaterally alter GST rates.

Public Health vs. Fiscal Policy

The context of the court's intervention is the severe air pollution crisis, but the text argues that the *method* of intervention (tax cuts) is misplaced.

Valid Judicial Mandate- Monitoring and enforcing environmental laws to protect public health is well within the court's constitutional power**.**

Invalid Policy Prescription- lowering GST is a specific policy choice, not a matter of legal right. Tax cuts on devices (air purifiers) shift the burden of clean air to individuals (buying machines) rather than forcing the state to fix structural causes.

The Need for Structural Solutions

Beyond Band-Aids- Reducing taxes is a short-term, superficial measure. Real solutions require structural reforms in

1. Emission controls.
2. Urban planning.
3. Energy policy.
4. Transport reforms**.**

Constructive Engagement- The text cites the Aravalli region cases as examples of *constructive* judicial engagement, where courts focused on protecting natural resources rather than dictating fiscal terms.

Conclusion

The Judiciary remains indispensable for enforcing environmental compliance and holding the government accountable. However, Constitutional Discipline mandates that fiscal decisions (like GST rates) remain with the GST Council. Effective governance is achieved when institutions respect their defined roles while working toward long-term solutions**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/sc-has-role-in-clean-up-not-in-fixing-gst-rates-on-purifiers-10443690/

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC

DAILY EDITORIALS
DECEMER 2025

Editorial of the Day – 01.12.2025

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1. **India needs research pipelines(TH)** -1
2. **GDP growth is robust; GST cuts and US tariffs will shape momentum(IE)** -3

1. India needs research pipelines (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.(Indigenization of technology and developing new technology)

Introduction

India faces a critical policy challenge- it cannot sustain its economic growth ambitions relying solely on public grants. History shows that economies successfully converting science into industry share a specific discipline—they maintain stable, long-term partnerships where company investments are linked to university strengths. To replicate this, India must shift private research spending from episodic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) gestures to a predictable innovation pipeline that funds real lab time, supports doctoral cohorts, and secures pilot production lines.

Global Models of Corporate–Campus Research

Successful global economies demonstrate specific traits in R&D investment that India can emulate-

Industrial-Scale Budgets- Leading global technology firms invest amounts rivalling national R&D budgets. *Example-* In 2024, Meta allocated ~$44 billion (nearly 1/3rd of revenue). Giants like Alphabet, Amazon, and Microsoft maintain similar multi-billion dollar programs.

High Research Intensity- U.S. companies demonstrate high R&D-to-sales ratios. In 2022, U.S. firms booked ~$692 billion in domestic R&D against $14 trillion in net sales (approx. 5% ratio).

China's High-Intensity Model- Huawei**-** Reported 179.7 billion yuan in R&D in 2024 (20.8% of revenue), with over 50% of the workforce in R&D.

BYD- Invested 54.2 billion yuan with an R&D intensity of nearly 7%.

Policy Instruments for Partnerships

USA (NSF)- The National Science Foundation's *Industry–University Cooperative Research Centres* pool company contributions for pre-competitive university research.

Consortia- The *Semiconductor Research Corporation* supports multi-university consortia to train talent and solve industry-aligned problems.

Key Shared Traits- Successful models utilize joint centres, shared production lines, long-horizon consortia, and open talent pathways.

India's Position and Emerging Leaders

Current National Baseline- India's Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD) is approximately 0.65% of GDP. Private enterprises contribute only about two-fifths (40%), significantly lower than the firm share in advanced economies.

Emerging Indian Corporate Leaders (FY24 Data)-DR. Reddy's- Invested ₹22.9 billion (8.2% of sales).Tata Motors- Invested ₹29,398 crore (6.7% intensity).Sun Pharma- Spent 6.7% of global revenue on R&D. Bharat Electronics (BEL)- Dedicated 6.24% of turnover .Reliance Industries- Recorded over ₹4,100 crore in expenditure (FY24-25).

Existing Effective Models

IIT Madras Research Park- Hosts 200+ companies adjacent to labs and student teams.

IDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence)- Links start-ups and research labs for defence innovation.

India Semiconductor Mission- Ties investments, skills, and academia (e.g., Micron ATMP project in Sanand).

Roadmap for Scaling Research–Industry Linkages

To build self-reliance with global openness, India requires a structured approach to link Private R&D with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)-

Set Sector-Wise R&D Expectations- Establish three-year R&D-to-sales ratios for strategic sectors (Auto, Pharma, Electronics, Defence, Space, Energy).Targets should rise gradually, respecting cash-flow constraints and export goals. Adopt Shared IP frameworks that reward both academic publication and commercialisation.

Strengthen Co-funded Research Models- Incentivize co-funded projects and matching grants routed through HEIs. Focus on multi-year work with open data, clear deliverables, and industry-relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Create dedicated line items for university-run pilot lines and testbeds that companies can book by the hour. Shift from single projects to problem portfolios managed by multi-university centres.

Modernise Tax Tools for R&D- Shift incentives from inputs to measurable outputs (patents, standards, clinical milestones, field trials). Link tax deductions to collaboration with accredited HEIs and the hiring of graduate researchers.

Build Collaboration Capabilities- Support campus programs to train faculty/PhDs in industry collaboration, IP negotiation, and translational projects.

Talent Pathways- Expand roles for PhDs in product teams, create dual-track roles (adjunct appointments), and sponsor doctoral cohorts aligned with company roadmaps.

Improve Corporate Disclosure- Encourage listed firms to report specific R&D spending and the share directed to Indian HEIs. Publish results in Indian languages and practitioner-friendly formats to build prestige around research careers.

Anchoring Innovation in India's Knowledge Ecosystem

Contextual Relevance- Indian campuses are situated beside dynamic markets and draw on deep knowledge traditions.

Value Add- When corporate research engages with this heritage and location, it acquires context, depth, and relevance—capabilities essential for high-performing industrial R&D.

Conclusion

India possesses the necessary components—labs, talent, and markets—for world-class innovation. The path forward requires a shift from "wishful thinking" to a national supply chain for innovation.

Industry's Role- Set transparent targets, fund real lab time, and build collaborative networks.

Academia's Role- Focus on research with measurable value, remain open to industry questions, and demonstrate outcomes.

Result- A stable engine of growth where research funding translates into scalable industrial outcomes.

Source- https- //www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-needs-research-pipelines/article70341873.ece

2. GDP growth is robust, GST cuts and US tariffs will shape momentum(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment

Introduction

India's economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience, recording a robust 8.2% GDP growth in Q2 FY26, significantly surpassing the RBI's estimate of 7%. With a cumulative first-half growth of 8%, India

retains its position as the fastest-growing major economy globally. This performance is particularly significant as it occurs against a backdrop of global headwinds, including US tariffs and geopolitical instability. The focus now shifts to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to calibrate a policy that balances this growth momentum with price stability.

Sectoral Performance Analysis

Agriculture (Resilient Foundation)- Registered a growth of 3.5%, driven by a favorable monsoon and increased crop output.

Impact- This is expected to have a multiplier effect on rural incomes, boosting rural consumption and agricultural exports.

Manufacturing (Industrial Revival)- Clocked a strong growth of 9.1%, signalling a recovery in industrial activity and investment demand.

Corporate Health- Corporate profitability surged by 15.5%, reflecting improved balance sheets and strong private sector performance.

Services (Urban Engine)- Growth driven primarily by finance, real estate, and professional services. Highlights the resilience of the urban economy and the formal employment sector. Exports- IT and BPO exports remain crucial for sustaining foreign exchange inflows.

Government Spending (Fiscal Consolidation)- Non-interest, non-subsidy revenue expenditure contracted by 6.4%.While this acted as a drag on immediate growth numbers, it reflects the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation in the post-pandemic era.

Demand and Consumption Trends

Private Consumption- Showing clear signs of recovery, evidenced by a surge in vehicle sales, which indicates a revival in demand for durable goods.

Investment Activity- Maintained steady momentum with capital formation making a positive contribution to GDP.

Policy Boost- The GST rate cuts implemented in September 2025 are projected to further stimulate consumption and investment in Q3.

External Sector Vulnerabilities

Export Contraction- Merchandise exports to the US fell by 9% in October, attributed to tariff barriers and a slowdown in global demand.

Global Risks- The sector faces headwinds from US interest rate policies, rising trade restrictions, and geopolitical conflicts. These factors pose risks to India's export-oriented sectors and balance of payments.

Structural Drivers and Challenges

Key Drivers of Growth- Strong domestic consumption and private investment. Sustained Government capital expenditure (Capex) in infrastructure and energy.

Formalisation- Benefits accruing from GST, digital payments, and improved tax compliance.

Corporate Deleveraging- clean balance sheets enabling fresh investment.

Emerging Challenges

Fiscal Pressure- Lower-than-expected nominal GDP growth could constrain revenue collections.

Uneven Demand- Slower rural demand persists in certain geographical pockets.

Inflation Volatility- Food inflation remains susceptible to climate change and monsoon variability.

Monetary Policy Implications (The MPC Dilemma)

The Inflation Context- Headline inflation remains below the RBI's target, theoretically creating space for rate cuts. Core inflation pressures are currently moderate.

The Growth Context- Strong domestic momentum (8.2% growth) argues against aggressive easing to prevent the economy from overheating. The RBI must prioritize long-term financial stability over short-term stimulus.

External Factors- Exchange rate volatility due to global uncertainties. Risks of imported inflation, particularly from potential oil and commodity price shocks.

Policy Considerations- To Cut or Not to Cut

Arguments for Rate Cut	**Arguments Against Rate Cut**
Inflation is currently under control and below target.	Strong growth momentum suggests caution; no immediate need for stimulus.
Private consumption and investment need support to sustain the pickup.	Global uncertainty requires maintaining liquidity buffers.
Easing by global central banks could reduce pressure on capital outflows.	Premature easing could compromise the credibility of the inflation-targeting framework.

Conclusion

The Q2 FY26 GDP data underscores the resilience of India's domestic demand and the success of structural reforms like GST and digitization. However, the path ahead requires vigilance. While the domestic engine is strong, fiscal constraints and external risks loom. The MPC's upcoming decision will likely be a balancing act—sustaining this high-growth trajectory without compromising inflation stability—to ensure a durable economic future.

Source- https- //indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/gdp-growth-is-robust-gst-cuts-and-us-tariffs-will-shape-momentum-10394931/

Editorial of the Day – 02.12.2025

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1. War clouds- On the U.S. and Venezuela (TH) -1

2.Give states their fair share, protect their fiscal space(IE) -2

1. War clouds- On the U.S. and Venezuela (TH)

GENERAL STUDIES 3- International Relation

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape in the Americas has witnessed a sharp escalation following Donald Trump's declaration that Venezuela's airspace is "closed in its entirety." This move has heightened fears of a looming military confrontation. While Washington frames these aggressive maneuvers as a necessary component of the "war on drugs," critics view the military build-up as a pretext for regime change, exploiting Venezuela's deepening internal political and economic collapse.

Escalating US Pressure and Justification

The "Closed Airspace" Declaration - Donald Trump's assertion that Venezuela's airspace is closed has acted as a flashpoint, triggering immediate fears of a potential US military strike.

Narrative of "War on Drugs" - Washington justifies its intensified operations in the Caribbean and Pacific as measures targeting alleged drug traffickers. The US administration explicitly alleges that President Nicolás Maduro leads the Cartel de los Soles, which they have designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

Strategic Military Build-Up Around Venezuela

The US has significantly boosted its regional military presence, signaling a potential shift from diplomatic pressure to kinetic action -

Naval Deployment - The USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier has been positioned in the region, along with two amphibious ready groups containing over 4,500 Marines and sailors.

Aerial Dominance -F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper drones are stationed in Puerto Rico, in close proximity to Venezuela. B-1 Lancer bombers have been flown along the Venezuelan coastline as a show of force.

Political Alignment - These military moves coincide with open support for opposition leader María Corina Machado, suggesting a coordinated push toward regime change.

Venezuela's Internal Political and Economic Crisis

Governance Failures - The Maduro regime is accused of rigging the 2024 election and presiding over a near-total economic collapse, marked by hyperinflation and shortages.

Humanitarian Impact - The instability has caused millions of Venezuelans to flee the country.

The Drug Trade Nuance - While Venezuela is an established transit route for drugs coming from Colombia, the text notes that the US has provided no concrete evidence linking Maduro personally to drug trafficking.

Legacy of Opposition Support - The US and Europe previously recognized figures like Juan Guaidó to delegitimize Maduro, a strategy that is being revisited.

Sovereignty, Sanctions, and Historical Lessons

Impact of Sanctions - US-imposed sanctions have arguably exacerbated the economic distress faced by ordinary Venezuelans rather than just targeting the regime.

Violation of International Law - Recent US strikes resulting in civilian deaths are flagged as violations of international law.

Question of Sovereignty - Threats against the state are viewed as an assault on Venezuela's sovereignty, irrespective of Maduro's governance failures.

Risk of Repetition - Critics warn that the US risks repeating the costly interventionist mistakes of Afghanistan (2001–2021) and Iraq (2003).

Conclusion

The situation in Venezuela presents a complex dichotomy - while the rule of Nicolás Maduro is marred by legitimacy crises and governance failures, the escalating US military pressure threatens to undermine regional stability and sovereignty. Drawing from the lessons of Afghanistan and Iraq, a path rooted in dialogue, de-escalation, and diplomacy is advocated as the only sustainable solution to prevent another destabilizing crisis in the Americas.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cautious-optimism-on-india-and-growth/article70345469.ece# -~ -text=India's%20challenge%20is%20to%20maintain%20the%20growth%20momentum&text=Growth%20has%20been%20led%20by,also%20provided%20a%20modest%20boost.

2.Give states their fair share, protect their fiscal space(IE)

GENERAL STUDIES 2 - Governance

TOPIC - Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Introduction

Fiscal federalism in India is the constitutional mechanism that ensures a balanced distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States, enabling both tiers of government to meet their developmental and welfare obligations effectively. While the 14th Finance Commission marked a paradigm shift by increasing the states' share in the divisible pool of central taxes from 32% to 42%, thereby enhancing their fiscal space, the subsequent 15th Finance Commission period witnessed a marginal decline. As the 16th Finance Commission begins its deliberations, critical questions regarding equitable allocation, fiscal autonomy, and the shrinking fiscal space—particularly for high-income states—have taken center stage. Addressing these is vital for maintaining cooperative federalism and preventing overdependence on the Centre.

Trends in Fiscal Transfers

The core of states' fiscal resources comprises tax devolution and grants from the Centre. The trends over recent Finance Commission (FC) periods reveal significant shifts -

14th Finance Commission Era - The vertical devolution share of states in central taxes was raised sharply from 32% to 42%. This led to an increase in the post-transfer fiscal space for states, rising from 63.85% to 68.08% of combined receipts.

15th Finance Commission Era - There was a slight reversal in gains, with states' fiscal space declining marginally to 67.39%. The reduction in pure tax devolution was only partially offset by specific Finance Commission grants and non-FC grants, indicating a shift from "untied" funds (devolution) to potentially "tied" or conditional funds (grants).

State-wise Variations and Regional Disparity

The impact of these fiscal shifts has not been uniform, with developed states facing a deeper crunch -

Impact on High-Income States – States like Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu experienced a notable fall of 0.38 percentage points in their fiscal space during the 15th FC period.

Dual Blow - These states faced a simultaneous reduction in their own revenue receipts and central transfers. This reflects the uneven impact of horizontal distribution formulae (which often prioritize equity/need over contribution) and the rising prevalence of non-sharable cesses.

Structural Factors Affecting Fiscal Space

Several policy and structural changes are eroding the revenue autonomy of states -

Rise of Non-Sharable Cesses & Surcharges - The Centre has increasingly resorted to collecting revenue through cesses and surcharges. Unlike the divisible pool of taxes, these are not shared with states, effectively shrinking the pie available for devolution despite high tax collections.

Horizontal Distribution Criteria - The use of "Income Distance" and other equity-based weights in the devolution formula tends to disadvantage high-income states relative to less developed states, reducing the incentive for performance and contribution.

GST Reforms & Compensation - The potential GST 2.0 reforms, which may include rate rationalization (reductions), pose a revenue risk. The cessation of the GST compensation cess has removed a guaranteed revenue cushion, exposing states to market volatilities and reducing their revenue autonomy.

Implications for Governance and Development

Constrained Developmental Spending - Reduced fiscal space directly limits the ability of states to finance critical sectors such as infrastructure, public health, education, and social welfare programs.

Erosion of Autonomy - A shift from high tax devolution to grant-based transfers often come with central conditionalities. Excessive central control strains the spirit of cooperative federalism and undermines the fiscal autonomy of states to plan according to local needs.

Equity vs. Efficiency - While equity is necessary, the current trajectory risks alienating performing states. Balanced and predictable transfers are essential to maintain harmony while respecting both contribution (efficiency) and need-based (equity) principles.

Way Forward

Role of 16th Finance Commission - The Commission needs to revise the horizontal distribution formulae to better account for regional disparities while addressing the concerns of contributing states regarding revenue shortfalls.

Rationalization of Cesses - The Centre must limit the use of non-sharable cesses and surcharges or devise a mechanism to share a portion of these proceeds, preventing the erosion of the divisible pool.

Enhancing Revenue Efficiency - Both Union and State governments must focus on improving tax buoyancy and implementing efficient collection mechanisms to expand the overall resource base rather than fighting over a shrinking pie.

Transparency - Establishing a transparent and equitable transfer mechanism will reinforce trust, support sustainable economic growth, and strengthen the federal fabric

Conclusion

Ensuring a fair share for states in central transfers is not merely a fiscal imperative but a constitutional necessity for cooperative federalism. Protecting the fiscal space of states enables them to meet their specific developmental obligations and reinforces equitable growth across India. The path ahead requires a dual strategy - strengthening the overall tax base through economic growth and reforms, and rationalizing the transfer mechanism to sustain fiscal stability while respecting the twin principles of equity and contribution.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/give-states-their-fair-share-protect-their-fiscal-space-10396773/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 03.12.2025

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1. Speed breakers Ahead- On India's Economic Data (TH) -1

2. With Putin in Delhi, an Opportunity-With Old BFF Russia, Go Beyond Defence (IE) -2

1. Speed breakers Ahead- On India's Economic Data (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

The Indian economy is currently exhibiting a volatile performance pattern. While the Second Quarter (Q2) witnessed an impressive GDP expansion of 8.2%, leading to initial optimism, recent high-frequency indicators for the Third Quarter (Q3) reveal deep-seated vulnerabilities. A divergence has emerged between strong headline GDP numbers and weaker ground-level data in industrial output (IIP), manufacturing, and exports, suggesting that the recent economic highs may face significant "speed bumps" and may not be sustainable in the short term.

Economic Data Volatility- A Mixed Picture

Roller-Coaster Trend- The economic narrative has shifted rapidly from high optimism to emerging caution.

GDP vs. Realities- The robust 8.2% Q2 GDP growth significantly boosted government sentiment. However, this is juxtaposed against low nominal growth and a recent growth forecast downgrade by the IMF, indicating underlying structural softness.

Industrial and Manufacturing Slowdown

Sharp Decline in IIP- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth plummeted to 0.4% in October 2025, marking the lowest growth rate in 14 months.

The Manufacturing Divergence

GDP Data- Showed a robust 9.1% growth in manufacturing for Q2.

IIP Data- In contrast, October data revealed a slowdown to just 1.8%.

Base Effect- Part of the Q2 growth can be attributed to a low-base effect, as manufacturing had grown only 2.2% in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

Tariff Shock- A critical factor is the imposition of 50% tariffs by the U.S. *Initial Phase*- There was a rush to fulfill older orders before tariffs kicked in. *Current Phase*- This was followed by a sharp 12% contraction in exports in October as the full weight of tariffs was felt.

Weakening Export Momentum

PMI Contraction- The manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dropped to a nine-month low of 56.6 in November.

Order Book Stress- New export orders are growing at their slowest pace in over a year, directly pointing to disruptions caused by rising global tariffs and trade barriers.

Sectoral Strains- Supply-Side Constraints

Weather Impact-

Electricity- Output was reduced due to winter weather conditions.

Mining- Extended rains dragged down mining activities.

Primary Goods- The combination of these factors resulted in a net contraction in the primary goods sector in October.

Investment and Capital Goods Concerns

Conflicting Signals

GDP Data- Indicated a healthy 7.3% rise in investment during Q2.

IIP Data- Suggests a slowdown heading into Q3.

Capital Goods Slump- Growth in capital goods—a proxy for private investment activity—stood at a mere 2.4% (a 14-month low). This indicates a softening of investment momentum in the economy.

Consumption Weakness Breakdown

The Consumption Paradox-

GDP Data- Showed Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) growing at approximately 8% in Q2.

IIP Data- Conversely, recorded a contraction in both consumer durables and non-durables.

Performance Low- This contraction marks the worst performance for these segments in two years.

GST Indicators- Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections stood at ₹1.7 lakh crore in November. While substantial, this indicates that aggregate demand has not strengthened as rapidly as anticipated post-rationalisation.

Conclusion

The early trends for Q3 highlight growing economic headwinds. The economy is currently characterized by a dichotomy- strong past GDP figures versus fragile current industrial output, weakening exports due to external tariff shocks, and slowing consumption. With investment momentum moderating, the overall outlook signals a period of caution for policymakers. A sustained recovery will require stabilizing external demand, improving domestic consumption conditions, and ensuring growth remains broad-based rather than statistically skewed.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/speedbreakers-ahead-on-indias-economic-data/article70349466.ece#google_vignette

2. With Putin in Delhi, an Opportunity- With Old BFF Russia, Go Beyond Defence

GENERAL STUDIES 2- International Relation

TOPIC- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

President Vladimir Putin's scheduled visit to India in December 2025 serves as a critical juncture to recalibrate and modernize the India-Russia strategic partnership. Historically anchored in defence, the relationship currently faces stress tests from the ongoing Ukraine conflict, Russia's deepening ties with China, and India's need to balance its relations with the West. This visit offers a timely opportunity to transition the partnership from a purely buyer-seller defence dynamic to a multi-dimensional collaboration in economy and technology, thereby reinforcing India's strategic autonomy.

Current State of India-Russia Relations

Historical & Strategic Pillars-

Deep-Rooted Trust- The relationship enjoys political trust and strategic goodwill dating back to the Soviet era.

Defence Dominance- Russia remains a linchpin in India's defence architecture, supplying critical platforms like the S-400 missile systems and Su-57 fighter jets.

Energy Security- Cooperation extends significantly into the nuclear energy sector and, more recently, oil imports.

Economic Asymmetry-

Low Trade Volumes- Despite strong political ties, bilateral trade (excluding recent oil spikes) has historically hovered around $5 billion annually.

Comparative Weakness- This figure is notably lower than India's trade with smaller neighbours like Bangladesh (approx. $11 billion).

G2G Nature- The engagement is almost entirely Government-to-Government, with minimal participation from the private sector or civil society.

Geopolitical Complexities-

China Factor- Russia's isolation from the West has increased its dependence on China, a regional adversary of India, adding a layer of strategic complexity.

Western Friction- India's continued energy imports from Russia during the Ukraine war have drawn criticism from the US and Europe, challenging New Delhi's diplomatic balancing act.

Challenges and Risks

Geopolitical Sensitivity- India faces the difficult task of navigating relations with Russia without alienating key Western partners (US and Europe), whose capital and technology are vital for India's growth. Western concerns regarding India's ties with Moscow could spill over into unrelated trade and investment negotiations.

Economic Constraints- The current low base of trade limits immediate commercial gains. Geopolitical tensions and sanctions regimes restrict private sector enthusiasm and complicate payment mechanisms.

Global & Internal Uncertainty- The unpredictability of Ukraine peace negotiations makes long-term planning difficult. Russia's domestic economic constraints and internal priorities may limit its capacity to engage in robust new partnerships.

Opportunities for India

Diversification of Ties- There is an urgent need to move beyond the "defence-only" narrative. Potential exists to expand into trade, technology, scientific research, and infrastructure collaboration.

Joint Ventures & Innovation- Collaborative opportunities exist in emerging technologies, renewable energy, and joint research initiatives to ensure long-term engagement.

Post-Conflict Economic Participation- A potential peaceful resolution in Ukraine will likely trigger a reconstruction phase and economic expansion in Russia. India can position itself early to leverage opportunities in trade, investment, and technology transfer during Russia's recovery.

Reinforcing Strategic Autonomy- Engaging Russia prevents over-dependence on any single power bloc. Maintaining robust ties with Moscow, alongside Washington and Brussels, enhances India's leverage and validity as a truly multi-aligned global power.

Way Forward

Broadening the Agenda- The partnership must pivot toward energy security, renewable resources, space research, and digital technologies. Active efforts should be made to involve the private sector to reduce the reliance on G2G frameworks.

Strategic Diplomacy- Use the high-level visit to reaffirm India's commitment to global peace while staunchly protecting its multi-alignment policy. Diplomatic messaging must balance support for Russia's legitimate interests with India's adherence to the UN Charter and territorial integrity.
Long-Term Vision- India must prepare a strategy for Russia's eventual economic revival post-conflict. The goal is to build a partnership that is sustainable, mutually beneficial, and resilient against the fluctuations of global geopolitics.

Conclusion

President Putin's visit is not just a ceremonial engagement but a strategic necessity to transform a defence-heavy relationship into a comprehensive partnership. By expanding the basket of cooperation to include technology and commerce, India can convert historical goodwill into tangible economic gains. A modernized India-Russia tie is essential for India's global diplomatic influence, ensuring that New Delhi remains a key player in the emerging multipolar world order.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-with-putin-in-delhi-an-opportunity-with-old-bff-russia-go-beyond-defence-10398902/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 04.12.2025

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1. Taking the leap- on leprosy in India and discrimination (TH) -1

2. Rupee breaches the 90-mark-driving the slide against the dollar (IE) -2

1. Taking the leap- on leprosy in India and discrimination (TH)

General Studies 2- Social Justice

TOPIC- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Eliminating Legal Barriers for Persons with Leprosy

Introduction

Despite medical advancements making leprosy a non-infectious and fully curable disease, persons affected by it in India continue to face systemic oppression. This burden is driven by deep-seated stigma, misinformation, and archaic laws. An analysis of the current legal landscape reveals that discriminatory provisions deny basic rights and dignity to these individuals, necessitating urgent legal and social reforms to build a just society.

Background and Current Burden of Disease

Causative Agent- Leprosy is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*. It is one of the oldest known human infections, with evidence dating back to 2000 BCE.

Global Burden- India accounts for a staggering 57% of global leprosy cases.

Vulnerability Factors- High prevalence is attributed to factors such as genetic susceptibility and unsanitary living conditions.

Medical Reality- Modern medicine has rendered the disease fully curable and non-infectious, yet the social and legal treatment of patients remains stuck in the past.

The Nature of Stigma and Discrimination

Root Causes- Stigma stems from ancient beliefs, fear of contagion, and a lack of scientific temper regarding the disease.

Systemic Prejudice- The discrimination is not just social but institutional, requiring systematic efforts to uphold the dignity of affected individuals.

Judicial Intervention- The Supreme Court of India has intervened to address these injustices, pushing for immediate corrective actions to dismantle this prejudice.

Legal Discrimination- The Current Status

Extent of Discriminatory Laws- A report by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) highlighted that 97 Central and State laws still contain discriminatory provisions against persons with leprosy.

Rights Denied- These laws systematically exclude affected persons from- Accessing public transport. Entering public spaces.

Civic Rights- Eligibility to contest elections.

Economic Rights- Employment opportunities and the right to run independent businesses.

Judicial Scrutiny- The Court is currently examining petitions that challenge this widespread statutory discrimination.

NHRC Recommendations for Reform

Since 2021, the NHRC has been advocating for comprehensive reforms-

Holistic Approach- Focus on early detection, timely treatment, and rehabilitation.

Terminological Changes- Urged the Centre to replace derogatory terms used in old statutes to restore dignity to patients.

Technological Inclusion (Aadhaar)- A critical recommendation involves using Iris scans for Aadhaar enrolment. *Reason*- Leprosy often damages fingertips, making biometric fingerprint identification difficult or impossible for affected individuals.

Call for Immediate Remedial Action

Moral Imperative- Retaining antediluvian (ancient/outdated) provisions in the face of modern medical progress is unjust and unacceptable.

State Accountability- The Supreme Court has directed all States and Union Territories to submit reports on the steps taken to address these discriminatory laws.

Legislative Action- Governments must urgently repeal these archaic laws and implement robust remedial measures based on NHRC evidence.

Modern Context- It is unfathomable for a modern democracy to trap citizens in stigma generated by previous generations that lacked scientific understanding.

Conclusion

To ensure true equality, India must move beyond medical treatment and address the socio-legal dimensions of leprosy. This requires dismantling archaic legal barriers, removing social prejudice, and guaranteeing dignified access to rights and services. Decisive action is needed to uphold human rights and end the historical discrimination against persons with leprosy permanently.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/taking-the-leap-on-leprosy-in-india-and-discriminatioin/article70353527.ece

2. Rupee breaches the 90-mark-driving the slide against the dollar (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment**.**

Rupee Breaches 90-Mark- Drivers and Implications

Introduction

The Indian rupee has recently crossed the psychologically critical 90-per-dollar mark, signaling significant vulnerabilities in the country's external sector. This depreciation presents a paradox against a backdrop of strong domestic macroeconomic fundamentals, including a GDP growth of 8.2% in Q2 FY26, inflation below 1%, and softening crude oil prices. The situation highlights the complex interplay between structural trade challenges, external market dynamics, and capital outflows.

Key Drivers of Depreciation

Widening Trade Deficit

The primary pressure on the rupee stems from a distinct imbalance in trade.

Export Contraction- Merchandise exports contracted by 1.8% year-on-year in October 2025. Non-oil exports suffered a sharper decline of 12%, hitting an 11-month low.

Key Sectors Hit- Engineering goods, gems and jewellery, chemicals, and ready-made garments.

Import Surge- Imports rose by 16.6%, creating high demand for dollars.

Gold Imports- Tripled to $14.7 billion driven by festive demand and speculative buying.

Other Drivers- Silver, fertilizers, and industrial machinery.

Delayed US-India Trade Agreement

Uncertainty- Prolonged negotiations and lack of clarity on the India-US trade deal have dampened export sentiment and future planning.

Market Fear- Participants worry that continued delays will exacerbate the trade deficit, further weakening the local currency.

Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) Outflows

Capital Flight- FPIs have withdrawn a massive Rs 152 lakh crore from domestic equities since January 2025.

Reasoning- Investors are seeking higher returns in global markets. India's equity market underperformance relative to global peers has made it a convenient source for liquidity withdrawal.

RBI's Soft-Touch Intervention

Strategy- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opted for a strategy of gradual depreciation rather than aggressive defence.

Objective- To maintain the rupee at competitive levels to support export viability.

Risk- While this helps exporters, limited intervention increases risks for importers and exposes the economy to potential imported inflation.

Global Factors

External Drivers- The strength of the US Dollar Index, trends in global crude oil prices, and gold import volumes remain major external determinants of rupee volatility.

Implications for the Indian Economy

Area of Impact	Implications
Export Competitiveness	A weaker rupee theoretically makes Indian goods cheaper abroad, but it cannot fully offset structural weaknesses in key sectors like textiles and engineering.
Imported Inflation	Depreciation increases the landed cost of imports. Rising bills for gold and industrial machinery may push up domestic production costs and inflation.
Investor Confidence	High currency volatility combined with trade policy uncertainty can deter long-term Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
Macro Management	The RBI faces the difficult task of balancing export support (via weaker currency) with reserve preservation to prevent disorderly market movements.

Way Forward & Recommendations

Expedite Trade Agreements- The government must prioritize the immediate conclusion of the India-US trade deal to reduce uncertainty and boost export volumes.

Enhance FDI Inflows- To counter FPI outflows, India needs to attract stable long-term capital by- Improving the Ease of Doing Business. Upgrading infrastructure. Providing tax clarity. Strengthening local governance.

Diversify Export Basket- Reduce dependence on traditional markets (like the US) and sectors by promoting non-traditional and value-added exports.

Macroprudential Measures- The RBI may need to intervene cautiously—not to reverse the trend, but to prevent excessive volatility that harms business planning.

Conclusion

The rupee crossing the 90-mark is a reflection of both domestic structural issues (rising trade deficits, investment outflows) and global headwinds (strong dollar, gold demand). While moderate depreciation can offer a temporary competitive edge to exporters, ensuring long-term currency stability requires a coordinated policy approach focusing on finalizing trade deals, boosting FDI, and prudent macroeconomic management.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/rupee-breaches-90-mark-whats-driving-slide10400171-10400171/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 05.12.2025

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1. Freeze and thaw- On the winter session of Parliament(TH) -1

2. Census is about who we are. It cannot ignore caste and migration (IE) -2

1. Freeze and thaw- On the winter session of Parliament(TH)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures (Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.)

Parliament Winter Session- Issues and Agenda

Introduction

The Winter Session of Parliament, scheduled from December 1 to 19, 2025, has commenced amidst heightened friction between the Government and the Opposition. Spanning 15 sittings, this session is critical due to its heavy legislative agenda and the backdrop of sharp accusations regarding the erosion of parliamentary conventions and the shortening of schedules.

Overview of the Winter Session

Duration and Schedule- The session is relatively short, commencing on December 1 and concluding on December 19, comprising only 15 sittings.

Political Climate

Government Stance- The Prime Minister has cautioned against "political theatrics" while asserting the government's willingness to discuss any issue.

Opposition Grievances- The Opposition has criticized the truncated nature of the session. They have also alleged a break in convention regarding the exclusion of Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi from diplomatic engagements.

Role of the Chair- Expectations are placed on Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan (Rajya Sabha Chairman) to mediate and ease the strained relations between the treasury and opposition benches.

Legislative Agenda and Key Bills

The government has listed 14 Bills for consideration, several of which carry significant political and administrative implications-

Jan Vishwas (Amendment) Bill, 2025- Aims to further simplify criminal justice processes and decriminalize minor offenses to improve ease of doing business and living.

Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2025- Seeks to replace existing regulators like the UGC (University Grants Commission) and AICTE with a single overarching body. *Contentious Point-* States are likely to challenge this as it may infringe upon federal autonomy in education.

Health Security se National Security Cess Bill- Introduced by the Finance Minister, this bill aims to repackage/restructure the existing cess on tobacco products.

Other Significant Legislation- National Highways (Amendment) Bill, Atomic Energy Bill, Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill

Scheduled Debates and Electoral Issues

Electoral Reforms- A major focus will be on the Special Summary Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Government View- Prioritizing the push for "One Nation, One Election" (synchronised national elections).

Opposition View- Raising concerns regarding alleged malpractices in the maintenance of electoral rolls and the general conduct of elections.

Historical Commemoration- A special discussion is scheduled to mark 150 years of the composition of *Vande Mataram*.

Opposition Demands and Concerns

The Opposition is pushing for urgent debates on pressing national issues, specifically-
Internal Security- Discussions on the recent Delhi blasts.
Economic Distress- Rising prices (inflation) and agrarian/farmers' issues.
Environmental Crisis- Severe air pollution affecting major cities.
Institutional Integrity- Allegations regarding the misuse of federal investigation agencies against political opponents.

Conclusion

For the parliamentary system to function effectively, the focus must shift from political confrontation to substantive deliberation. Both sides need to engage constructively to address critical challenges like electoral integrity, national security, and economic stability. A productive session is essential to uphold the constitutional spirit of dialogue and ensure governance accountability.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/freeze-and-thaw-on-the-winter-session-of-parliament/article70357837.ece

2. Census is about who we are. It cannot ignore caste and migration (IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society
Topic- Population and associated issues, Poverty and developmental issues, Urbanization, their problems and their remedies

Governance Implications of the Delay

Historic Gap- The Census 2021 was postponed citing the COVID-19 pandemic, despite elections continuing in several states. This has resulted in a 16–17-year void without updated population data, blinding policy formulation.
Resource Misallocation
Welfare Schemes- Critical programs (e.g., PDS, Food Security) and Finance Commission transfers continue to rely on outdated 2011 data, excluding millions of eligible beneficiaries.
Urban Planning- Cities are severely under-planned as they fail to account for the rapid population surge of the last decade.
Constitutional & Electoral Impact-
Delimitation Freeze- Naming the exercise "Census 2027" ensures compliance with the 84th **Constitutional Amendment**, which froze delimitation until "the first Census taken after the year 2026" is published.
Women's Reservation- The implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill is constitutionally linked to delimitation. Since delimitation is a 4–6-year process, women's reservation in Parliament is unlikely to materialize before the mid-2030s.

Caste Enumeration- The Debate and Necessity

Historical Context- The last comprehensive caste enumeration occurred in 1931. Post-independence, Census data has been restricted to SCs and STs for constitutional reservation mandates. The SECC 2011 (Socio-Economic Caste Census) attempted full data collection but the data was never released due to quality concerns.
Necessity for Data-
Evidence-Based Policy- Essential for rationalizing OBC and SC/ST reservations and affirmative action policies.
Social Justice- Guides targeted resource allocation for education, employment, and poverty alleviation based on empirical backwardness rather than estimates.

Challenges & Risks

Political Polarization- Fears that detailed caste data could deepen social fissures and lead to caste-based political mobilization.

Administrative Complexity- enumerating thousands of castes, sub-castes, and clan names requires scientific rigor to avoid errors.

Editorial Stance- Ignoring caste reality is not a neutral act. Census 2027 must enumerate caste with the same scientific rigor applied to variables like age, literacy, and occupation.

Migration- The Crisis of "Invisibility"

Current Issue- Millions of migrants are statistically counted in their native villages rather than the cities where they live and contribute economically.

Structural Implications

Urban Governance Deficit- Municipalities struggle to provide services (water, sanitation, housing) to populations that officially do not exist in their records.

Electoral Distortion- Migrants often cannot vote in their city of residence, rendering them politically **invisible** and reducing the incentive for urban leaders to address their needs.

Rural Misallocation- Villages receive funds for populations that have long migrated away.

Proposed Solutions

Residency-Based Counting- Register migrants at their place of residence if they have lived there for more than 6 months.

Inter-State Coordination- Update voter rolls and coordinate between source and destination states to ensure migrants are enfranchised where they live.

Digital Census- Opportunities vs. Risks

Advantages

Efficiency- Faster enumeration, reduced manual errors, and quicker publication of final results.

Tracking- Enables real-time monitoring and district-wise progress tracking.

Risks & Privacy Concerns

Surveillance- The collection of personal, biometric, and socio-economic data raises fears of state surveillance.

Data Linkage- Potential linking with Aadhaar, NPR (National Population Register), or voter rolls could compromise citizen privacy and lead to profiling.

Essential Safeguards-

Purpose Limitation- Census data must be strictly used for statistical purposes, never for law enforcement or citizenship verification (NRC).

Independent Audits- Robust privacy protocols and independent audits are required to validate data security and anonymization.

Transparency and Federal Trust

State Access- State governments must have real-time access to enumeration data to trust the process.

Public Monitoring- Public dashboards should be established to track district-wise progress and ensure accountability.

Data Release- To maintain credibility, all collected variables—including caste—must be published transparently after independent validation.

Conclusion

Census 2027 represents more than a mere statistical update; it is the bedrock of Indian governance and democracy. To be effective, it must evolve into a comprehensive exercise that accurately counts caste and migration, ensuring representation for the marginalized. By balancing technological efficiency with democratic accountability and strict privacy safeguards, the Census can

empower evidence-based policymaking, ensure fair delimitation, and lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and just republic.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/s-y-quraishi-writes-census-is-about-who-we-are-it-cannot-ignore-caste-and-migration-10402996/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 06.12.2025

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2. Delhi HC Rejected Semaglutide Patent Suit(IE) -2

1. Marked for Life- On Acid Attack Survivors(TH)

General Studies 1- Social Issues

TOPIC- Role of women and women's organization, social empowerment

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has recently issued a strong critique regarding the sluggish pace of justice for acid attack survivors, highlighting a specific case that has dragged on for 16 years. Terming such delays as a "mockery of the system," the Court emphasized that perpetrators of such heinous crimes deserve no sympathy. The observations underscore an urgent need for systemic reforms, including day-to-day hearings, stricter laws, and comprehensive rehabilitation measures to restore dignity to survivors.

Judicial Observations and Stance

"Mockery of the System"- The Supreme Court expressed deep shock over the 16-year delay in concluding the trial of an acid attack survivor, labelling the administrative and judicial lethargy as a mockery of justice.

Zero Sympathy Doctrine- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant explicitly stated that courts should not show any leniency or sympathy towards acid attackers.

Call for Firm Response- The Court urged the entire judicial ecosystem to respond with firmness and urgency to ensure that justice is not just theoretical but delivered in practice.

Case Study- The Struggle of Shaheen Malik

Timeline of Injustice

2009- Shaheen Malik was attacked at the age of 26 while pursuing her MBA.

2009–2013- The case saw zero progress, reflecting initial systemic apathy.

Current Status- The trial was transferred from Haryana to Rohini Court, Delhi. Despite the passage of 16 years, final arguments are still pending.

Physical and Social Toll- The survivor has undergone multiple reconstructive surgeries over the years to address severe disfigurement and health complications.

Advocacy and Rehabilitation- Turning her trauma into activism, Malik founded the NGO 'Brave Souls' in 2021 to provide medical and legal assistance to other survivors.

Issues Raised in the PIL (Public Interest Litigation)

Disability Recognition- The petition seeks the inclusion of acid attack survivors under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

Internal Injuries- The PIL highlighted a specific, often overlooked category of victims—those forced to ingest acid. These survivors suffer life-threatening internal injuries without visible external scarring, yet they struggle to receive formal acknowledgment and state support.

Demand for Dignity- The plea seeks formal recognition of the unique suffering of acid attack victims to ensure they receive adequate state-sponsored support and rehabilitation.

Supreme Court Directives and Government Response

Legislative Action- The CJI suggested that the Central Government consider bringing an ordinance to strengthen the legal response mechanism against acid attacks.

Government Support- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta supported the petition, asserting that perpetrators of such "inhuman" acts should face equal ruthlessness from the law.

Data Collection- The Court directed the Registrar-Generals of all High Courts to compile and furnish data regarding the number of pending acid attack trials across India.
Special Courts- To tackle delays, the Court proposed the establishment of special courts to conduct **day-to-day hearings**, ensuring trials are concluded swiftly.

Legal and Policy Landscape

Precedent (Laxmi vs. Union of India)- The summary recalls this landmark judgment where the SC had previously ordered strict regulations on the sale of acid, along with mandatory compensation and rehabilitation for victims.
Current Legal Provisions- Section 124 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) specifically outlines the punishment for acid attacks, replacing older provisions.
Implementation Gap- Despite the existence of these legal frameworks, conviction rates remain low, and trials are excessively lengthy.

Statistical Context (NCRB 2023 Data)

National Prevalence- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recorded 207 acid attack cases nationwide in 2023.
Regional Hotspots
West Bengal- Highest incidence with 57 cases.
Uttar Pradesh- Second highest with 31 cases.
Inference- The data indicates that despite legal deterrents, acid attacks remain a prevalent form of extreme gender-based violence.

Conclusion

Acid attacks persist as one of the cruellest forms of gender violence in India. While the legal framework exists, the ground reality is marred by delayed trials, low conviction rates, and inadequate victim support. The Supreme Court's latest intervention signals a critical pivot toward special courts and strictly enforced timelines. For justice to be meaningful, India must bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring survivors receive not just verdicts, but holistic rehabilitation and the dignity they are "marked for life" to be denied.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/marked-for-life-on-acid-attack-survivors/article70362175.ece

2. Delhi HC Rejected Semaglutide Patent Suit(IE)

General Studies 2- Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Introduction

The Delhi High Court has delivered a significant verdict allowing Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) to manufacture and export generic versions of Semaglutide, a breakthrough drug used for Type 2 diabetes and obesity. The Court rejected the plea of the patent holder, Novo Nordisk, which sought to restrain DRL based on a formulation patent. This ruling reinforces India's strict stance against "evergreening"—the practice of extending patent monopolies through minor modifications—thereby prioritizing public health and affordable access to essential medicines.

Key Details of the Case

The Drug Involved
Name- Semaglutide (a GLP-1 receptor agonist).
Market Names- Sold by Novo Nordisk as Ozempic (for diabetes) and Wegovy (for weight loss).
Function- It mimics the GLP-1 hormone to stimulate insulin secretion, inhibit glucagon, and suppress appetite.

The Patent Conflict

Patent No. 275964 (Composition Patent)- This covered the original chemical compound. It expired in September 2024, theoretically opening the market to generics.

Patent No. 262697 (Formulation Patent)- Novo Nordisk held this secondary patent on the specific delivery/formulation method, valid until March 2026.

The Dispute

Novo Nordisk's Argument- They claimed the formulation was novel and offered significantly higher efficacy, thus deserving protection.

DRL's Argument- They challenged the second patent, arguing it lacked "inventive step" and "novelty." DRL contended this was a classic case of evergreening prohibited under Indian law, as the changes were minor modifications of the known substance.

The Delhi High Court's Ruling

Verdict- The Court refused to grant an injunction against DRL, effectively allowing them to manufacture and export the drug**.**

Rationale- The Court found DRL's challenge to the patent to be *prima facie* (on the face of it) valid. It observed potential double patenting by Novo Nordisk, attempting to extend exclusivity beyond the expiry of the primary molecule patent.

Restriction- While manufacturing for export is allowed, domestic sales in India are restricted until the original composition patent issues are fully resolved or the patent term ends (though the primary patent has already expired in Sept 2024, the legal nuance lies in the formulation patent's validity).

Legal Context- Combating Evergreening

Section 3(d) of the Patents Act, 1970- This is the cornerstone of India's IPR regime regarding pharmaceuticals. It prevents the patenting of "mere use of a known substance" or "mere discovery of a new form of a known substance" unless it results in significantly enhanced efficacy**.**

Purpose- To stop pharmaceutical giants from making trivial changes to existing drugs just to keep generics off the market.

Constitutional Duty- The ruling aligns with Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health.

Precedent- This decision strengthens the jurisprudence established in the landmark Novartis vs. Union of India (Glivec case, 2013), where the Supreme Court rejected a patent for a cancer drug on similar grounds.

Implications for the Pharma Industry & Economy

Boost for Generics- Strengthens India's reputation as the "Pharmacy of the World." Encourages other major players like Cipla, Sun Pharma, and Mankind Pharma to enter the GLP-1 market.

Economic Impact

Exports- Allows Indian companies to tap into the massive global demand for obesity and diabetes drugs, contributing to the trade surplus.

Make in India- Reinforces domestic manufacturing capabilities and the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative.

Market Dynamics- Promotes competition, which inevitably drives down the cost of life-saving drugs for both domestic and international consumers.

Public Health & Science Perspective

Disease Burden- India faces a rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and obesity. Affordable access to advanced drugs like Semaglutide is critical for management**.**

Healthcare Access- Lower costs mean these drugs can potentially be included in broader public health programs under the National Health Mission. Aligns with WHO standards that advocate for access to generic versions of essential medicines**.**

Way Forward

Regulatory Vigilance- The Patent Office must remain vigilant to identify and reject frivolous patent applications that aim to "evergreen" monopolies.

Balance of Interests- India must continue to balance its TRIPS compliance (protecting genuine innovation) with its public health obligations.

Domestic Innovation- While promoting generics, policy frameworks should also incentivize genuine R&D within India to move from being a "volume" leader to a "value" leader in pharma.

Conclusion

The Delhi High Court's decision is a victory for public health over corporate monopoly. By enforcing strict checks against evergreening, the judiciary has ensured that patent laws serve their true purpose- rewarding genuine innovation without blocking access to essential, life-saving treatments. This ruling not only benefits Indian patients but also reinforces India's pivotal role in the global pharmaceutical supply chain.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/why-delhi-hc-rejected-semaglutide-patent-suit-10405013/**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. Balancing, not swinging- on India-Russia ties, Indian diplomacy(TH) -1

2. Economy beyond headline numbers – better jobs, green growth needed(IE) -2

1. Balancing, not swinging- on India-Russia ties, Indian diplomacy(TH)

General Studies 1- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

India's foreign policy is currently navigating a high-stakes geopolitical landscape, best exemplified by the recent visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi. This visit, marking the 25th year of the India-Russia strategic partnership, serves as a testament to India's pursuit of "Strategic Autonomy." By hosting the Russian President amid the ongoing Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions, India has signaled a commitment to continuity in its historic ties while cautiously managing its burgeoning relationship with the West.

Significance of the Visit

25th Anniversary- The visit commemorated 25 years of the Strategic Partnership between the two nations.

Timing- This was President Putin's first visit to India since the onset of the Ukraine invasion in 2022.

Geopolitical Pressure- The visit occurred despite an active International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against Mr. Putin. Intensified Russian attacks in Ukraine. Russia's rejection of new U.S. peace proposals, which has heightened European security concerns.

India's Resolve- Proceeding with the visit under these conditions underscores India's willingness to prioritize its national interest over external diplomatic pressure.

Diplomatic Signals- Continuity and Trust

Warm Reception- The Indian Prime Minister received President Putin personally, according him a full state visit. This visual symbolism conveys that New Delhi still regards Moscow as a "trusted partner," disregarding efforts by the West to isolate Russia.

Stance on Ukraine- India maintained its consistent position- It reiterated a general call for peace and dialogue. Crucially, it refused to directly criticise Russia for the war in Ukraine.

Resilience to Sanctions- Despite the looming threat of secondary sanctions and U.S. pressure on tariffs regarding oil trade, India demonstrated a clear intent to preserve and protect its economic engagement with Russia.

Key Economic Takeaways

The focus of the summit was heavily tilted toward economic cooperation rather than military engagement

Labour Mobility- A new agreement was discussed to facilitate labour mobility between the two nations.

Fertilizer Security- An MoU was signed to jointly establish a urea plant in Russia, securing a vital input for India's agricultural sector.

Economic Roadmap 2030- Both sides adopted the roadmap announced earlier in 2024 to deepen trade and connectivity.

Financial Infrastructure- Plans to explore national currency payment systems to bypass Western financial sanctions. Promotion of maritime corridors (e.g., Chennai-Vladivostok or INSTC routes) to streamline logistics.

Trade Goals- The leaders reiterated the ambitious goal of reaching $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

The Balancing Act- Managing Western Sensitivities

India displayed strategic caution to avoid antagonizing the U.S. and Europe, evident in what was *not* announced-

Strategic Omissions- There were no major announcements regarding- Defence hardware/deals. Nuclear energy projects. Space collaboration.

Reasoning- Avoiding these sensitive sectors signals India's awareness of Western "red lines."

Oil Imports- India avoided committing to *higher* volumes of oil imports. This makes the $100 billion trade target harder to achieve but helps avoid further friction regarding the trade deficit and sanctions.

"Dhruv Tara"- While the PM described Russia as a "Dhruv Tara" (Guiding Star), the overall conduct of the visit showed a prioritization of ties with the U.S. and EU alongside maintaining the Russian connection.

Defining Strategic Autonomy

Consistency is Key- The article argues that true strategic autonomy is about consistent engagement with all major power blocs (Russia and the West).

Avoiding "Swinging"- India must not "swing" back and forth based on momentary pressures but should maintain a steady equilibrium.

The Path Ahead- Sustaining this autonomy requires a careful blend of diplomacy where India defends its independent foreign policy without becoming a junior partner to any single bloc.

Conclusion

India's handling of President Putin's visit reflects a sophisticated exercise in realpolitik. By stripping the visit of controversial military deals and focusing on economic essentials like fertilizers and connectivity, India safeguarded its historic partnership with Russia while minimizing fallout with the West. The visit reinforces that for New Delhi, strategic autonomy is not about isolation, but about the capacity to engage multiple conflicting powers simultaneously to serve India's National Interest.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/balancing-not-swinging-on-india-russia-ties-indian-diplomacy/article70368877.ece

2. Economy beyond headline numbers – better jobs, green growth needed(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

India's economy has demonstrated resilience and strength, recording a robust headline GDP growth of 8.2% in Q2FY26. While this signals strong macroeconomic performance on the surface, beneath these figures lie significant structural challenges. Concerns raised by international bodies like the IMF regarding data quality, coupled with domestic issues of jobless growth and severe environmental degradation in North India, suggest that high growth rates alone are insufficient. True development requires a shift towards inclusivity, data transparency, and environmental sustainability.

The Paradox- High Growth vs. Data Credibility

While the growth numbers are impressive, the credibility of the data underpinning them is under scrutiny.

Strong Headline Numbers- The 8.2% growth rate in Q2FY26 positions India as a fast-growing major economy.

IMF's "C" Rating- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reportedly graded India's national accounts with a "C" rating for the quality of underlying data.

Outdated Base Year- A primary criticism is the continued reliance on the 2011-12 base year for GDP calculations. This old base fails to capture new economic activities, digital shifts, and modern consumption patterns.

The Invisible Informal Sector- With approximately 90% of the economy operating in the informal sector, current data collection methods chronically undercount this segment. This leads to a significant mismeasurement of- Actual GDP. Employment levels. True welfare standards of the population.

The Challenge of Jobless Growth & Structural Transformation

Economic expansion has not translated proportionately into formal employment, creating a phenomenon of "jobless growth."

Over-reliance on Agriculture- Despite the service sector boom, about 46% of India's workforce remains dependent on agriculture.

Contrast- The agriculture sector grew by only 3.5% in Q2FY26, indicating a disparity between where the growth is (Services/Industry) and where the people are (Agriculture).

Informality Trap- Government schemes and welfare transfers are providing relief but are not a substitute for high-quality, formal-sector jobs.

Stalled Structural Transformation- A healthy developing economy typically moves labor from low-productivity agriculture to high-productivity manufacturing. In India, this transition is slow, impeding sustainable structural transformation.

The Environmental Cost of Growth

The current growth model appears to be environmentally expensive, particularly in North India, undermining the quality of life.

Air Pollution Crisis- Cities like Delhi consistently rank among the most polluted globally. AQI levels frequently exceed 400, which severely impacts life expectancy and public health.

Water Toxicity- Groundwater contamination, particularly with heavy metals, poses long-term health risks that are not factored into GDP calculations.

"Defensive Consumption" Paradox- A portion of the GDP growth is fueled by people spending money to protect themselves from pollution (e.g., buying air purifiers, water filters, medical treatments). While this increases economic activity figures, it actually represents a decline in human welfare.

Recommendations for Meaningful Growth

To bridge the gap between GDP figures and ground reality, the following interventions are recommended

Area of Reform	Specific Actions
Job Creation	Accelerate private investment, improve Ease of Doing Business, and align Skill India programs with actual market demands to move workers to formal jobs.
Data Modernization	Immediately update the GDP Base Year (ideally every 5 years). Institutionalize high-frequency data collection to better capture the informal economy.
Environmental Action	Implement coordinated policies on Crop Residue Management, urban transport overhaul, and strict industrial emission norms.

Way Forward

Strengthen Employment Generation- Focus on MSME growth as they are labor-intensive. Encourage start-ups and industries that can absorb labor migrating out of agriculture**.**

Modernize National Accounts- Move towards real-time data tracking to build confidence among domestic and global investors. Transparency in data is crucial for effective policy formulation.

Promote Green and Sustainable Growth- Green GDP- Integrate environmental indicators into GDP measurement to get a "Holistic View" of growth. Invest heavily in urban public transport to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Policy Integration- Economic, labor, and environmental policies must not work in silos. PMO-level coordination is suggested to ensure strictly implemented monitoring across states.

Conclusion

India's growth story remains impressive on paper, but for it to be truly "developed" (Viksit) by 2047, the focus must shift from *quantity* of growth to *quality* of growth. Addressing the "Jobless" nature of expansion, fixing the "Data Deficit," and reversing "Environmental Degradation" are the three pillars required to make India's rise sustainable and inclusive**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/economy-beyond-headline-numbers-better-jobs-green-growth-needed-10408015/?ref=opinion_pg

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2.India and the UK- A Defence Partnership with Potential to Make a Better World - 2

1. Prudent action- On RBI Interest rate cuts

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. (Monetary Policy (RBI), Inflation vs. Growth, Banking Sector & Interest Rates.)

Introduction

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has executed a strategic rate cut, reflecting a nuanced approach to monetary policy. Despite strong headline GDP numbers, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) remains cautious about the underlying strength of the economy and external headwinds. This move is a "careful balancing act" aimed at sustaining investment and protecting exporters while maintaining a neutral stance to allow for swift policy reversals if inflation risks re-emerge.

The MPC's Decision- Key Statistics

Rate Reduction- The MPC reduced the policy rate by 25 basis points (bps), bringing it down to 5.25%.
Cumulative Action- This adds up to a total reduction of 125 bps in the year 2025.
Historical Context- Such aggressive cumulative cuts were last witnessed in 2019, a period marked by a sharp slowdown in growth.

The Growth Paradox

There is a divergence between the rising GDP figures and the central bank's dovish policy action.
GDP Momentum- Growth has accelerated from 5.6% in Q2 of the previous year to 8.2% in Q2 of the current year.
Skepticism on Durability- The rate cut suggests the RBI is not fully convinced that this growth momentum is secure or self-sustaining.
The Deflator Factor- The analysis notes that real growth figures might look inflated due to a low GDP deflator (implying nominal growth might not be as robust as real growth suggests).

Rationale Behind the Rate Cut

The MPC's decision is driven by both domestic capacity issues and external threats.
Idle Capacity- Indian firms still possess ample idle capacity. This implies that stimulating demand will not immediately lead to overheating or inflation, making a rate cut a "safe" bet to push growth.
Supporting Investment- Cheaper credit is intended to encourage corporate investment, which is currently present but often funded by debt.
External Shocks (US Tariffs)- The MPC is preemptively cushioning the economy against the unfolding impact of 50% tariffs imposed by the U.S. on global supply chains, which threatens Indian exports.

Sectoral Impact- Focus on MSMEs

Credit Lifeline- Lower interest rates are specifically targeted to benefit Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
Competitiveness- Many MSMEs rely heavily on affordable credit for survival. Lower rates reduce their operational costs, enhancing their competitiveness in the export market amidst global trade volatility.

Inflation Dynamics and Future Risks

Current Forecast- The MPC has lowered its inflation forecast to a modest 2%.
Volatility Warning- Despite the low forecast, the committee remains alert to potential spikes in food or oil prices which could quickly reverse the low-inflation trend.

Lesson from History (2019)- The text cites a cautionary tale from 2019, where inflation surged from 2% to 7.6% within a year following rate cuts, highlighting how quickly the landscape can change.

Policy Stance- Flexibility Over Commitment

Neutral Stance- By maintaining a neutral stance, the RBI avoids committing to a long-term low-rate regime.

Preparedness- This signals readiness for a swift policy reversal (hiking rates) if global uncertainty alters the growth trajectory or if inflation suddenly spikes.

Conclusion

The RBI's latest policy action is a proactive measure to support an expansion that still feels fragile despite high headline growth. By prioritizing flexibility, the MPC has positioned itself to support the economy against external trade shocks and internal structural weaknesses while keeping its powder dry to fight inflation should it resurface.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/prudent-action-on-rbi-interest-rate-cuts/article70372583.ece

2. India and the UK- A Defence Partnership with Potential to Make a Better World

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

The India-UK defence partnership has evolved into a modern, comprehensive strategic relationship that goes beyond traditional buyer-seller dynamics. Rooted in shared democratic values, respect for sovereignty, and freedom of navigation, this partnership aims to bolster security in the Indo-Pacific region while fostering mutual economic growth through industrial collaboration and high-level strategic alignment.

Joint Military Exercises & Interoperability

The partnership focuses heavily on enhancing combat readiness and tactical coordination through regular military engagements.

Key Exercises-

Ajeya Warrior (Army)- Has evolved to simulate complex battlefield scenarios, allowing Indian and British forces to operate under unified command structures**.**

KONKAN (Navy)- Focuses on advanced maritime manoeuvres and air defence drills. Recent iterations have seen high-level assets like India's INS Vikrant and the UK's HMS Prince of Wales operating together.

Significance- Enhances multi-domain operational readiness. Fosters professional bonding and mutual trust, which is crucial for coordinated responses to regional security threats.

Defence Industrial Cooperation & Technology Sharing

A shift towards co-development and co-production marks the current phase of relations, aligning with India's domestic goals**.**

10-Year Roadmap- Both nations are guided by a Defence Industrial Roadmap that promotes joint Research & Development (R&D) and technology transfer.

Key Initiatives

Missile Systems- A £350-million deal for the supply of Lightweight Multirole Missiles.

Naval Technology- Collaboration on maritime electric propulsion systems, vital for the modernization of future Indian naval platforms.

Strategic Alignment- These initiatives support India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) vision by leveraging advanced UK expertise to modernize Indian defence capabilities.

Knowledge Sharing & Human Capital Development

The partnership places a strong emphasis on institutional exchanges and training to build long-term capacity**.** Institutional Training- Indian officers undergo training at prestigious UK institutions like the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Britannia Royal Naval College. Instructor Exchange- Future plans include integrating Indian Air Force Qualified Flying Instructors into UK training programs.

Impact- Standardizes training methodologies and enhances leadership skills. Promotes cross-cultural understanding and builds professional networks between the armed forces of both nations**.**

Strategic and Geopolitical Dimensions

The collaboration extends beyond bilateral ties to address broader geopolitical realities.

Indo-Pacific Focus- Both nations advocate for a free and open Indo-Pacific, emphasizing adherence to international law and respect for territorial sovereignty**.**

Global Security- The partnership acts as a counterbalance to emerging regional threats and reinforces multilateral security frameworks.

Proactive Stakeholders- By integrating defence with diplomacy, India and the UK position themselves as key contributors to global security governance.

Integration with Economic and Trade Cooperation

Security cooperation is designed to work in tandem with economic prosperity.

Synergy with CETA- The partnership is reinforced by ongoing negotiations for the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

Virtuous Cycle

Defence-industrial collaboration benefits from improved investment flows and trade facilitation. Conversely, economic growth is supported by a secure, stable, and rules-based regional environment maintained through defence cooperation.

Conclusion

The India-UK defence partnership is a multidimensional effort that successfully merges military readiness with industrial innovation and strategic vision. By deepening ties across security, technology, and training, both nations are not only addressing contemporary global challenges but are also securing their mutual economic and geopolitical interests for the long term.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-and-the-uk-a-defence-partnership-with-potential-to-make-a-better-world-10409885/?ref=opinion_pg

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

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1.Note of harmony-On the debate on Vande Mataram(TH) -1

2. India's small enterprises hold key to job growth(IE) -2

1. Note of harmony-On the debate on Vande Mataram(TH)

General Studies 1- History

Topic- The Freedom Struggle- Contributions from different parts of the country**.**

Introduction

Vande Mataram, a timeless tribute envisioning the nation as "Mother India," served as a unifying force during India's freedom struggle. As the nation observes the 150th anniversary of this historic hymn, the focus must remain on its spirit of sacrifice and shared identity. However, recent events have sparked a debate on how best to honor this legacy—whether by reopening old historical wounds or by strengthening modern social cohesion.

The Historical Legacy of Vande Mataram

Origin and Authorship- The song was penned by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. It was published in his novel *Anandamath* in the early 1880s. This year marks the song's 150th anniversary.

Role in the Freedom Struggle- It served as a battle cry that inspired generations of freedom fighters. It successfully united diverse communities against colonial rule, fostering a collective national identity.

Political Adoption (1937)- In 1937, the Indian National Congress (INC) leadership officially adopted the **first two stanzas** of the song for use at its gatherings. This decision was rooted in a strategy of accommodation to respect the sensibilities of all communities while retaining the song's patriotic core.

Constitutional Status- Post-independence, the Constitution of India recognized these stanzas as the **National Song**. It stands equal to the National Anthem in stature, symbolizing nation-building and collective identity.

The Recent Parliamentary Controversy

A parliamentary session intended to commemorate the 150th anniversary devolved into a partisan debate, highlighting contrasting interpretations of history.

The Ruling Party's Argument (BJP)- Argued that the historical decision to limit the song to only two stanzas was an act of appeasement. Claimed that this specific concession contributed to the rise of separatist sentiments, ultimately leading to the Partition of India.

The Opposition's Counter-Argument (INC/Opposition)- Leaders like Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Mallikarjun Kharge contended that the historical context was being misrepresented.

Question of Relevance- They questioned the utility of debating settled historical matters in the present day.

Focus on Governance- Ms. Vadra emphasized that Parliament should prioritize current issues affecting citizens rather than excavating old divisions.

Critical Historical Lessons

To avoid repeating past errors, it is essential to draw the correct lessons from the freedom movement rather than rewriting it.

Unity through Accommodation- The national movement succeeded because it built unity across religious, linguistic, and cultural lines within a shared political space. The adoption of specific stanzas of *Vande Mataram* highlights a tradition of mutual respect, not the imposition of a singular cultural identity.

Shared Heritage- Historical records show that for decades, Hindus and Muslims together chanted **Vande Mataram** during mass mobilizations against the British.

Fragility of Unity- While the unity project was remarkable, the eventual Partition exposed its fragility. This underscores the danger of promoting specific identities that overshadow the broader, secular, and constitutional Indian commonness.

Reaffirming National Purpose (Way Forward)

Avoid Weaponizing Symbols- Twisting a symbol of harmony (*Vande Mataram*) into a source of political division serves no constructive purpose for the nation.

Strengthen Constitutional Values- The truest tribute to Mother India is to uphold unity, harmony, and mutual respect.

Future Outlook- India must renew its sense of national purpose by ensuring that the legacy of *Vande Mataram* continues to inspire future generations toward cohesion, not conflict.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/note-of-harmony-on-the-debate-on-vande-mataram/article70376936.ece

2. India's small enterprises hold key to job growth(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Employment- Growth, formalisation, and issues relating to employment

Small Enterprises, Big Jobs- Transforming India's Employment Landscape

Introduction

India's employment challenge extends beyond mere job creation; it is fundamentally about enhancing productivity and growth within the millions of small and unincorporated enterprises. While policy often favors large industries, the true engine for inclusive and broad-based economic growth lies in empowering the unorganized sector to formalize, access credit, and adopt technology.

Current Employment Structure in India

Understanding the composition of the workforce is crucial to diagnosing the employment challenge.

Scale of the Sector- As of 2023-24, over 12 crore workers are employed across 7.3 crore non-agricultural enterprises dominance of Self-Employment (OAEs)

Own Account Enterprises (OAEs)- These are units that *do not* hire paid workers. They constitute 87% of all enterprises.

Nature of Work- This statistic highlights that a significant portion of self-employment in India is driven by necessity (survival) rather than entrepreneurial dynamism**.**

Role of Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs)- Although HWEs form a small fraction of total enterprises, they contribute disproportionately to Gross Value Added (GVA). This disparity indicates that enterprises with hired labor are significantly more productive than single-person operations.

The Link Between Growth and Employment

Data suggests a strong correlation between enterprise growth (productivity) and job creation.

Productivity-Employment Elasticity- A 10% increase in GVA (Gross Value Added) among small enterprises correlates with a 4.5% rise in hired workers**.**

The Transition Opportunity- Since nearly 9 out of 10 enterprises currently hire *no* workers, upgrading even a fraction of OAEs into HWEs can trigger a massive expansion in employment opportunities**.**

Structural Challenges Faced by Small Enterprises

Despite their potential, small enterprises face three critical hurdles that stifle growth ("The Missing Middle" problem).

Low Formalisation- Many micro-enterprises avoid registration (e.g., Udyam portal) because they perceive the compliance costs to be higher than the potential benefits. Impact- This exclusion prevents them from accessing government schemes and formal market linkages**.**

Limited Access to Credit

The Credit Gap- Only 10–12% of unincorporated enterprises have access to formal institutional loans. Productivity Multiplier- Access to credit is transformative. For medium-sized enterprises, formal credit can boost GVA by 72%. For large enterprises, GVA can increase more than threefold.

Poor Technology Adoption- The use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools is low. Gains from tech adoption (digital payments, online marketplaces) are highly pronounced, yet micro-enterprises lag in utilizing basic IT tools which could enhance efficiency.

Policy Implications & Initiatives

To unlock the potential of this sector, policy must shift from "protection" to "promotion of growth."

Ease of Doing Business- Simplify regulatory norms to encourage voluntary formalisation.

Differentiated Credit- Move beyond simple microloans. Providing stage-appropriate credit is vital *Subsistence credit* for tiny units. *Working & Growth capital* for expanding units.

Digital Inclusion Programs- Expansion of digital infrastructure through

1. Digital MSME Scheme
2. ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce)
3. UDYAM Registration
4. DISHA (Digital Saksharta Abhiyan)

Note- These require local handholding and skills training to be effective.

Way Forward- A Roadmap for Transformation

Formalisation Drive- Incentivize the move from informal to formal by reducing compliance burdens and offering tangible benefits for registration**.**

Graded Credit Expansion- Link credit availability to the maturity stage of the enterprise (Micro $\rightarrow$ Small $\rightarrow$ Medium).

Technology & E-Commerce- Aggressively promote digital tools and platforms with mentorship to help micro-units access wider markets.

Skill Development Integration- Align vocational education with enterprise needs, focusing on-

1. Digital Literacy
2. Financial Management
3. Market Linkages

Integrated Ecosystem Approach- Ensure coordination between the Ministries of MSME, Skill Development, Finance, and IT to create a cohesive support system.

Monitoring & Evaluation- Utilize surveys like ASUSE (Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises) to assess impact and ensure policies are results-oriented.

Conclusion

India's path to creating "Big Jobs" lies in the transformation of its "Small Enterprises." By facilitating the transition of Own Account Enterprises (OAEs) into Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs) through credit, technology, and formalisation, India can unlock sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-small-enterprises-hold-key-to-job-growth-10411882/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. Childcare Isn't Just a Social Safety Net. It's a Lever for Growth(IE) -2

1. A Verdict That is an Abdication of Judicial Function(TH)

General Studies 2- Polity/Governance

Topic- Role of Governor- Discretionary powers, Article 200, relation with State Legislature.

A Verdict of Abdication- Timelines for Constitutional Functionaries

Introduction

The Supreme Court's recent judgment in the 16th Presidential Reference regarding the setting of timelines for constitutional authorities (President, Governors, Speakers) has sparked significant debate. While the Court's refusal to prescribe strict timeframes reflects judicial restraint, critics argue it constitutes an "abdication of judicial function." The central concern is that this reluctance allows constitutional silence to be weaponized, undermining the spirit of the Constitution and the doctrine of Constitutional Morality

The Constitutional Context- "Silence" on Timelines

Lack of Specificity- The Constitution of India does not prescribe specific time limits for actions required by high authorities like the President, Governors, or Speakers of Houses.

Open-Ended Nature- The framers left these provisions open-ended, trusting the high constitutional functionaries to act with dispatch and responsibility.

Judicial Restraint- The Supreme Court's reasoning in the recent verdict adheres strictly to the text—arguing that since the Constitution does not explicitly state a timeline, the Judiciary should not infer or impose one.

The Anomaly of the Speaker (Anti-Defection Law)

A major critique of the "no timeline" stance is visible in the functioning of the Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law).

Quasi-Judicial Role- Speakers function as quasi-judicial authorities when deciding disqualification petitions.

The Loophole- Assemblies have a fixed five-year term. However, the adjudication process for defection is open-ended.

Consequence- An elected member can defect and complete their entire term without facing disqualification simply because the Speaker delays the decision.

Undermining Democracy- This renders the anti-defection law ineffective and subverts the mandate of the electorate.

The Governor's Role- Weaponizing Article 200

The judgment effectively validates the growing trend of Governors delaying legislative business.

Indefinite Delays- Governors have increasingly withheld assent or delayed Bills passed by State Legislatures.

The "Pocket Veto" Issue- While Governors can return a Bill for reconsideration, they cannot constitutionally withhold assent *indefinitely*. Doing so acts as a "pocket veto," effectively neutralizing a law passed by an elected legislature.

Separation of Powers- The power to strike down a law as *ultra vires* belongs solely to the Constitutional Courts, not the Governor. By stalling bills, Governors are effectively usurping this judicial power.

Critique of the Verdict- An Irony of Interpretation

Legitimizing Inaction- By ruling that "no text means no timeline," the Court has unintentionally validated the partisan delays by Governors and Speakers.

Failure of Interpretation- The author argues the Court missed an opportunity to interpret "constitutional silence" in a way that protects the system from abuse.

Abdication of Duty- As the ultimate guardian of the Constitution, the Court is expected to intervene when constitutional processes are stalled, rather than hiding behind textual silence.

The Doctrine of Constitutional Morality

The analysis invokes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision to critique the judgment.

Ambedkar's Warning (1948)- He warned that the Constitution could be subverted not just by changing the text, but by altering administrative practice**s** (e.g., deliberate delays). He emphasized that "Constitutional Morality" is not a natural sentiment but must be cultivated.

Modern Application- Recent landmark judgments (e.g., Sabarimala, LGBTQIA+ rights) have relied on Constitutional Morality to interpret the text in harmony with evolving public conscience. The current verdict is seen as a regression from this progressive trend.

The Core Argument- The administrative details were left out of the Constitution because the framers trusted future generations and the Courts to uphold the *spirit* of the law. The Court's refusal to set timelines betrays that trust.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's reluctance to evolve a timeframe for constitutional functionaries' risks normalizing the subversion of democracy through administrative delay. By failing to check the "constitutional distortion" caused by partisan Speakers and Governors, the verdict weakens the very system it is meant to protect, highlighting a significant gap in internalizing the Constitutional Morality envisioned by the founding fathers.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-verdict-that-is-an-abdication-of-judicial-function/article70381516.ece

2. Childcare Isn't Just a Social Safety Net. It's a Lever for Growth(IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society

Topic- Role of Women and Women's Organizations**-** Challenges faced by working women, constraints on female labour force participation

The Unavoidable Growth Lever- Childcare as Soft Infrastructure

Introduction

India's ambition to achieve 8-10% annual economic growth faces a significant, often overlooked hurdle- the lack of robust childcare infrastructure. Moving beyond the traditional view of childcare as a mere social safety net, this analysis argues for its recognition as critical "soft infrastructure"—an economic springboard. By addressing the productivity drag caused by women leaving the workforce due to care duties, and by fostering early human capital development, investing in childcare is a non-negotiable strategy for securing India's demographic dividend.

The Economic Imperative- Childcare as Infrastructure

The absence of affordable childcare is not just a family issue but a systemic economic bottleneck.

Addressing Productivity Drag- Millions of women are forced to scale back work hours or exit the workforce entirely due to inaccessible or unaffordable childcare. This creates a "hidden" drag on national productivity, stalling growth ambitions.

Unlocking Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)- Reliable childcare enables women to take up jobs that match their skills and aspirations rather than settling for flexible but low-paying work.

Evidence from Southern States- States like Tamil Nadu and Telangana that invested in social infrastructure (hostels, childcare) now account for nearly three-fourths of women in manufacturing, proving the direct link between infrastructure and employment.

Improving Job Quality- Global evidence (e.g., Vietnam, Rio de Janeiro) demonstrates that accessible childcare does not just increase employment numbers; it shifts women into formal employment and increases productive working hours.

Institutional and Demographic Urgency

Institutional Anchor (NMECC)- To treat childcare as market-shaping infrastructure, a unified approach is required.

Proposal- Establish a National Mission on Early Childhood Care (NMECC) to converge efforts across the Ministries of Women & Child Development (WCD), Labour, Education, Health, and Industry.

The Demographic Deadline

Shrinking Window- Fertility rates are already below replacement levels in several states.

Aging Population- By 2050, one in five Indians is projected to be over 60.

Risk- Without immediate intervention, the demographic dividend risks turning into a deficit—a future workforce with poor capabilities and too few productive workers supporting an aging population.

A Hybrid Model for the Way Forward

The proposed strategy combines physical upgrades with digital innovation to ensure holistic development for both the child and the economy.

Component	Intervention Strategy	Real-world Examples & Evidence
Physical Infrastructure	Convert existing Anganwadis/crèches into full-day facilities, focusing on industrial belts and service hubs.	Telangana- Increased stipends to extend Anganwadi hours. Tamil Nadu- Added half-time workers to double instructional time for preschoolers.
Human Capital Support	Mobilize para-professionals (SHG members, local youth) to assist Anganwadi workers, reducing their burden.	Meghalaya- Used short-term fellowships. Chandigarh- Utilized internships to bridge the gap.
Early Stimulation (0-3 Years)	Focus on simple parent-child interactions, recognizing that 80% of brain development happens in the first 1,000 days.	Odisha- A study showed that weekly digital/peer learning sessions (mothers' groups) significantly improved children's cognitive skills.
Digital Tools	Use "bite-sized" media and personalized nudges (via WhatsApp/Poshan Tracker) to turn daily routines into learning moments.	Poshan Tracker- Government leveraging this tool to provide early learning guidance directly to parents.

Conclusion

Childcare is the "missing link" that bridges social justice with economic ambition. Treating Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as essential soft infrastructure is a strategic necessity. A unified, hybrid approach involving government mandate, business innovation, and civil society outreach is required to support women's employment today while building the capabilities of the workforce of tomorrow.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/childcare-isnt-just-a-social-safety-net-its-a-lever-for-growth-10413871/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. The Stark Reality of Educational Costs in India(TH)

General Studies 2- Education

The NSS 80th Round (2025) findings highlight a troubling trend in India's basic schooling landscape- despite constitutional guarantees the Right to Free and Compulsory Education for all children aged 6 to 14 years under Article 21A and policy ambitions (National Education Policy 2020), household expenditure on education is rising, and access is becoming increasingly unequal due to growing reliance on private schools and coaching .

Key Findings from the NSS 80th Round Survey

Enrolment Trends (Public vs. Private Education)- At the national level, enrolment remains divided between government and private schools 55.9% in government schools; 11.3% in private aided schools; 31.9% in private unaided schools.

Urban–Rural Divide

Urban areas- 51.4% of students attends private schools.

Rural areas- Only 24.3% attend private schools.

The gender gap in private school enrolment is modest, 34% of boys versus 29.5% of girls.

Rising Private Enrolment Over Time- Private enrolment has increased at all education levels, both in rural and urban areas, compared with the 75th NSS Round (2017–18). It underscores a growing preference for private education often associated with better perceived quality but higher costs.

Cost of Education

Rural government schools- 25.3% of students pays fees.

Urban government schools- 34.7% pays fees.

In contrast, 98% of private school students, rural or urban, pay course fees.

Household Consumption Expenditure (HCES 2023–24)- Pre-primary private school costs equal the monthly income of the poorest 5% of households. Higher secondary private school costs match the income of households in the third income decile. It clearly demonstrates that education has become a heavy financial burden, even at the basic level.

Private Coaching- Hidden Cost of Learning

Incidence of Private Tutoring- Private tuition, now a parallel education system, is widely prevalent

Rural areas- 25.5% of children takes private coaching.

Urban areas- 30.7% of children does so.

Participation increases with grade level, from around 10–13% at pre-primary to over 40% at higher secondary.

Expenditure on Private Coaching- The average annual cost of private coaching is ₹7,066 in rural and ₹13,026 in urban areas, which add significantly to the already high cost of schooling.

Socio-Economic Correlates of Private Tutoring

Cost Burden and Inequality- 80th Round of NSS shows that private school students pay up to 9 times more than those in government schools. Urban households, especially in states like Telangana and Delhi, spend significantly more on education, including tuition, transport, and digital devices. The financial burden is disproportionately high for lower-income families, who often cut back on essentials to afford private schooling or coaching.

Policy Blind Spots- There is limited regulation or oversight of the coaching industry, while the **NEP (2020)** acknowledges the issue of private tutoring. The lack of affordable, high-quality public education options pushes families toward private alternatives, reinforcing socio-economic divides.

Parental Aspirations and Social Mobility- Families with higher household income, parental education, and urban residence view coaching as an investment in academic success and social prestige. Many private school teachers are underpaid and underqualified despite high private school fees, compelling parents to spend even more on private tutoring.

Inequality and the Decline of Public Schooling- Free education is a constitutional right. But costly private education is increasingly the norm, perpetuating inequality. Affluent families can afford private schools and coaching, poorer families rely on underfunded public schools, leading to divergent learning outcomes.

Ongoing Efforts to Improve Public Schooling in India

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018)- Integrates three earlier schemes- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE). It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-primary to Class XII.

PM SHRI Schools (2022)- To develop over 14,500 model schools across India. It focuses onModern infrastructure with smart classrooms;

1. Holistic, inquiry-based pedagogy aligned with NEP 2020;
2. Emphasis on environmental sustainability and experiential learning;

National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR)- It aims to create a unified digital infrastructure for education. It includes

1. DIKSHA platform for e-content and teacher training;
2. UDISE+ for real-time school data;
3. Digital learning resources in regional languages;

Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM POSHAN)- It aims to improve nutritional status and school attendance.

1. Over 11 crore children in government and government-aided schools.
2. Inclusion of pre-primary children and fortified food in some states.

Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme (Union Budget 2025–26)- It aims to provide digital-format textbooks in Indian languages to enhance comprehension and accessibility.

Way Forward- Strengthening Publicly Funded Schools

Addressing inequities requires urgent systemic reforms. Strengthening public education is crucial to ensure that education remains a right, not a privilege. The Journal of Development Studies (2024) finds that private tuition is negatively associated with school quality, students in better schools depend less on tutoring. Improving teaching standards, infrastructure, and accountability in government schools can reduce dependence on private tuition and restore public confidence in free education.

Conclusion

India's constitutional vision of free and universal education remains far from reality. Education is becoming one of the largest household expenditures for many Indian families with rising private school enrolment, high tuition costs, and increasing reliance on private coaching. India needs to urgently revitalize public schooling, ensure equitable funding, and uphold the constitutional promise of 'education for all' to realize the NEP 2020 goal of universal education by 2030.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-stark-reality-of-educational-costs-in-india/article70385413.ece

2. The U.S. has released its first National Security Strategy under Trump's second term.

General Studies 3- International Relations

About National Security Strategy

Legal Basis- The U.S. National Security Strategy is mandated by the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986.

Nature of the NSS- It is a grand strategy that reveals how the US views the world for the coming years.

1. The strategy exhibits a paradox the desire to maintain Global Dominance while pursuing Isolationism.
2. This approach is termed Transactional Realism**,** meaning the US seeks to assert dominance but is unwilling to bear the cost or security burden for its allies.

Foreign Policy Priorities Outlined in the Strategy

End of Mass Migration- Washington has identified that the era of mass migration has ended.

Protection of Core Rights and Liberties- Core rights and liberties, including freedom of speech and religion, need to be protected more than ever.

Reduced Global Burden- The U.S. will no longer carry the full burden of global security**.**

Atlas Syndrome- The feeling of carrying the weight of the world on one's shoulders, especially in the context of reducing responsibilities or retrenchment. Derived from the story of the Titan Atlas from Greek mythology, who is forced to hold up the sky.

Shepherding Peace Deals- It will continue brokering peace deals worldwide to solidify U.S. influence abroad.

Economic Security- Economic security is a top foreign policy priority. Key measures include balanced trade, secure access to critical materials, reindustrialisation, stronger defence and energy infrastructure, and leveraging Wall Street and global digital finance.

Concerns Regarding Europe

Patronising Tone- The NSS warns Europe of possible civilizational erasure due to its economic decline It faults Germany and EU countries with unstable minority governments whose policy actions do not match their stated desire for peace in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Germany's Pushback- Germany's Foreign Minister stated that issues of freedom and governance in Germany do not belong in the U.S. NSS and that the country does not need external advice.

Implications of NSS

Anxiety About the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)- The NSS has raised concerns about NATO's effectiveness and cohesion**.**

Risk of Autocracy- By making allies take greater regional responsibility, the U.S. may reduce its own role, giving autocrats more freedom to act aggressively and violate international norms.

Conclusion

The new U.S. National Security Strategy signals a shift toward transactional realism, combining assertive global ambitions with reduced burdens. While prioritising economic security and selective engagement, it risks weakening alliances, unsettling Europe, and emboldening autocratic powers worldwide.

Source- https-//timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/trumps-national-security-strategy-2025-released-india-crucial-era-of-mass-migration-is-over/articleshow/125795567.cms

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. From Licence Raj to Jan Vishwas, What We Need to Set Our Entrepreneurs Free(IE) -2

1. A Critical Story that a Chunk of the Media Missed(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment

IMF's Assessment of India's National Accounts Data

Introduction

The recent release of India's Quarter 2 national accounts data has brought to light a significant contradiction. While the official data showed an unexpectedly strong 8.2% growth, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) simultaneously raised serious concerns about the methodology used to compile these statistics. The IMF assigned India's national accounts—including GDP and GVA—a 'C' grade, the second-lowest rating possible. This analysis highlights the structural flaws in India's economic data and the media's failure to adequately report on it.

Media Coverage- A Crisis of Silence

Despite the severity of the IMF's observation, the issue received minimal public attention due to inadequate media coverage.

Limited Reporting- Most media outlets ignored the IMF's reservations. The Hindu was the notable exception, featuring the story prominently on its front page ("IMF gives 'C' grade for India's national accounts statistics", November 28, 2025).

Silence of Financial Press- The "pink papers" (business newspapers), which are expected to scrutinize economic data, largely overlooked the report.

Buried News- A few outlets that did carry the story relegated it to the inside pages, making it difficult for the public to notice.

Impact- This lack of coverage leaves citizens uninformed and ill-equipped to understand the true state of the economy, reflecting a failure of journalism to act as a watchdog.

The Core Methodology Issue

The primary concern raised by the IMF revolves around how India calculates the growth of its vast informal (unorganized) sector.

The Proxy Problem- India estimates growth in the unorganized sector by using the formal organized sector as a proxy.

Scale of the Sector- Even after excluding agriculture, the unorganized sector contributes nearly 30% of India's GDP.

Fundamental Question- The reliance on proxies raises doubts about whether India has a reliable measurement framework for such a large economic segment or if the GDP figures are merely "informed approximations."

Reliability Concerns- The Divergence of Sectors

Experts like Pronab Sen and Arun Kumar argue that using the organized sector to represent the unorganized sector is fundamentally flawed, especially during economic shocks.

False Assumption- The methodology assumes that both sectors move in the same direction at the same speed.

Reality of Shocks- During major disruptions—such as Demonetization, the GST rollout, and the COVID-19 pandemic—the organized sector often grew (or recovered faster) while the unorganized sector declined or stagnated.

Overestimation- Because the proxy (organized sector) was growing, the data likely overestimated the performance of the shrinking unorganized sector.

Caution on Headline Numbers- Consequently, impressive figures like the 8.2% quarterly growth must be viewed with caution, as they rely heavily on assumptions rather than comprehensive data.

Structural Challenges and Future Outlook

The text suggests that these data issues are structural and unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

Institutional Limitations- The IMF's 'C' grade reflects deep-rooted issues that cannot be fixed quickly.

New Series Update- The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is working on updating the GDP base year and methodology, with a new series expected by February 2026.

Persisting Doubts- However, experts remain skeptical. Pronab Sen frankly states, "I don't think we can" adequately address the IMF's concerns immediately, primarily because robust, real-time data collection for the unorganized sector does not exist.

Conclusion

The IMF's 'C' grade serves as a critical warning about the structural weaknesses in India's economic data system. Updating the base year alone will not solve the problem of accurately measuring the unorganized sector. The situation is compounded by the media's under-reporting, which weakens informed public debate and policy scrutiny. True economic accountability requires both better data infrastructure and a media that acts as a vigilant watchdog.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-critical-story-that-a-chunk-of-the-media-missed/article70389725.ece

2. From Licence Raj to Jan Vishwas, What We Need to Set Our Entrepreneurs Free(IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Investment models; Ease of Doing Business.

Jan Vishwas Siddhant – Unlocking Entrepreneurial Potential

Introduction

India's entrepreneurial ecosystem has historically struggled under the weight of "Regulatory Cholesterol"—a legacy of the Licence Raj characterised by excessive prior approvals, complex compliance, and disproportionate punishments. Despite the economic liberalisation of 1991, structural bottlenecks remain. The proposed Jan Vishwas Siddhant aims to dismantle these barriers, shifting the governance model from one of suspicion and control to one of trust and facilitation, thereby unlocking the potential of millions of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Regulatory Pathologies Hindering Entrepreneurship

The text identifies specific structural flaws (pathologies) in the current regulatory framework that act as barriers to entry and growth.

The Burden of Prior Approval

Permission Culture- Entrepreneurs are forced to seek thousands of permissions, No Objection Certificates (NOCs), and licences from various central and state ministries.

Stifled Innovation- Innovation is inherently "permissionless," yet administrative hurdles curtail the fundamental right to practice any profession (Article 19).

Instrument Proliferation

Bureaucratic Overload- Beyond Acts and Rules, the administrative state churns out thousands of non-legislative instruments (circulars, guidelines, SOPs).

Scale- Estimates suggest employers face over 12,000 such instruments, creating deep confusion and inefficiency.

Compliance Blind Spot

Cumulative Burden- Policymakers often ignore the aggregate weight of regulations. As of 2025, compliance obligations reached over 69,000.

Need for Rationalisation- There is a critical need to replicate reforms like the 75% reduction in labour law compliance to decrease regulatory friction.

Enforcing the Unenforceable

Breeding Corruption- Laws that are practically unenforceable inevitably lead to corruption and administrative inefficiency.

Requirement- Effective regulation demands realistic enforcement capabilities and performance management of civil servants.

The Punitive Process

Over-criminalisation- Minor economic offences (e.g., cheque bouncing) are often criminalised, clogging the judicial system and penalising honest errors.

Solution- A shift towards proportional punishments and risk-based inspections is necessary.

Absence of a 'Single Source of Truth'

Opacity- There is no comprehensive, unified database of all applicable Acts, rules, and notifications, leading to compliance errors and harassment.

Jan Vishwas Siddhant- Transformational Reforms

The Jan Vishwas Siddhant proposes a fundamental overhaul of the regulatory architecture.

Perpetual Self-Registration

Paradigm Shift- Moving to a principle where "Everything is permitted until prohibited."

Mechanism- Replacing licences with self-registration for all sectors except those affecting national security, public safety, human health, and the environment.

Risk-Based Inspections & Decriminalisation

Reduced Interference- Inspections will be randomised, risk-based, and potentially third-party to minimize bureaucratic harassment.

Proportionality- Universal application of decriminalisation principles to ensure penalties match the offence.

Digitisation and Transparency

Digital Backbone- All regulatory filings to be digital.

Single Truth- Establishing IndiaCode and e-Gazette as the authoritative "single source of truth" for all laws.

Accountability- Annual Regulatory Impact Assessments to track compliance burdens and punishments.

Empowering Entrepreneurs

From *Ijaazat* to *Koshish*- Shifting policy focus from seeking permission (*ijaazat*) to enabling effort and experimentation (*koshish*).

Outcome- Fostering an iterative business culture that nurtures innovation and job creation.

Way Forward

To fully realise the potential of these reforms, the text suggests a comprehensive roadmap.

Expand Trust-Based Regulation- Extend perpetual self-registration to more sectors, strictly maintaining exceptions only for critical areas (security, health, environment). Cultivate a culture of voluntary compliance.

Digital Governance Integration- Fully integrate IndiaCode and e-Gazette to create a live, verifiable repository of all legal obligations. Ensure all compliance requirements are transparent, dated, and verifiable.

Standardise Decriminalisation- Implement proportionate penalties across all sectors. Decriminalise minor administrative and commercial offences to clear court backlogs and boost investor confidence.

Institutionalise Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)

Mandatory Review- Ministries must conduct annual reviews of compliance burdens and enforcement efficiency.

Goal- Use these assessments to simplify rules and remove obsolete regulations.

Capacity Building- Train civil servants to shift from a mindset of "control" to "facilitation." Link performance metrics to Ease of Doing Business outcomes.

Encourage Entrepreneurial Mindset- Provide mentoring, financial facilitation, and skill support to SMEs. Shift the ecosystem to support "freedom to try."

Feedback Loops- Establish a framework for stakeholder consultation with fixed timelines. Continuously monitor implementation to ensure reforms remain adaptive.

Conclusion

The Jan Vishwas Siddhant is not just a policy tweak but a paradigm shift from control to trust. By aggressively removing the regulatory "cholesterol" that stifles enterprise, it seeks to transform India into a hub of innovation. The ultimate goal is to replace the "fear of permission" with the "freedom to try," thereby strengthening India's global economic competitiveness and fostering non-farm job creation.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/from-licence-raj-to-jan-vishwas-what-we-need-to-set-our-entrepreneurs-free-10417633/

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1. Time to pause- On retail inflation, data takeaways(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment (Monetary Policy, Inflation targeting, and Consumer Price Index (CPI) reforms.)

Introduction

In late 2025, India's retail inflation has plummeted to historically low levels. This decline is not necessarily a signal of permanently low prices but is driven primarily by favorable base effects and the disproportionate influence of food prices within the current Consumer Price Index (CPI) framework. While this environment has allowed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to execute an aggressive monetary easing cycle, the current economic landscape suggests that a cautious "pause" is now necessary. The central bank must account for the temporary nature of these trends and impending structural changes to inflation measurement.

Retail Inflation- Trends and Statistical Drivers

The recent inflation data reflects a sharp downward trajectory, largely influenced by statistical anomalies rather than a purely structural cooling of prices.

Record Lows- Retail inflation in November 2025 dropped to 0.7%, marking the second-lowest level ever recorded. This followed October 2025, which saw the lowest inflation in the series.

The Role of Base Effects- The primary driver for this dip is the High Base Effect. Inflation was significantly high in the previous year (6.2% in October 2024 and 5.5% in November 2024). When current prices are compared against these high historical values, the resulting inflation percentage appears artificially low.

Future Outlook- This statistical advantage is temporary. The base effect is expected to fade gradually by **July 2026**, after which inflation numbers are likely to normalize and trend higher.

Issues with CPI Composition and Food Prices

The current CPI structure is heavily skewed, making headline inflation highly sensitive to volatile components.

Food Dominance- The current CPI basket assigns a massive weight of roughly 46% to food and inflation figure.

Recent Contraction- In November 2025, food prices contracted by 2.8%. This single factor significantly pulled down the overall inflation rate.

Statistical Illusion- Much like the headline number, this food price decline is largely statistical, measured against a very high base of 8.2% food inflation recorded in November 2024.

Upcoming Structural Reforms- The New CPI Series

To address the limitations of the current framework, the government is poised to introduce structural changes to how inflation is calculated.

Timeline- A new CPI series is expected to be released in Q1 of 2026–27.

Base Year Revision- The base year will be updated from the outdated 2012 to 2024. This is crucial for correcting the mismatch between the index and current consumption patterns.

Weightage Correction- The new series will revise weightages to reduce the over-dominance of food. This will provide a more accurate reflection of how Indian households actually spend their income today.

Impact- The new base year will help neutralize extreme base effects, significantly improving the quality and reliability of inflation measurement.

Monetary Policy Implications and Actions

Despite the known flaws in the current data, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has used these

low readings to support growth.
Aggressive Easing- In December 2025, the MPC cut policy rates by 25 basis points, bringing the rate down to **5.25%**.
Cumulative Impact- Throughout 2025, the RBI has delivered cumulative rate cuts totaling 125 basis points, marking the most significant easing cycle since 2019.

The Argument for a Policy "Pause"

The analysis suggests that the RBI should now halt further rate cuts for the following strategic reasons-
Assessment of Transmission- A pause is required to observe how the 125 basis points of cuts already delivered are transmitting through the economy. The MPC needs time to see if these cuts are effectively stimulating demand and investment.
Fiscal Policy Synergy- With the Union Budget 2026 recently passed, the MPC should wait to see the inflationary or expansionary effects of fiscal policy before making further monetary adjustments.
Waiting for New Metrics- Before cutting rates further, it is prudent to study the new CPI series. The revised weightages could fundamentally alter how future rate changes impact inflation, and acting on old data might be premature.

Conclusion

The sharp decline in retail inflation to below 1% in late 2025 should be viewed as a temporary statistical phenomenon rather than a permanent conquest of price pressures. As base effects wane and the new CPI series reshapes the inflation narrative, price pressures may re-emerge. Having already delivered substantial stimulus, the prudent course for the RBI is to pause, monitor the transmission of previous cuts, and recalibrate its strategy once the impact of the 2026 Budget and the new inflation metrics becomes clear.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/time-to-pause-on-retail-inflation-data-takeaways/article70395261.ece#google_vignette

2. From Brazil, a lesson on antibiotic use for India(IE)

General Studies 2- Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Introduction

India has emerged as the global epicenter of the Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) crisis, driven largely by the rampant and unchecked preventive use of antibiotics. While Indian medical practices often rely on antibiotics for routine viral ailments, Brazil offers a contrasting model of strict regulation and disciplined medical practice. The comparison highlights that curbing AMR is not a matter of medical expertise, but rather of effective enforcement and a systemic shift from "preventive" to "curative" antibiotic usage.

The Crisis of Antibiotic Misuse in India

Current practices in India reveal a systemic reliance on antibiotics for conditions where they are medically ineffective or unnecessary.
Rampant Prescription for Viral Infections- There is a widespread trend of prescribing antibiotics for common viral infections like coughs, colds, and flu. Since antibiotics act only against bacteria, their use in viral cases offers no benefit and accelerates resistance.
The "Preventive" Mindset- Doctors and patients often favor the preventive use of antibiotics out of fear of potential secondary infections. This leads to a culture of "quick fixes" rather than evidence-based medical observation.
Agricultural and Environmental Contamination- Misuse is not limited to humans; antibiotics are extensively used as growth promoters in livestock.This allows drug-resistant bacteria to survive in animals and enter the human food chain, compounding the resistance crisis.

Lessons from Brazil- A Model of Discipline

Brazil provides a successful case study in managing antibiotic consumption through strict regulatory

frameworks and disciplined healthcare delivery.

Mandatory Regulation- Unlike the easy availability of drugs in India, Brazil enforces a strict policy where a local doctor's prescription is mandatory for purchasing antibiotics. Over-the-counter sales are effectively banned.

Curative vs. Preventive Approach- Brazilian healthcare providers prioritize curative use (treating an established infection) over preventive use. There is a medical discipline to allow minor bacterial growth or viral infections to resolve naturally via the body's immune system, intervening only when serious symptoms arise.

Systemic Enforcement- The success of Brazil's model lies in the efficient enforcement of prescription norms, ensuring that the rational use of drugs is not just a guideline but a practice.

India's National Response- The NAP-AMR

India has recognized the threat at a policy level, but implementation remains the bottleneck.

The National Action Plan (NAP-AMR)- Formulated initially for 2017–2021 and recently revised for the **2025–2029** period. It adopts a multi-sectoral approach covering human health, agriculture, and environmental waste management.

Barriers to Implementation- Despite the plan, execution has been weak due to-

1. **Regulatory Gaps-** Lack of stringent checks on pharmacy sales.
2. **Limited Surveillance-** Inadequate monitoring of resistance trends.
3. **Cultural Factors-** A healthcare culture that prioritizes immediate symptom relief over long-term antibiotic stewardship.

Significance and Threat Assessment

Long-Term Public Health Risk- AMR threatens to render antibiotics ineffective for serious infections, potentially taking modern medicine back to a pre-antibiotic era where minor injuries could be fatal.

The Necessity of Behavioral Change- The key takeaway from the Brazil comparison is that regulations must be paired with a shift in mindset. Public awareness and doctor discipline are as vital as government policy.

Way Forward- A Roadmap for India

To combat the AMR crisis effectively, India must move beyond policy formulation to strict ground-level execution.

Strict Enforcement of Regulations- Immediate crackdown on over-the-counter (OTC) antibiotic sales without valid prescriptions.

Operationalizing NAP-AMR- Effective implementation of the revised NAP-AMR (2025–29) across all sectors (Human, Animal, Environment).

Behavioral Modification- Launch extensive public awareness campaigns to educate patients that antibiotics do not cure viral fevers. Train physicians to resist patient pressure for quick-fix prescriptions.

Adopting the 'One Health' Approach- Integrate monitoring systems to control AMR emerging from livestock, poultry, and environmental sources, acknowledging that human health is linked to animal and environmental health.

Conclusion

The editorial concludes that India's struggle with Antimicrobial Resistance is not a failure of medical knowledge but a systemic failure of regulation and enforcement. To safeguard public health, India must mirror the Brazilian approach- enforcing strict prescription laws, ending the practice of preventive dosing, and fostering multi-sectoral cooperation to ensure antibiotics remain effective for future generations.

Source- https-//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20251215/282162182549218?srsltid=AfmBOooGOoGPxwwPA42c5UUKHdDiMqgqaE7bX4lE7_GmUcFwo8Glxuzt

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. MGNREGA needs reform but changes fray the safety net -2

1. A broad-based development models

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment. (Inclusive growth; Investment models; Industrial policy; Infrastructure (Energy, Ports, Roads)

Tamil Nadu – A Broad-Based Development Model

Introduction-Tamil Nadu (T.N.) has emerged as a national benchmark for a "broad-based development model," successfully integrating robust industrial growth with extensive social welfare and environmental sustainability. With a diversified economy and progressive governance, it has become the second-largest state economy in India, demonstrating that economic efficiency and social equity can coexist.

Macro-Economic Performance (GSDP)

The state has demonstrated resilience and high growth, outperforming national averages significantly.

Nominal Growth- The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices expanded by 16% in 2024–25, rising from ₹26.88 lakh crore (2023–24) to ₹31.19 lakh crore.

Real Growth (Constant Prices)- T.N. clocked an impressive 11.2% growth in 2024–25, making it the fastest-growing state in India (significantly higher than the national average of 6.5%).

Sustained Momentum- The state has maintained consistency over the last three years 2021–22- 15.91%, 2022–23- 14.47%, 2023–24- 13.34%

Sectoral Analysis- The Engines of Growth

Manufacturing and Industrial Powerhouse- The secondary sector is the core driver, characterized by high employment and export capabilities.

Comparative Advantage- In the last four years, manufacturing GSDP rose by ₹1.46 lakh crore, which is nearly double the increase recorded by Maharashtra (₹0.71 lakh crore).

Growth Rate- Ranked 1st nationally in four-year average real manufacturing growth (9.38%).

Employment Hub- Hosts 40,121 factories. Employs 24.75 lakh factory workers (Top national position in factory employment).

MSME Ecosystem- Ranks 3rd nationally with over 39 lakh Udyam-registered MSMEs.

Export Leadership- Merchandise exports nearly doubled from $26.15 billion (2020–21) to $52.07 billion (2024–25).

Sectoral Leader- Electronics, Textiles, and Leather.

Runner-up- Engineering exports.

Infrastructure & Energy

Industrial Corridors- The only state where *every* district is covered under one or more industrial corridors.

Power Capacity- Installed capacity rose from 35,139 MW to 42,772 MW (2021–25), ensuring energy security for industries.

Services Sector & Investment Climate

The services sector complements the industrial base, transitioning towards a knowledge economy.

GVA Contribution- Services contribute 53.6% to the State's Gross Value Added (GVA).

Growth (2024–25)- Recorded a real growth of 11.3%.

Key Sub-sectors- Public Administration- 14.2%, Real Estate- 12.42%, Transport & Communication- 11.29%

FDI Inflows- Consistently ranks among top states for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). FDI Equity inflows increased to **$3,681 million** in 2024–25, defying the national trend of declining FDI.
Global Investors Meet 2024- Signed 631 MoUs worth ₹6.64 trillion.
Overseas Outreach- Commitments of ₹23,000 crore secured from the U.S., U.K., and Germany.

Human Capital and Social Welfare (The "Dravidian Model")

The state's unique selling point is its "Welfare-Led Social Development," ensuring that economic gains translate into human development.

Key Welfare Schemes

Women's Empowerment- Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam (Financial assistance), Magalir Vidiyal Payanam Thittam (Free bus travel for women).
Education & Youth- *Naan* Mudhalvan Thittam (Skill development), *Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme* (Nutrition/School attendance).
Social Security- Mudhalvarin Kaakkum Karangal *Scheme*.

Human Development Outcomes

Education

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)- Ranks 1st in higher education at 47% (National Avg- 28.4%).
Female GER- Ranks 3rd at 47.3%.
Institutions- Highest number of technical institutions (955) in India.

Health

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)- Low at 12 per 1,000 live births.
Life Expectancy- Ranks 3rd nationally at 73.4 years.
Poverty- One of the lowest Multidimensional Poverty levels in India at 1.43%.

Fiscal Stability and Rankings

Despite high welfare spending, the state has maintained fiscal prudence.

Rankings

1st- Export Preparedness Index.
2nd- Credit-Deposit Ratio (120.5%), indicating high lending for economic activity.
3rd- Per Capita NSDP Income (₹3.62 lakh).

Fiscal Health

Fiscal Deficit- Projected at 3% of GSDP (2025–26), adhering to fiscal discipline targets.
Debt Management- Debt-to-GSDP ratio declined from 27% (2021–22) to 26% (2024–25), despite reduced central transfers.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's trajectory offers a blueprint for inclusive capitalism. By leveraging a highly skilled workforce, robust infrastructure, and a welfare-oriented governance structure, the state has insulated itself from global uncertainties. With sustained growth in manufacturing and services, alongside controlled inflation and fiscal deficits, Tamil Nadu is firmly on course to achieve its ambitious target of becoming a $1 trillion economy by 2031.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-broad-based-development-model/article70399703.ece#-~-text=It%20also%20ranks%20first%20in,in%20achieving%20broad%2Dbased%20development.

2. MGNREGA needs reform but changes fray the safety net

General Studies 2- Polity/Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Introduction

The Government of India has proposed a significant structural overhaul of the rural employment landscape by introducing the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Grameen (VB-

GRAMG) Bill. This bill seeks to replace the existing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The primary objective is to modernize rural employment by increasing guaranteed workdays and integrating advanced technology. However, the proposed shift from a "demand-driven" model to a "normative allocation" model, coupled with changes in fiscal federalism (funding patterns), has sparked a debate on balancing efficiency with the sanctity of the social safety net.

Key Features of VB-GRAMG

The VB-GRAMG Bill introduces four major pillars of reform

Expanded Guaranteed Employment

Increased Duration- The bill promises 125 days of guaranteed wage employment per rural household annually, a significant increase from the statutory 100 days provided under MGNREGA.

Agricultural Synchronization- It introduces a 60-day restricted period during the peak sowing and harvesting seasons.

Rationale- This is designed to prevent labor shortages in the agricultural sector, ensuring that government schemes do not compete with private farming needs during critical crop cycles.

Advanced Technology Integration

To align with the vision of a "Digital India" and reduce system leakages, the bill mandates

Biometric Authentication- Mandatory for worker verification**.**

Real-time Monitoring- Utilization of GPS monitoring and mobile-based tracking of worksites**.**

Artificial Intelligence (AI)- Deployment of AI tools specifically for fraud detection and data analysis.

Objective- To enhance transparency and ensure accountability in the disbursement of wages, addressing long-standing complaints of ghost beneficiaries.

Restructured Fiscal Design (Funding Pattern)

A major shift in "Fiscal Federalism" is proposed

Centre-State Split- Unlike MGNREGA, which was primarily centrally funded, VB-GRAMG proposes a 60-40 cost-sharing ratio between the Centre and States.

Special Category Exceptions- The Centre will retain 90% funding only for Northeastern and Himalayan states.

Implication- This significantly increases the financial burden on state exchequers.

Allocation Mechanism (Top-Down Approach)

Normative Allocation- The bill envisages a model where the Centre allocates funds based on norms/estimates rather than real-time demand.

Shift from Legacy Model- This reverses the core ethos of MGNREGA, which was a bottom-up, demand-driven scheme where funds were released based on work demanded by the Gram Sabhas.

Critical Analysis and Implications

Strengths (The Case for Reform)

Enhanced Income Security- The provision of 125 days of employment directly translates to higher potential income for rural households, addressing rural distress more aggressively.

Reduction in Leakages- The alignment with NITI Aayog's recommendations for e-governance (AI, GPS) is expected to curb corruption, ghost workers, and fund misappropriation.

Support for Agriculture- By restricting public works during the 60-day sowing/harvesting window, the bill protects the agricultural supply chain, ensuring farmers have access to labor when it is most needed for food production**.**

Concerns (The Challenges)

Fiscal Burden on States- States with weaker fiscal health may struggle to meet the 40% matching grant.

Precedent- Similar issues were observed in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), where delays in state subsidy payments led to scheme failures. If states cannot pay their share, wage payments to workers will be delayed.
Centralization Risks- Moving away from a demand-driven model to centralized (normative) allocation risks a mismatch between resources and needs.
Impact- High-demand districts might face under-provisioning of funds, undermining local planning. This contradicts the Ministry of Rural Development's own past evaluations favoring bottom-up planning.
Erosion of the Safety Net- Critics argue that repealing MGNREGA—a rights-based statute—dilutes the legal guarantee of work.
Political Optics- There is apprehension that this may weaken the safety net for marginalized groups (SC/ST/Women) who rely heavily on this scheme for survival.

Way Forward

To ensure VB-GRAMG succeeds without compromising social security, the following measures are recommended-
Flexible Funding Model- The Centre should consider retaining full or majority funding (beyond 60%) for economically backward states to prevent wage delays that could cripple the scheme's credibility.
Hybrid Planning Approach- Balance the top-down allocation with local demand sensitivity. Mechanisms must be in place for districts and Gram Sabhas to communicate real-time spikes in employment demand to the Centre.
Inclusive Technology- While expanding AI and biometric oversight, safeguards must be introduced to ensure technology does not become an exclusion error for illiterate, elderly, or digitally unskilled workers.
Livelihood Safeguards during Restricted Periods- Careful monitoring is required to ensure the 60-day agricultural restriction does not leave landless laborers (who do not own farms) without income during those months. Complementary skill development and alternative livelihood programs should be introduced to build rural resilience.
Institutionalized Accountability- Establish an independent monitoring body to conduct periodic social audits. Reports on employment generation, fund utilization, and social impact should be made publicly accessible to maintain trust.

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill represents a bold step towards modernizing India's rural employment framework through technology and increased workdays. However, the shift in fiscal burden to states and the centralization of allocation pose significant risks. For the reform to be truly effective, it must adopt a balanced approach that combines administrative efficiency with the flexibility of local demand, ensuring that the safety net for the most vulnerable remains intact.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/nrega-needs-reform-but-changes-fray-safety-net-10422041/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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2. Indian Communism is 100 Years Old and It's Too Early to Write its Obituary(IE) -2

1. The Three Revolutions Reshaping American Power(TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests**.**

Introduction- The Architecture of Cruelty

The text argues that the United States is undergoing a fundamental transformation in its statecraft, characterized by a unifying thread called the "Architecture of Cruelty." This framework is defined not as accidental harm, but as a system where harm is foreseen, normalised, and deliberately deployed.

This shift is driven by the alignment of three major developments-

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's Proposal- A suggestion to reshape the G-20 into an exclusive inner caucus, marginalising emerging economies.

The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS)- A formal document reflecting a shift towards ideological exclusion and security-first logic.

The Heritage Foundation's Blueprint (Restoring America's Promise 2025–26)- A policy roadmap providing the ideological foundation for these changes.

Together, these signal a coordinated restructuring of political morality, foreign policy, and global economic governance.

Revolution I- The Shrinking of Civic Space (Internal Rupture)

This revolution fundamentally alters the domestic moral and bureaucratic landscape of the U.S.

Dismantling Moral Foundations- The political project of Mr. Trump has replaced traditional civic restraint and responsibility. Transgression is now viewed as authenticity, and the erosion of shame is utilised as a political asset.

The New Security Doctrine (2025 NSS)- Cultural cohesion, ideological alignment, and demographic stability are redefined as national security imperatives. Domestic culture is framed through a security lens, treating independent institutions not as correctives but as obstacles to sovereign autonomy.

Bureaucratic Overhaul-The Heritage blueprint advocates for a massive institutional remake. This includes ideological vetting and large-scale personnel turnover to ensure alignment with the new agenda.

Permissive Cruelty- Hardship resulting from administrative purges and punitive regulations is absorbed into governance. Suffering is met with indifference rather than recognised as harm.

Revolution II- Foreign Policy Based on Conditionality (External Shift)

The 2025 NSS marks a sharp departure from the traditional U.S. role of providing institutional stability.

Transactional Alliances-Alliances are no longer assumed permanent; they are treated as conditional contracts. Obligations are constantly reassessed based on immediate utility rather than shared long-term values.

Revival of the Monroe Doctrine- Prioritisation of the Western Hemisphere over traditional focuses like Europe or the Indo-Pacific. Signals a return to regional dominance rather than global management.

Migration as Security- Migration is elevated from a domestic policy issue to a core national security threat, reshaping foreign policy priorities to focus on border control.

Institutional Downgrading- International bodies (e.g., UN, WTO) are recast as constraints on U.S. sovereignty rather than amplifiers of U.S. power. Multilateralism is viewed as a violation of sovereignty; allied cooperation is judged by ideological conformity rather than capability.
Selective Dominance- The strategy is neither pure isolationism nor realism. It is assertion where leverage is high and retreat where costs rise.
Systemic Impact- This leads to fragile alliances, emboldened revisionist powers, and a fragmented global order.

Revolution III- Economic Restructuring (Inequality by Design)

The economic revolution seeks to institutionalise a tiered global economy.
Concentrated Governance- Rubio's G-20 proposal signals a division between "rule-makers" (powerful states) and "rule-takers" (emerging economies). Decision-making on critical issues like debt relief, trade, and climate finance is narrowed to a small, exclusive group.
Hemispheric Economics & Sovereignty- The NSS promotes reshoring and industrial sovereignty, aiming to anchor growth within North America. Tariffs are used as leverage, and globalisation is treated as a strategic risk.
Unequal Burdens- Countries with weak bargaining power face harsher debt terms, politicised supply chains, and restricted capital access. The burden of inflation and export disruption falls disproportionately on workers globally.
Systemic Cruelty- Economic pain is deliberately uneven; it functions as a tool to stabilise a hierarchical global order.

The Return of Imperial Logic

All three revolutions are underpinned by a mindset that echoes colonial logic, though updated for the modern era.
Colonial–Imperial Mindset- A return to a hierarchical worldview where power confers entitlement. The strong impose costs, while the weak are expected to absorb them.
Structural Domination- Unlike territorial colonialism, this is an order built on exclusion and unequal burdens.
Institutional Codification- The 2025 NSS provides the bureaucratic language. The Heritage 2026 blueprint provides the ideological justification.
Cruelty as Logic- Suffering is not accidental; it is designed and embedded within policy execution as an organising principle.
The Emerging Order- The U.S. seeks to protect sovereignty through contraction, project power through hierarchy, and reshape governance through exclusion.

Conclusion

The restructuring of American power creates a global architecture of cruelty. The irony of this transformation is the universality of its harm. The victims of this reordering are not just in distant locations like Maputo or Dhaka, but also within the U.S., in places like Harlan, Kentucky. The effects of this policy shift extend outward across borders but ultimately return home, damaging the very populace the policies claim to protect.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-three-revolutions-reshaping-american-power/article70404219.ece

2. Indian Communism is 100 Years Old and It's Too Early to Write its Obituary(IE)

General Studies 1- History
Topic- Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present – significant events, personalities, issues.

Indian Communism at 100- Unfinished Business

Introduction

The year 2025 marks the centenary of the Communist Party of India (CPI), a milestone that stands in sharp contrast to the public fanfare surrounding the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Once a formidable force capable of influencing national policy and ruling key states like West Bengal and Tripura, the Left now faces severe political marginalisation. Despite this decline, the movement leaves behind a complex legacy of land reforms and secularism, while the persistence of inequality suggests its core issues remain relevant.

Historical Trajectory of Indian Communism

Origins & Global Context- Indian communism was born out of the global political and intellectual upheavals following World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the rising tide of anti-colonial nationalist movements.

Key Leaders- The movement was shaped by foundational figures such as M.N. Roy, Singaravelu Chettiar, and S.A. Dange**.**

Early Influence (Pre-Independence)- Despite facing severe repression under British colonial rule, the CPI successfully mobilised diverse sections of society, including workers, peasants, students, and intellectuals. It played a significant role in shaping political and cultural discourse through robust mass organisations.

Peak Electoral Strength (Post-Independence)- The movement reached a zenith in 2004, commanding approximately 60 Lok Sabha seats. It held influential sway over national policy during the UPA government era. It maintained prolonged governance in strongholds like West Bengal and Tripura.

Reasons for Decline

The text attributes the steep decline of the Left to three primary structural and strategic failures-

Political Missteps- The decision to withdraw from the UPA coalition in 2008 is highlighted as a critical error. Tactical alliances, including occasional alignment with the BJP in opposition, weakened its ideological credibility**.**

Factionalism & Rigidity- Internal divisions and ideological rigidity prevented the formation of effective coalitions with other democratic forces, including the Congress.

Failure to Adapt- The Communists struggled to recalibrate their strategy in response to major geopolitical and domestic shifts, including The Sino-Soviet split. The trauma of Partition. The political rise of the BJP. The economic reforms of the liberalisation era.

Enduring Legacy

Despite its political contraction, Indian communism has left an indelible mark on the socio-political fabric of the nation

Land Reforms- The Left pressured governments to implement land redistribution, which fundamentally reshaped rural power structures and empowered the landless.

Secularism & Federalism- It has been a consistent defender of pluralism and decentralisation, offering staunch resistance to communal mobilisation.

Welfare & Social Justice- The movement played a pivotal role in the expansion of social welfare programmes and the codification of labour rights**.**

Cultural Impact- Beyond politics, it fostered a vibrant cultural ecosystem in literature, theatre, and cinema. It promoted rationalist thought and amplified the voices of the marginalised through egalitarian values.

Future Prospects

Persistent Relevance of Core Issues- The systemic conditions that originally gave rise to communism are still acute in 21st-century India- agrarian distress, widening income inequality, precarious labour conditions, and global economic instability.

Global Context- There is a renewed interest in socialist and left-wing ideas globally, offering a potential tailwind for revival.

Path Forward- Revival depends on three strategic pillars

1. Ideological flexibility to adapt to modern realities.
2. Strategic unity among the currently fragmented Left parties.
3. Coalition-building with progressive democratic forces.

Conclusion

Indian communism is currently facing its gravest crisis, battling existential marginalisation. However, its historical contributions to socio-economic reform and secular discourse cannot be erased. If Left parties can pivot from rigid dogma to strategic adaptation, the movement retains the potential to play a meaningful role in India's evolving political landscape**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-indian-communism-is-100-years-old-and-its-too-early-to-write-its-obituary-10424059/

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2. SC Advisory Opinion on Governor's Role is Flawed, let it Stay Advisory(IE) -2

1. Rearguard Action- On Weather Change and Consistent Action(TH)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topic- Environmental pollution and degradation.

The Annual Fog–Pollution Crisis- From Seasonal Emergency to Chronic Failure

Introduction

India's winter fog season has ceased to be a mere weather phenomenon; it now heralds the return of an annual air pollution crisis. This recurring emergency exposes deep-rooted failures in urban air quality management. While the fog—driven by low temperatures and moisture—is natural, its toxicity is man-made. The season acts as a magnifier, revealing that the severe pollution spiking after the monsoon is not an isolated event but a symptom of chronic, year-round administrative negligence that affects millions across the Indo-Gangetic plains and beyond.

The Fog–Pollution Nexus

The Seasonal Cycle- The onset of the annual fog cycle triggers chaos across northern India. It is characterized by a sharp surge in Particulate Matter (PM) levels immediately following the monsoon.

Geographical Expansion- The crisis is no longer limited to Delhi-NCR. It encompasses the entire Indo-Gangetic plain and is expanding to coastal urban clusters like Mumbai and Kolkata, indicating a nationwide systemic failure.

The Mechanism- Fog formation is driven by low temperatures combined with high moisture. This moisture acts as a trap for residual emissions (pollutants), preventing them from dispersing. Consequently, AQI levels deteriorate sharply, turning a visibility issue into a toxicity crisis.

Crisis Magnitude and Public Impact

AQI Escalation- Base levels of Air Quality Index (AQI) hover between 300–400 (Very Poor). During fog episodes, these levels frequently escalate to 400+ (Severe and Severe+).

Psychological and Health Impact- While fog itself reduces visibility, its combination with pollutants compounds health risks. This intensifies public panic among citizens who are already suffering from prolonged exposure to chronic toxic air. Daily life and mobility are severely crippled during peak episodes.

The Cost of Inaction- Accidents and Disruptions

The pollution-induced fog has tangible, deadly consequences for transport and safety-

Road Tragedies

Uttar Pradesh- Reported at least 25 deaths and 59 injuries directly linked to fog-related accidents.

Yamuna Expressway- A catastrophic multi-vehicle pile-up in Mathura resulted in a deadly inferno, highlighting the danger of high-speed travel during low-visibility periods.

Aviation Paralysis- Delhi's aviation sector faced a meltdown with 228 flights cancelled (131 departures and 97 arrivals). Hundreds of flights faced delays, leaving thousands of passengers stranded and paralyzing air connectivity.

Policy Response- Governance Gaps and Reactive Measures

The administrative response follows a predictable, reactive pattern rather than a proactive strategy.

Emergency Protocols (GRAP-4)- Implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP-4) includes bans on construction/demolition, shifting schools online, and restricting vehicle movement.

Symbolic Enforcement- Measures such as "fuel denial without PUC" and curbs on BS-6 vehicle entry are criticized as symbolic threats rather than effective deterrents.
The Core Failure- Current measures ignore residual emissions trapped by moisture—the primary driver of the AQI collapse. Central high-level meetings often result in repeating unimplemented advisories rather than enforcing strict compliance.
Institutional Role (CAQM)- The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) is urged to assert its independence. The goal must be to maintain AQI below 350 through year-round controls, rather than scrambling only when weather conditions worsen.

Conclusion

The recurring fog–pollution emergency is a clear indictment of India's current environmental governance. It underscores those reactive bans and symbolic threats are insufficient against a crisis of this magnitude. To prevent further visibility-related deaths, flight disruptions, and health hazards, there must be a shift towards systemic, year-round action. An empowered and independent CAQM must focus on curbing emissions at the source throughout the year, ensuring that adverse weather does not automatically translate into a public health disaster.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/rearguard-action-on-weather-change-and-consistent-action/article70407515.ece#-~-text=The%20Centre%20announces%20a%20spate,Delhi's%20AQI%20stays%20below%20350.

2. SC Advisory Opinion on Governor's Role is Flawed, let it Stay Advisory(IE)

General Studies 2- Polity & Constitution
Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.(Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.)

Governor's Role in Granting Assent to Bills (Supreme Court Advisory Opinion 2025)

Introduction

The role of the Governor in granting assent to State Bills has recently come under judicial scrutiny following an Advisory Opinion of the Supreme Court delivered under Article 143. This opinion addresses the "constitutional silence" regarding time limits in Article 200. While the Court maintained judicial restraint by refusing to fix rigid timelines, the decision has sparked a debate on whether it inadvertently legitimises executive inaction, thereby undermining the federal balance and the supremacy of elected legislatures in a parliamentary democracy.

Background to the Dispute

Pattern of Delayed Assent- There has been a recurring trend of Governors delaying assent to Bills for extended, undefined periods. These delays are often perceived as politically selective, disproportionately affecting Opposition-ruled States, which exacerbates Centre-State friction.
The Tamil Nadu Episode- Governor R.N. Ravi withheld assent to multiple Bills for nearly three years. The State government challenged this in the Supreme Court, arguing it violated democratic norms and constitutional morality.
Preceding Judgment (April 2025)- A two-judge Bench ruled that Governors cannot indefinitely withhold Bills. It suggested a "reasonable timeframe" (generally three months) and introduced the principle of "deemed assent" if the Governor remains inactive.
Presidential Reference- Seeking clarity on this judgment, the Union government invoked Article 143, asking if courts have the power to mandate timelines for high constitutional authorities like the Governor or President.

Key Observations of the Supreme Court (Advisory Opinion)

No Fixed Judicial Timelines- The Court ruled that prescribing mandatory, fixed timelines would constitute judicial overreach into the domain of constitutional functionaries.

Constitutional Options Under Article 200- The Governor has three specific courses of action

1. Grant assent to the Bill.
2. Withhold assent and return the Bill to the legislature (with a message), provided it is not a Money Bill.
3. Reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President.

Scope for Limited Judicial Intervention- Courts can issue a "limited mandamus" directing the Governor to act only in cases of "prolonged, unexplained, and indefinite inaction." However, the Court cannot examine the merits or wisdom of the Governor's decision itself. *Note*- As an advisory opinion, this is non-binding in nature.

Issues and Concerns Raised

Ambiguity Surrounding 'Reasonable Time'

Lack of Definition- The opinion fails to define objective parameters for what constitutes "prolonged" delay or set an outer limit.

Consequences- This ambiguity perpetuates uncertainty. For instance, Bills have been pending for nine years in West Bengal and three years in Tamil Nadu.

Departure from Constituent Assembly Intent- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision (May 31, 1949)- He explicitly stated that the Governor is a "nominal and ornamental head" with no independent discretion.

Executive Subservience- All executive functions must be performed on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

Critique- The advisory opinion seemingly elevates the Governor above this design, diluting legislative primacy.

Democratic and Federal Implications

Legitimacy Deficit- Governors are unelected Centre nominees, whereas State legislatures hold a popular mandate.

Undermining Federalism-** Prolonged delays act as an "informal veto," allowing indirect central influence over State legislation and weakening cooperative federalism**.**

Contradiction of Precedents- Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974)- Governor must act on ministerial advice. Nabam Rebia v. Deputy Speaker (2016) - Gubernatorial discretion must be narrowly interpreted.

Analysis of the Opinion

Arguments Supporting the Opinion- Separation of Powers It prevents the judiciary from intruding into the functioning of high constitutional offices.

Respect for Silence- It respects the specific "constitutional silence" left by the framers regarding timelines.

Arguments Critiquing the Opinion

Constitutional Paralysis- It risks enabling paralysis through deliberate inaction.

Lack of Accountability- It weakens the accountability of an unelected office.

Politicisation- It risks converting the Governor's office into a political tool against opposition-ruled states.

Way Forward

Judicial Clarification- A future Constitution Bench needs to establish measurable, objective standards for "reasonable time" to prevent abuse.

Legislative Reform- Parliament could consider codifying timelines for assent within the Constitution to ensure clarity while preserving the federal balance.

Reinforcing Constitutional Morality- Governors must operate as impartial heads, guided by democratic norms rather than political expediency.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's advisory opinion reflects institutional restraint but stops short of resolving the core issue- indefinite gubernatorial inaction. By failing to engage deeply with the Constituent Assembly's intent, the opinion risks normalising executive delay as a legitimate constitutional tool. In a parliamentary democracy, the silence of an unelected authority cannot be permitted to override the will of an elected legislature. Clear guidance—whether constitutional or legislative—is imperative to safeguard federalism and democratic accountability.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/sc-advisory-opinion-on-governors-role-is-flawed-let-it-stay-advisory-10425829/**

Editorial of the Day – 19.12.2025

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1. Temporary relief- On trade performance, deeper distress ahead(TH) -1

2. A Bold Step Amid an Ambitious Nuclear Energy Target(TH) -2

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1. Temporary relief- On trade performance, deeper distress ahead(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth (Export-Import Policy).

India's Export Surge and Trade Deficit Dynamics (December 2025)

Introduction- Recent trade data for India presents a paradoxical scenario. While merchandise exports have surged significantly, providing short-term economic relief, this growth rests on fragile foundations. The reduction in the trade deficit, driven partly by a weakening rupee and contracting imports, masks deeper structural vulnerabilities such as unsustainable cost-absorption by exporters and slackening domestic demand.

Strong Headline Numbers vs. Underlying Reality

Significant Export Growth- Merchandise exports witnessed a sharp rise of 19.4% in November 2025, reaching $38.1 billion—the highest figure for this month in a decade.

Resilience in the US Market- Despite steep tariffs, exports to the United States grew by 22.6% year-on-year to $6.98 billion (a 10.7% increase from October).

Cautionary Note- While these figures offer relief to the government, they should not lead to complacency as the underlying drivers are precarious.

The Hidden Cost of Tariff Resilience

Absorbing the Tariff Shock- The surge in US-bound exports is occurring despite 50% tariffs. This is largely because Indian exporters are absorbing the extra costs rather than passing them on to buyers.

Strategic Rationale- Exporters are maintaining this strategy in hopes that the tariffs are temporary; they fear that passing on costs now would lead to a permanent loss of customers.

Sustainability Concerns- This financial buffer is finite. If high tariffs persist, exporters will run out of capacity to absorb losses, threatening future volumes.

Structural Stress on MSMEs and Supply Chains

Vulnerability of Small Players- A significant portion of India's exporters are Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operating in labour-intensive sectors. They lack the deep pockets required to sustain prolonged losses.

Limited Impact of Currency Depreciation- While the weakening rupee helps export competitiveness, it offers only partial relief. It is insufficient to offset the massive tariff disadvantages India faces compared to global competitors.

Supply Chain Rigidity- Reorienting supply chains to new markets takes time and cannot happen overnight. Early indicators suggest a potential drop in orders for January, signalling upcoming stress.

Import Contraction and Domestic Demand

Narrowing Trade Deficit- The reduction in the trade deficit is primarily due to a 1.9% fall in imports (down to $62.7 billion), rather than a structural improvement in export capabilities.

Sign of Weak Demand- Since India has limited domestic manufacturing capabilities for many goods, a drop in imports typically signals slackening domestic consumption and industrial demand.

Worrying Trend- This contraction is particularly concerning as it follows recent GST rate cuts, which were expected to boost consumption.

Policy Imperatives- Urgency Over Assurances

Need for Action- The government has acknowledged the distress through the Export Promotion Mission, but detailed schemes are still pending.

Specific Recommendations

Credit Guarantee Schemes- Implementation of credit guarantees (similar to those used effectively during COVID-19) is preferred over simple loan repayment moratoriums to provide liquidity.

Contingency Planning- Given the unpredictability of US trade policy, India must prepare for a "worst-case scenario" rather than relying solely on diplomatic resolution.

Conclusion

Sustaining India's export momentum requires moving beyond temporary resilience measures. The convergence of prolonged tariff pressures, weakening domestic import demand, and financial stress on MSMEs demands swift and targeted policy interventions. Prudence lies in balancing the optimism of recent data with rigorous contingency planning to support the export ecosystem.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/temporary-relief-on-trade-performance-deeper-distress-ahead/article70411979.ece#-~-text=India's%20merchandise%20exports%2C%20hit%20by,in%20the%20last%2010%20years.

2. A Bold Step Amid an Ambitious Nuclear Energy Target(TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

The SHANTI Bill, 2025 and India's Nuclear Roadmap

Introduction - Human development has historically tracked closely with energy consumption. As mapped by Earl Cook in his 1971 *Scientific American* paper, energy use has escalated through stages of human progress—from primitive hunting (food energy) to agriculture, industry, and technology. Today, we stand at a new frontier- the digital era, where the digitalization of the economy is creating massive, additional energy demands. The SHANTI Bill, 2025, represents a strategic legislative step to meet these demands through a robust nuclear energy roadmap.

The Correlation- HDI and Energy Consumption

Development Metrics- The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of income, education, and health.

Energy-HDI Link- There is a strong correlation between HDI and per capita Final Energy Consumption (FEC). This relationship allows policymakers to estimate the energy required to achieve specific development goals.

India's Aspiration- As a G-20 member, India aims to reach an HDI above 0.9 (comparable to developed nations).

Projected Requirement- To achieve an HDI of 0.9, India needs to generate approximately 24,000 TWh of energy annually.

Breakdown- About 60% of this will be consumed as electricity. The remaining portion will likely be used to produce hydrogen via electrolysers.

Role of Hydrogen- Essential for decarbonising "hard-to-abate" sectors like steel, fertilisers, and plastics. Future electricity needs for hydrogen may decline if alternative low-carbon hydrogen technologies scale up.

Current Status- In 2023–24, India's total electricity generation was ~1,950 TWh with a CAGR of 4.8%. Sustaining this rate would take 4–5 decades to reach the target.

The Dual Challenge- Decarbonisation and Electrification

Transitioning to a high-energy future faces two simultaneous hurdles-

1. Decarbonising the energy mix.

2. Expanding end-use electrification- Currently, electricity accounts for only 22% of Final Energy Consumption (FEC); this must rise significantly.

Limitations of Renewables & Need for Nuclear

India's existing energy mix is heavily fossil-fuel dependent. While low-carbon sources like hydro, solar, and wind are vital, they have inherent limitations-

Resource Constraints

Hydro & Wind- Potential is geographically limited.

Solar- High population density restricts the availability of vast land tracts required for solar photovoltaic deployment.

Intermittency & Storage- Solar and wind are intermittent. Managing seasonal variability requires large-scale storage, which is currently too expensive to be a standalone solution.

Baseload Requirement- To ensure affordable and reliable electricity, the grid requires baseload **capacity** (sources that operate independently of weather/time).

Conclusion- Nuclear power is the only low-carbon source capable of providing reliable baseload electricity to support renewable integration.

India's Indigenous Nuclear Capabilities

The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Indian industry have successfully indigenised the nuclear supply chain

Self-Reliance- Uranium is the only major input requiring imports due to insufficient domestic reserves. India has capabilities in fuel fabrication, heavy water production, and reactor equipment manufacturing.

PHWR Mastery- The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) has mastered the design and operation of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) up to 700 MW capacity.

Status- 3 units operational, 1 nearing completion, 2 in advanced construction.

Expansion- 10 additional 700 MW units were approved in 2017 and are under progress.

Institutional Strength

Regulation- A dedicated regulatory body (AERB) established in the 1980s ensures safety.

Waste Management- Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has developed technologies for reprocessing spent fuel and managing nuclear waste safely.

The SHANTI Bill, 2025

To back the ambitious target of 100 GW installed nuclear capacity by mid-century, Parliament passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025.

Consolidation of Laws- It is an overarching legislation that consolidates provisions from The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010

Key Provisions

Legal Continuity- Deems the existing Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) as constituted under this new Act.

Liability- Clearly assigns primary responsibility for safety, security, and safeguards to the licensee operating the nuclear facility.

Significance- The Bill represents a bold policy signal of political commitment, providing the legal stability necessary to transition India into a developed nation.

Conclusion

Achieving high human development requires energy that is reliable, affordable, and clean. Given India's geographical constraints regarding renewables, nuclear power is not just an option but a necessity for deep decarbonisation. The SHANTI Bill, 2025, provides the critical institutional framework

and policy confidence required to scale nuclear capacity and realize India's developmental aspirations sustainably.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bold-step-amid-an-ambitious-nuclear-energy-target/article70412631.ece#google_vignette

3. The Teacher's Red Pen Should Open Minds, Not Shut Doors(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources**.**

Rethinking Teacher Authority for Inclusive Education

Introduction- The changing landscape of education demands a re-evaluation of the teacher's role, shifting from an authoritarian figure to a facilitator of inquiry. The metaphor, *"The teacher's red pen should open minds, not shut doors,"* encapsulates this necessary transition. While the "red pen" traditionally symbolizes evaluative power, discipline, and control, its rigid application can stifle curiosity and critical thought. This transformation is pivotal as India implements systemic reforms to make education more inclusive and inquiry-based.

Knowledge, Power, and Social Hierarchies

Historical Context- Thinkers like Francis Bacon and Michel Foucault have long established the link between knowledge and power. Historically, education has often served as a tool to reinforce power dynamics rather than dismantle them**.**

Inequality in Access- Unequal access to knowledge has entrenched social hierarchies, limiting social mobility for marginalized groups. In India, these disparities are visibly evident across lines of caste, gender, language, and region.

Assessment as Exclusion- Rigid assessment practices that focus binary "right or wrong" outcomes tend to reproduce existing hierarchies. When teachers function solely as evaluators, education risks becoming a mechanism of exclusion rather than a means of empowerment.

Pedagogical Shift- From Instructor to Facilitator

Alternative Tradition- The text advocates for a pedagogical approach where teachers act as facilitators, fostering an environment of inquiry, dialogue, and independent thinking.

Alignment with NEP 2020- This shift is in direct consonance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which prioritizes Development of critical thinking and conceptual understanding. Significant reduction of rote learning. Adoption of formative and competency-based assessments. Establishment of a learner-centric education model.

Assessment for Learning- NEP 2020 explicitly mandates using assessment as a tool for learning improvement rather than mere judgment or gatekeeping.

The Ethical Dimension of Teaching

Core Values- From an ethical standpoint, the profession of teaching is rooted in responsibility, empathy, and fairness.

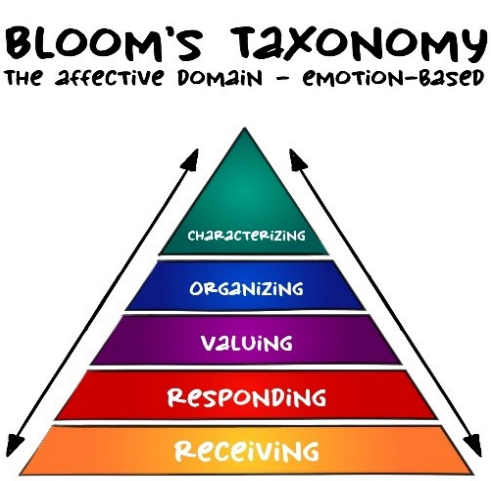
Dangers of Authoritarianism- Excessive reliance on authority figures discourages moral courage and intellectual autonomy in students.

Democratic Values- A respectful and balanced teacher–student relationship is essential for enhancing student dignity and confidence. This aligns with UNESCO's advocacy for education that promotes freedom of thought, scientific temper, and social responsibility—pillars essential for a pluralistic democracy like India.

Relevance in Contemporary Times

Combating Misinformation- In an era defined by information overload, misinformation, and conformity, the teacher's role is more critical than ever.

Breaking Conditioning- If learners are conditioned "not to question or disrupt," education loses its transformative potential.



Nurturing Key Traits- To prepare citizens who can uphold constitutional values (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), teachers must actively nurture Curiosity and a questioning attitude. Social awareness. The confidence to challenge unjust norms.

Conclusion

The discourse serves as a timely reminder that the ultimate goal of education is to liberate, not to discipline blindly. The "red pen" of authority must evolve into a tool for guidance rather than a mechanism for gatekeeping. As envisioned by the NEP 2020 and global frameworks, fostering a humane, inclusive, and dialogic education system is indispensable for India's continued social and democratic progress.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-teachers-red-pen-should-open-minds-not-shut-doors-10427737/lite/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 20.12.2025

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1. The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base(TH) -1

2. Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAMG)(IE) -2

1. The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base(TH)

General Studies 3- Security/Economy

Topic- Security challenges and their management in border areas; Effects of liberalization on the economy.

The Significance of a Strong Defence Industrial Base

Introduction- India's vision to emerge as a developed nation by 2047 rests on two pillars- socio-economic transformation and robust strategic capabilities. At the heart of this strategic framework lies the Defence Industrial Base (DIB**)**. Historically, India's defence sector suffered from a "policy imbalance" where domestic private participation was restricted while foreign imports were freely permitted, creating structural vulnerabilities. Today, a decisive shift is underway to reverse this trend, ensuring both economic growth and national security.

A Shift After Reforms- From Dependence to Resilience

Historical Context- For decades, restrictive policies curtailed the domestic private sector, fostering an overdependence on imports. This undermined national security and economic self-reliance.

Key Policy Reforms- Opening of the defence sector to private participation. Easing of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms. Corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB). Expansion of procurement under the 'Make' procedure. Active promotion of innovation within the sector.

Visible Outcomes- Steady rise in domestic defence production. Exponential expansion of exports to over 80 countries. Emergence of a maturing ecosystem capable of integrating into global supply chains.

The Strategic Imperative- Why Self-Reliance is Non-Negotiable

Global Instability- Ongoing conflicts in Europe, West Asia, and Asia highlight the severe risks associated with global supply-chain disruptions.

Security Challenges- Facing persistent border and maritime challenges, self-reliance (Aatmanirbharta) in defence has become indispensable, not optional.

Emerging Opportunities

Geopolitical Shifts- Increased defence spending in Europe creates new demand.

Cost-Efficiency- There is a growing global demand for cost-effective defence platforms.

Strategic Location- India's position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its growing diplomatic footprint enhance its credibility as a global supplier.

Simplifying Procedures- The Path to ₹50,000 Crore Exports

To achieve the export target of ₹50,000 crore by 2029, reform momentum must be sustained.

Addressing Regulatory Complexities- Current regulations constrain private sector participation, particularly for MSMEs and Startups. Processes for export licensing, Joint Ventures (JVs), and Technology-Transfer (ToT) approvals need to be faster and clearer.

Building Investor Confidence- Long-term demand projections are essential to enable large-scale private investments.

Redefining DRDO's Role

DRDO Focus- Should shift exclusively to frontier research.

Industry Role- Production, scaling, and commercialization should be handed over to the industry.

Significance- This aligns with global best practices and enhances competitiveness.

Dedicated Facilitation Agency- Need for a dedicated defence export facilitation agency staffed with professionals.

Function- Provide a single-window interface for global partners, addressing inter-ministerial coordination gaps.

Key Steps to Strengthen the Ecosystem

Comprehensive reforms are needed in financial, testing, and certification frameworks to support manufacturing.

Financial Reforms

Issue- Indian firms face constraints due to limited access to competitive credit.

Solution- Introduce specialised export financing instruments to ease capital constraints.

Strategic Financing- Greater use of Lines of Credit (LoC) and Government-to-Government (G2G) agreements to build buyer confidence.

Testing and Certification

Infrastructure- Expanding integrated testing facilities will reduce delays and lower compliance costs for private players.

Standards- Overly stringent domestic standards should be rationalized. Adopting international certification protocols is crucial for global acceptability.

Service Commitments- Offering long-term service commitments alongside hardware sales strengthens India's reputation as a reliable partner.

Conclusion

A strong defence industrial base does more than ensure security; it reduces import dependence, creates high-skilled employment, and enhances India's geopolitical leverage. While recent progress is encouraging, the moment demands consistent efforts to deepen reforms. Building an ecosystem that actively promotes innovation and investment is a defining stride in India's journey toward becoming a confident and influential global power.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-significance-of-a-strong-defence-industrial-base/article70416769.ece#-~-text=The%20pursuit%20of%20a%20strong,capable%20and%20influential%20global%20power.

2. Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAMG)(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Before criticising VB-G RAM G, Punjab gave only 26 days' work this year under MGNREGS, says BJP's Sunil Jakhar

Introduction

The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), abbreviated as VB-GRAMG, represents a significant reform in India's rural employment landscape. It aims to modernize and strengthen social protection by addressing the structural limitations of the existing MGNREGA framework. By providing statutory guarantees for wage employment and explicitly linking work to the creation of productive assets, the mission seeks to balance immediate livelihood security with long-term rural resilience.

Key Features and Reforms

Legal Guarantee of Employment

Enhanced Mandate- The Bill statutorily guarantees 125 days of wage employment per rural household annually (an increase from the traditional 100 days).

Unemployment Allowance- It introduces a mandatory unemployment allowance if work is not provided within 15 days of application.

Removal of Disentitlement- The Bill actively removes earlier disentitlement clauses present during the MGNREGA era, ensuring that rights are enforceable rather than discretionary.

Integration with Rural Asset Creation

Productive Focus- Employment generation is strictly linked to the creation of productive public assets.

Target Areas-Water security (water conservation and harvesting). Core rural infrastructure (roads, connectivity). Livelihood-related infrastructure. Climate resilience works.

Dual Benefit- This approach ensures that expenditure leads to both immediate income support for workers and long-term developmental capital for the village.

Addressing Structural Weaknesses

Governance Reform- The framework focuses heavily on transparency, grievance redressal, and accountability.

Global Best Practices- It aligns with recommendations from the World Bank (2022) and NITI Aayog by institutionalizing timely grievance resolution mechanisms and robust monitoring systems.

Local Planning and Cooperative Federalism

Decentralized Planning- Gram Panchayats retain the primary authority over planning works based on local needs, supported by state and district administration.

National Stack- Works are aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack. This digital infrastructure enhances visibility and coordination without centralizing the decision-making power.

Synergy with Agriculture- States are empowered to notify peak agricultural periods. During these times, public works can be adjusted to avoid labor shortages for farming activities, ensuring harmony with the local agrarian economy.

Technology and Accountability

Digital Enforcers- The Bill mandates the use of- Biometric authentication for workers. Geo-tagging of assets. Real-time monitoring dashboards.

Ghost Worker Prevention- Public disclosure serves as a check against "ghost workers" and leakages.

Participatory Oversight- Social audits conducted by Gram Sabhas are strengthened to ensure community oversight, balancing high-tech monitoring with grassroots democracy.

Fiscal and Policy Flexibility

Objective Allocation- Normative allocations are determined through objective criteria rather than arbitrary decisions.

State Flexibility- States are allowed to operationalize schemes within the statutory framework, promoting equitable resource distribution and the spirit of cooperative federalism.

Critical Analysis

Strengthening Social Protection

Enforceable Rights- Contrary to fears of dilution, VB-GRAMG enhances worker rights by making entitlements legally enforceable and closing existing loopholes.

Poverty Alleviation- By enhancing livelihood security, it contributes directly to poverty alleviation and inclusive growth, aligning with findings from the ILO (2023) and Economic Survey 2025.

Balancing Employment and Productivity

Resilience over Relief- By linking wages to asset creation, the scheme shifts from mere relief work to building rural resilience.

Labor Harmony- The provision to pause works during peak agricultural seasons addresses the long-standing complaint of farmers regarding labor unavailability during sowing and harvesting.

Modern Governance and Efficiency

Tech-Enabled Inclusion- It incorporates technology for transparency while maintaining flexibility for exception handling, ensuring legitimate beneficiaries are not excluded due to technical glitches.

Aggregation- The "Stack" approach prevents the fragmentation of works, addressing chronic inefficiencies often observed in rural schemes.

Fiscal Prudence and Decentralization

Rules-Based- The move towards rules-based fiscal allocation ensures financial discipline.

Empowerment- It strikes a pragmatic balance between central oversight (for standards and funding) and decentralized planning (for implementation and relevance).

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill is not a retreat from the state's responsibility but a renewal and modernization of the rural employment guarantee. By combining a legal mandate for 125 days of work with a focus on productive assets, technology-driven accountability, and cooperative federalism, the Bill seeks to transform rural wage employment into a mechanism that is effective, dignified, and sustainable for the future.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/vb-g-ram-g-punjab-26-days-work-mgnregs-sunil-jakhar-10429064/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 22.12.2025

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1. Unlocking the Potential of India-Africa Economic Ties(TH) -1

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE) -2

1. Unlocking the Potential of India-Africa Economic Ties(TH)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Topic- Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. (India-Africa Relations, South-South Cooperation)

Introduction- A Paradigm Shift in Engagement

India's engagement with Africa is undergoing a strategic transformation, moving from historical cultural and political solidarity to a pragmatic, economics-driven partnership. This shift aims to create durable and sustainable long-term collaborations rather than short-term transactional interactions.

Renewed Momentum- The relationship has gained significant traction over the last decade, highlighted by the African Union (AU) becoming a permanent member of the G20 in 2023 under India's presidency.

Diplomatic Outreach- Recent high-level engagements include Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Namibia and Ghana (July 2025) and Ethiopia (December 2025). Note- The July itinerary also included Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, and Brazil, signaling a broader "Global South" outreach.

The Strategic Necessity- Diversifying beyond the West

Dependence on traditional Western markets poses economic risks, necessitating a pivot toward Africa.

Over-reliance on the West- In FY24, nearly 40% of India's exports were directed to the United States and the European Union.

Rising Volatility- Reliance on these markets exposes India to slowdown risks, demand fluctuations, trade protectionism, and policy uncertainty in the West.

Africa as an Alternative- African economies offer a vital avenue for export diversification due to their expanding markets and potential for sustained long-term demand.

Current Trade Dynamics and the Chinese Challenge

While India is a significant player, there is a substantial gap compared to China's dominance.

India's Position- India is Africa's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade approaching $100 billion.

1. Export Volume- $38.17 billion in FY24.
2. Top Markets- Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania.
3. Key Exports- Petroleum products, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, rice, and textiles (constituting ~6% of Africa's total imports).

China's Dominance- China controls over $200 billion in bilateral commerce, supplying 21% of Africa's imports.

Key Chinese Sectors- Dominance in HSN 84 and 85 categories (machinery, electrical equipment, semiconductors).

Strategic Imperatives for 2030

To bridge the trade gap and deepen ties, India has set specific strategic goals.

Trade Targets- A clear goal to double trade with Africa by 2030.

Policy Measures- Reduction of trade barriers. Negotiating Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) and Comprehensive Economic Partnerships with African regional blocs.

Value Addition- A critical shift is required from low-value exports to value-added manufacturing, joint ventures, and cross-border production.

Leveraging AfCFTA- Utilizing the African Continental Free Trade Area platform to access a larger, integrated market rather than fragmented national markets.

Opportunities for MSMEs (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises)

The African market presents a lower barrier to entry for Indian MSMEs compared to hyper-competitive Western markets, but specific support is needed.

Financial Support- Prioritize expanding Lines of Credit. Improve access to affordable trade finance to enable MSMEs to enter and scale.

Risk Mitigation- Implementation of local currency trade mechanisms to bypass dollar volatility. Creation of a joint insurance pool to mitigate political and commercial risks, encouraging participation from banks and smaller firms.

Logistics- Reducing freight costs through port modernization, better hinterland connectivity, and robust India–Africa maritime corridors.

Services Sector- Leveraging India's strengths in IT, healthcare, professional services, and skill development to generate high-value exports and catalyze digital commerce.

The Role of the Indian Public Sector (PSUs)

Private sector investment faces hurdles such as bureaucratic delays, political instability, and high financing costs. The public sector must act as a catalyst.

Current Investment Flaws- Existing investment footprints are often distorted by flows via Mauritius, driven more by tax avoidance than by genuine productive investment on the continent.

PSU Leadership- Public Sector Units must lead in high-risk, capital-intensive sectors, specifically mining and mineral exploration.

The "Crowding-In" Effect- PSUs can secure critical resources and reduce risk perceptions, effectively paving the way for subsequent private sector investment.

Conclusion

India's strategy must evolve from transactional trade to a multipolar economic partnership. As global supply chains reconfigure, Africa is central to India's global ambitions. The focus must be on recalibrating strategies to include investment in manufacturing, agro-processing, and critical technologies to ensure a "Long-term, Durable, and Sustainable" partnership.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/unlocking-the-potential-of-india-africa-economic-ties/article70423170.ece

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance / Polity

Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Introduction

The passing of the VB-GRAMG Bill in December 2025 marks a significant pivot in India's rural welfare landscape, replacing the historic Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). While the original act was a lifeline for millions, providing demand-based wage employment, the new legislation introduces fundamental structural changes. However, the bill has sparked intense debate not just for its content, but for the hasty manner of its parliamentary passage, raising questions about legislative scrutiny, fiscal federalism, and democratic accountability.

Procedural and Democratic Concerns

The legislative process adopted for the bill has drawn criticism for undermining deliberative democracy.

Lack of Scrutiny- The Bill was passed via voice vote without being referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee. This bypassed the critical stage of detailed study, expert consultation, and clause-by-clause analysis.

Absence of Leadership- The debate saw the absence of key parliamentary figures, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, signaling a lack of high-level bipartisan engagement on a crucial issue.

Historical Parallels- The expedited nature of the passage mirrors the enactment of the controversial Farm Laws, highlighting a recurring trend where legislation is fast-tracked at the expense of transparency and consensus building.

Major Policy Shifts & Implementation Challenges

The Bill fundamentally alters the operating model of rural employment guarantee.

From Demand-Driven to Supply-Driven- *Old Model (MGNREGA)*- Legally guaranteed work based on rural household demand ("Right to Work"). *New Model (VB-GRAMG)*- Introduces "normative allocation", where funds are allocated top-down based on set norms rather than actual local demand.

Centre-State Fiscal Strain- The new framework mandates a 60-40 funding split (Centre covers 60%, States cover 40%). This marks a shift from the previous structure (where the Centre bore 100% of unskilled wage costs), potentially straining fiscally weaker states and leading to uneven implementation across the country.

Politicization of Funds- A centralized, normative allocation model risks political bias, where fund distribution could be influenced by political considerations rather than objective necessity.

Socio-Economic Implications

The reforms threaten the stability of the rural safety net that supports nearly 6 crore households.

Livelihood Security- MGNREGA acted as a shock absorber during crises (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) by generating hundreds of crores of person-days of employment.

Distress Migration- By guaranteeing local work, the scheme curbed distress migration to cities. A supply-constrained model may reverse this gain.

Rural Economy- Wage payments support rural purchasing power and asset creation. Abrupt policy shifts without safeguards could disrupt the fragile rural economic ecosystem.

Governance, Efficiency, and Technology

While the need for reform is acknowledged, the approach is contested.

Technological Legacy- The previous administration successfully integrated Aadhaar-linked payments and geo-tagging of assets to streamline the scheme and reduce leakages.

The Reform Dilemma- While streamlining and ensuring fiscal sustainability are valid goals, a consultative approach would have preserved these operational efficiencies while addressing the new fiscal targets.

Political Context and the Path Forward

Bipartisan Erosion- Rural employment guarantees have historically enjoyed bipartisan support. The lack of dialogue with opposition parties has fueled political polarization.

Risk of Policy Reversal- Rushing legislation without public feedback risks repeating the Farm Laws scenario, where lack of consensus eventually forced a policy rollback.

Conclusion

The VB-GRAMG Bill represents an ambitious attempt to restructure rural employment but is marred by "procedural haste" and potential threats to fiscal federalism. By shifting from a demand-based right to a supply-based allocation, the state risks weakening the safety net for the rural poor. For the reform to be successful and sustainable, it requires a balanced approach that restores the demand-driven character of employment, ensures adequate funding support for states, and respects the democratic process of parliamentary scrutiny.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/new-job-law-is-not-a-retreat-from-social-protection-it-aims-to-reform-10429491/

Editorial of the Day – 23.12.2025

Index

1. Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost(TH) -1
2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE) -2

1. Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost(TH)

General Studies 3- Governance

Topic- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Himachal Pradesh Needs a Financial Boost- Valuing Ecosystem Services

Introduction

The State of Himachal Pradesh (HP) acts as a critical ecological custodian for India, preserving vast forest covers that provide benefits far beyond its borders. However, this stewardship comes at a significant financial cost to the state. This analysis explores the imbalance where mountain states bear high environmental costs while delivering national benefits, arguing for a fiscal correction that recognizes and compensates for these "Ecosystem Services."

The Core Argument- National Benefits vs. State Burden

The "Free Rider" Problem- Mountain states like HP protect forests that regulate climate, water flow, and biodiversity for the entire nation (especially the plains).

Disproportionate Burden- While the benefits are national (positive externalities), the costs—such as restricted land use, maintenance of slopes, and higher infrastructure costs—are borne almost exclusively by the state exchequer.

Early Insights- The narrative draws from the long-standing local sentiment that building infrastructure in fragile hills is cost-intensive and that the state is effectively subsidizing the nation's ecological security without adequate reimbursement.

Quantifying Forest Wealth- The Economic Case

Recent data supports the argument that HP's ecological contribution is massive and undervalued.

Total Forest Wealth- A 2025 report by the Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, estimates HP's total forest wealth at ₹9.95 lakh crore.

Annual Economic Value- The annual flow of benefits is pegged at ₹3.20 lakh crore.

Key Services Valued- Carbon Sequestration (mitigating climate change). Water Provisioning (critical for downstream states). Biodiversity Conservation. Regulatory functions like flood control and soil stabilization.

Policy Gaps and Fiscal Constraints

Despite the obvious value, current policies fail to translate ecological value into financial capital for the state.

Recognition without Compensation- India's regulatory framework acknowledges the importance of forests but lacks instruments to comprehensively compensate states for the "opportunity cost" of conservation.

Eco-centric Development Paradox- HP is expected to follow an eco-friendly model, but this restricts industrial revenue generation, leaving the state financially constrained.

FRBM Act Constraints- The FRBM Act, 2005, limits the state's borrowing capacity (fiscal flexibility) without accounting for the unique high-cost, low-revenue nature of an agrarian, mountainous economy.

The Loss of Special Category Status

A historical shift in fiscal federalism has exacerbated HP's financial woes.

Historical Context- HP was granted Special Category State status in 1971 due to its difficult terrain and strategic location. This ensured preferential financial assistance (higher grant-to-loan ratio).

The 2015 Shift- Following the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission in 2015, this special status was effectively withdrawn/diluted, reducing the flow of central funds.
Impact- Although some later adjustments were made, the core financial gap persists, leaving the state unable to fund development while maintaining ecological safeguards.

Evolution of Finance Commission Criteria

The criteria for tax devolution have evolved but remain insufficient for mountain states.
Green Bonus & Incentives- Previous commissions introduced concepts like "Green Bonuses" and incentive-based grants.
15th Finance Commission- It introduced a specific criterion for "Forest and Ecology" with a 10% weightage in the devolution formula.
The Gap- This calculation often relies on "dense forest cover," ignoring other vital ecological assets common in HP, such as Glaciers and Snowfields. Cold Deserts. Alpine Pastures. Rivers and Water Bodies.

Recommendations for the 16th Finance Commission

To ensure sustainable development and equity, the 16th Finance Commission must correct these historical limitations.
Enhance Weightage- Increase the weightage assigned to "Forest and Ecology" in the tax devolution formula beyond the current 10%.
Inclusive Methodology- Revise the definition of "forest" or "ecology" to include non-forest ecological assets (glaciers, alpine meadows) that contribute to national ecological security.
Compensate for Stewardship- Explicitly view financial transfers not as "aid" but as "compensation" for the ecosystem services provided to the rest of India.

Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh's forests are a national asset, but their preservation should not be a state liability. The path forward requires a shift from narrow fiscal formulas to a holistic valuation of natural capital. By empowering the 16th Finance Commission to recognize and pay for these ecosystem services, India can ensure a "Green Federalism" that rewards ecological stewardship and secures the environmental future of the nation.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/himachal-pradesh-needs-a-financial-boost/article70425669.ece

2. New Job Law is Not a Retreat from Social Protection. It Aims to Reform(IE)

General Studies 3- Environment
Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

Environmental Governance Failure- Symbolism vs. Substance

Introduction- The Paradox of Priorities

The current parliamentary session highlights a disturbing disconnect in Indian democracy- a fervent focus on the historical and cultural symbolism of *Vande Mataram* contrasted against a deafening silence on the substantive issue of India's toxic air. While the House debates a song that celebrates India's clean air and fertile soil, the reality outside involves a hazardous "Airpocalypse," particularly in Delhi. This raises critical questions about legislative priorities, accountability, and the gap between performative nationalism and actual governance.

The Disconnect- Cultural Symbolism vs. Environmental Action

Hollow Nationalism- *Vande Mataram* conceptualizes India as a nurturing motherland rich in nature (Sujalam, Suphalam). However, limiting the debate to historical interpretation without addressing the contemporary degradation of that very "motherland" renders the nationalism symbolic rather than substantive.

Missed Opportunity- Parliament failed to leverage India's cultural heritage as a moral foundation to drive modern environmental policy. The ideal of the "sacred geography" is being eroded by policy inaction.

Public Health- A Chronic Emergency

Air pollution has transitioned from a seasonal nuisance to a perennial public health catastrophe.
Grim Statistics- Citing *The Lancet*, the analysis notes that air pollution causes over 1.6 million premature deaths annually in India.
Global Warnings- The World Health Organization (WHO) has repeatedly flagged that India's pollution levels far exceed safe limits.
Legislative Apathy- Despite these figures, parliamentary discussions remain sporadic, indicating that public health is not yet a top-tier political priority.

Institutional and Governance Failures

The crisis is not due to a lack of laws, but a failure of implementation and institutional capacity.
Weak Regulators- State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) suffer from chronic understaffing and a lack of technical expertise.
Data Gaps- Air quality monitoring infrastructure is unevenly distributed, leading to data blind spots in rural and semi-urban areas.
Regulatory Non-Compliance- Major polluters, specifically thermal power plants, continue to violate emission norms with impunity, exposing the lack of teeth in regulatory enforcement.

Debunking the Economy–Ecology Trade-off

The editorial challenges the traditional view that environmental protection hampers development.
False Dichotomy- Narratives suggesting that job creation and infrastructure must come at the cost of the environment are flawed.
Economic Cost of Pollution- Poor air quality directly degrades labour productivity, increases the national healthcare burden, and reduces the quality of life, ultimately hurting the economy. Environmental protection is, therefore, an economic investment.

Constitutional Obligations and Rights

The state's inaction is a violation of the social contract and the Constitution.
Article 21- The Supreme Court has interpreted the Right to Life to explicitly include the right to a clean and healthy environment. Legislative inaction thus amounts to a constitutional failure.
Intergenerational Equity- By destroying the ecological base today, the state is violating the rights of future generations to inherit a livable country.

Flaws in Current Policy Approaches

Short-Termism- Reliance on emergency measures like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), temporary bans, or AQI-based school closures are merely "band-aids."
Need for Structural Reform- Real solutions require long-term continuity Urban planning reforms. Energy transition to renewables. Massive expansion of public transport.
Democratic Feedback- Citizen protests (e.g., "Save Aravalli" or Delhi clean air protests) are democratic signals. Parliament must view these not as dissent but as feedback for policy correction.

Way Forward

Parliamentary Ownership- Establish regular, structured debates on climate and pollution, moving beyond the "Question Hour" formalities.
Institutional Autonomy- Empower Pollution Control Boards with financial independence, adequate staffing, and legal authority.

Airshed Management- Move beyond city-centric plans to an Airshed approach (managing pollution across regional geographic boundaries, e.g., the Indo-Gangetic Plain).

Clean Mobility- Accelerate Electric Vehicle (EV) adoption and public transport infrastructure.

Strict Enforcement- Implement time-bound, non-negotiable compliance for industrial emissions.

Conclusion

India's environmental crisis represents a governance failure as much as an ecological one. For India to be truly "Viksit" (Developed), Parliament must transition from symbolic debates to substantive leadership. True national pride is not found in rhetorical defense of the past, but in securing a healthy, breathable, and sustainable future for the citizens of the present.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/new-job-law-is-not-a-retreat-from-social-protection-it-aims-to-reform-10429491/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 24.12.2025

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1. **End the exploitation - On the Supreme Court judgment, child trafficking-(TH) - 1**
2. **OTPs, FASTag, food orders - How digital breadcrumbs are reshaping policing in India-(IE) - 2**

1. End the exploitation - On the Supreme Court judgment, child traffick-ing(TH)

General Studies 1 - Indian Society **Topic -** Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism (specifically issues relating to women and children).

1. Introduction

Child trafficking stands as one of the most brutal manifestations of modern slavery, revealing a stark chasm between legal protections and the lived reality of vulnerable children. A recent December 19 judgment by the Supreme Court of India has brought this issue to the forefront, labeling it a "deeply disturbing reality." The Court's observations highlight the persistence of organized crime, sexual exploitation, and systemic enforcement failures, calling for urgent, coordinated action from both the State and civil society.

2. The Judicial Perspective - A "Deeply Disturbing Reality"

Context of the Judgment - The Supreme Court's observations arose from a case involving a minor who was sexually exploited by a trafficking gang in Bengaluru.

The Verdict - The Court upheld convictions under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, reinforcing that such crimes are not just legal violations but assaults on human dignity, bodily integrity, and constitutional rights.

Organized Nature of Crime - The Bench explicitly recognized the complex, layered structure of trafficking syndicates. These networks operate through distinct phases—recruitment, transport, harbouring, and exploitation—making detection difficult and prosecution complex.

3. Critical Guidelines on Child Testimony

The Supreme Court laid down significant directives regarding how courts should handle the testimony of trafficked minors to ensure justice is not derailed by technicalities.

Judicial Sensitivity - Courts must exercise extreme sensitivity and latitude when recording a child's statement.

Understanding Trauma - Minor inconsistencies in a child's narrative should *not* undermine their credibility. The Court recognized that children often struggle to narrate traumatic events with precise chronological accuracy.

Status of the Victim - A trafficked minor must never be viewed as an accomplice. Her testimony should be accorded the same evidentiary value and credence as that of an injured witness.

4. Systemic Failures - Data and Enforcement

Despite the existence of laws, the gap between legislation and implementation remains a primary hurdle.

Conviction Deficit - Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs reveals a glaring "deterrence gap." Between 2018–2022, while 10,659 trafficking cases were recorded, the conviction rate stood at a dismal 4.8%.

Need for Reform - Strengthening of Anti-Trafficking Units. Urgent need to pass a comprehensive Anti-Trafficking Bill to close legal loopholes.

5. Rehabilitation and Prevention

The response to trafficking must extend beyond the courtroom.

Holistic Rehabilitation - Post-rescue efforts must go beyond monetary compensation. True rehabilitation involves long-term psychological care, social reintegration, and skill development.

Education as a Shield - Prevention is the first line of defense. Ensuring children remain in school until age 14, as mandated by the Right to Education (RTE) Act, is critical to reducing vulnerability to traffickers.

6. New Age Challenges - The Digital Threat

Adaptive Crime - Trafficking is no longer limited to physical kidnapping; it has become "shape-shifting" and adaptive in the digital era.

Cyber-Exploitation - The internet is increasingly used for recruitment and exploitation. Authorities and social organizations must upgrade their capabilities to counter these evolving forms of cyber-enabled trafficking and forced child labour.

7. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's judgment serves as a wake-up call for systemic reform. To dismantle these entrenched networks, India needs stronger investigations, significantly higher conviction rates, and a judicial process that is sensitive to the trauma of victims. However, the ultimate solution lies in a societal shift—prioritizing prevention through education and protection. Only through the sustained resolve of the government and the active engagement of civil society can the dignity of children be truly safeguarded.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/end-the-exploitation-on-the-supreme-court-judgment-child-trafficking/article70429918.ece#google_vignette

2. OTPs, FASTag, food orders - How digital breadcrumbs are reshaping policing in India(IE)

General Studies 3 - Internal Security **Topic -** Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

Digital Residue and Crime Investigation in India

1. Introduction - The Era of Electronic Evidence

The rapid proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally altered crime detection in India. Every online interaction creates a "digital footprint" or residue, creating a vast trail of electronic evidence. High-profile cases like the BlueChip scam and massive GST frauds have demonstrated that traditional policing is evolving into technology-enabled policing. Law enforcement now relies heavily on digital identifiers—from OTPs to food delivery logs—to trace suspects who are otherwise elusive.

2. Digital Footprints as Investigative Tools

Triangulation via Data - Criminals often switch phones, SIM cards, or locations to evade capture. However, they leave unavoidable traces through everyday transactions.

Sources of Evidence - Police utilize OTPs, ride-hailing app logs, food delivery history, and telecommunication tower data to triangulate movements.

Breaking Anonymity - Even if a suspect discards a SIM card, their login on a delivery app or a digital payment on a new device acts as a beacon for investigators.

International Parallels - The shift is global. For instance, in the 2025 Palisades fire case (USA), interactions with AI models like ChatGPT were utilized as admissible evidence, setting a precedent for AI-generated digital footprints in court.

3. The Rise of Sophisticated Cyber-Financial Crime

Scale of Frauds -

BlueChip Scam - A massive ₹1,000 crore fraud.

GST Frauds - Large-scale tax evasion schemes amounting to ₹5,300 crore.

Modus Operandi - These crimes leverage digital anonymity to move funds and coordinate logistics. The interconnectedness of cybercrime and traditional crime means that digital tools are now central to both the commission of the crime and its subsequent detection.

4. Regulatory and Legal Evolution (2025)

The government is proactively adapting the legal framework to close surveillance gaps.

SIM-to-Device Binding - The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has mandated that messaging platforms and banking apps bind the SIM card to the specific device, making it harder for fraudsters to clone accounts or use stolen SIMs on different phones.

Telecommunication Cybersecurity Amendment Rules, 2025 -

TIUE Framework - Introduces the concept of Telecommunication Identifier User Entity (TIUE).

Scope Expansion - This potentially brings app-based platforms (like Zomato, Swiggy, Amazon) under stricter regulatory oversight, recognizing them as critical data points for crime investigation.

5. The Privacy vs. Security Dilemma

The Trade-off - While digital evidence improves detection efficiency (high conviction potential), it raises significant concerns regarding Article 21 (Right to Privacy).

Data Access - Most platforms have privacy policies that allow data sharing with law enforcement. However, the lack of a "data protection law" specific to surveillance raises fears of -

1. Arbitrary access by police.
2. Lack of judicial oversight in data retrieval.
3. Potential misuse of personal data for profiling.

6. Way Forward

Robust Legal Framework - Establish clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the admissibility of electronic evidence in courts (under the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) to prevent technical acquittals.

Specialised Cybercrime Units - Create dedicated units focused on blockchain tracing (for crypto frauds) and cyber threat intelligence, equipped with AI tools to analyze massive datasets.

Privacy Safeguards - Introduce checks and balances to ensure data access is lawful, necessary, and proportionate. Transparency in how digital evidence is accessed is vital for public trust.

Regulatory Compliance - Strictly enforce the TIUE framework and SIM-to-device binding across all digital service providers, including e-commerce.

Preventive Policing - Move from reactive investigation to preventive policing using AI and predictive analytics to flag suspicious transaction patterns in real-time.

Public Awareness - Educate citizens on Cyber Hygiene—the risks of digital footprints and secure online practices.

7. Conclusion

The digital age demands a paradigm shift in policing. The BlueChip and GST fraud cases serve as case studies for the necessity of data-driven investigation. However, as the state expands its surveillance capabilities through mechanisms like TIUE, it must simultaneously strengthen privacy safeguards. The goal is a balanced ecosystem where technology enhances justice without compromising civil liberties.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/digital-breadcrumbs-reshaping-policing-10434859/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.12.2025

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1. New Labour Codes, The Threats to Informal Workers(TH) -1

2. Aravallis Need the Supreme Court's Shield(IE) -2

1. New Labour Codes, The Threats to Informal Workers(TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

New Labour Codes- Threats to Informal Workers (Summary & Analysis)

Introduction

The enactment of the four new labour codes in 2019 and 2020—covering Industrial Relations, Wages, Social Security, and Occupational Health & Safety—has drawn consistent opposition from trade unions. These codes were passed without the traditional tripartite consultation (Workers, Employers, Government) at the Indian Labour Conference (ILC). While the impact on the organised sector is widely debated, the unorganised sector, which constitutes 90% of India's workforce and contributes nearly 65% to the GDP, faces grave existential threats. This analysis highlights the specific dangers posed to informal workers, particularly in the context of Tamil Nadu.

The Myth of Universalisation and Consolidation

Misleading Claims- The Union Government claims the codes aim to consolidate laws and universalise social security. However, unorganised workers are largely excluded from all codes except the Social Security Code.

Repeal of Protections- "Consolidation" has led to the repeal or weakening of sector-specific laws that previously offered targeted safeguards.

BOCW Dilution- The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act, 1996, a critical safeguard for construction workers, has been undermined, increasing vulnerability in the informal sector.

Erosion of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Protections

Removal of Safety Rules- Approximately 180 safety rules under the BOCW Act have been omitted from the new Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code.

Weakened Enforcement- The shift from mandatory physical inspections to a web-based inspection system weakens the enforcement of safety standards and minimum wage laws, violating international labour standards.

Neglect of Occupational Diseases- The OSHWC Code ignores specific occupational diseases prevalent among informal workers, such as Silicosis (Construction workers). Cancer from pesticide exposure (Agricultural workers). Chronic ailments (Salt workers).

Lack of Policy- There is no comprehensive occupational health policy for the identification, treatment, and rehabilitation of work-related illnesses.

No ESI Coverage- With sector-specific laws repealed, unorganised workers lose access to Employees' State Insurance (ESI) coverage, leaving them without state-backed health mechanisms.

Unequal Social Security Framework

Disparity in Benefits- Organised Workers Receive clearly defined social security benefits. Informal Workers Relegated to vaguely worded "welfare schemes" without concrete legal guarantees.

Dismantling of Funding Sources- Post-GST reforms led to the abolition of sector-specific cesses (taxes dedicated to welfare). This has cut off funding for workers in beedi, salt, and mining sectors without any effective replacement.

Lack of Assured Funds- There is no longer a mandate for employer contributions or specific Union government support dedicated to informal worker welfare.

Centralisation and Threat to State-Level Welfare Boards

One-Size-Fits-All Approach- The Social Security (SS) Code proposes a single welfare board for all unorganised workers (excluding construction and gig workers), ignoring the unique needs of diverse sectors.

Central Control of Funds- The centralised e-Shram registration system raises fears that the Union Government aims to take control of accumulated welfare funds, estimated at ₹1 lakh crore.

Threat to Existing Boards- In Tamil Nadu, 39 sector-specific welfare boards face dissolution.

Absence of Saving Clauses- The new codes lack "saving clauses" to legally preserve existing State-level boards or benefits like old-age pensions, maternity support, and educational assistance.

The Tamil Nadu Context- A Model Under Threat

Robust Framework- Tamil Nadu has a pioneering welfare architecture under the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Act, 1982, built through decades of union struggle.

Coverage- The state has approximately 3 crore informal workers, with nearly 2 crores already registered across various welfare boards.

Contrast with Other States- While states like Andhra Pradesh have shut down welfare boards following the introduction of the new codes, Tamil Nadu has remained cautious and delayed framing rules to protect its system.

Conclusion & Way Forward

Preserve State Autonomy- To protect informal workers, State governments must safeguard their specific welfare boards and labour laws.

The Kerala Model- Tamil Nadu should emulate Kerala's approach by refraining from notifying rules under the new codes.

Demand for Saving Clauses- States must insist on legal provisions (saving clauses) that explicitly protect the existing, functional state-level welfare architecture from being dismantled by the central codes.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/new-labour-codes-the-threats-to-informal-workers/article70434603.ece

2. Aravallis Need the Supreme Court's Shield(IE)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topic- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

The Aravalli Verdict- Implications of the New "100-Metre" Definition

Introduction- The Aravalli Significance

The Aravalli Mountain range is one of the oldest geological formations in the world, stretching approximately 692 km across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi. It is not merely a physical feature but a critical ecological backbone for Northwest India.

Ecological Functions- It acts as a natural "Green Wall," preventing the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Hydrology- It is a vital recharge zone for groundwater in the water-stressed North Indian belt.

Climate Regulation- Acts as the "green lungs" for the Delhi-NCR region, mitigating pollution and regulating local climate**.**

Judicial History- The Supreme Court has historically played a proactive role in protecting this region from illegal mining and encroachments.

The Core Controversy- The 100-Metre Criterion

The Supreme Court recently accepted a new definition of the Aravalli hills, restricting the classification to only those landforms above 100 metres in elevation. This shift has generated significant concern among environmentalists and scientists**.**

Critical Issues Highlighted in the Verdict

Massive Exclusion of Hill Areas (Data by Forest Survey of India - FSI)- The 20-Metre Baseline- Traditionally, hills above 20 metres were considered part of the ecological landscape**.**

Drastic Reduction- Under the new 100-metre rule, 91.3% of the 12,081 surveyed hills (above 20m) are excluded from protection.

Near Total Loss- If the total 1,18,575 identified hill structures are considered, over 99% fail to meet the new definition.

Result- The continuous mountain range is legally reduced to a few "scattered hills," stripping the vast majority of the range of its legal forest status.

Environmental & Ecological Implications

Accelerated Desertification- By losing protected status, the hills can no longer effectively serve as a barrier against the Thar Desert, threatening the fertile plains of North India.

Biodiversity Loss- The fragmentation of the range disrupts wildlife corridors and destroys habitats. Groundwater Crisis- The Aravallis function as a watershed; opening these areas to development or mining will severely impact the water table in Haryana and Delhi**.**

Health Hazards- Ignoring occupational diseases (like silicosis) and pollution impacts contradicts the role of the hills in mitigating air pollution in the NCR.

Contradiction with Expert Opinions

Internal Disagreement- The verdict contradicts the warnings raised by the Court's own Amicus Curiae and the Central Empowered Committee (CEC).

Ignoring Past Damage- The CEC's 2018 survey highlighted that the Aravallis have already lost 25% of their hills due to illegal mining. The new definition validates further destruction rather than arresting it.

Broader Legal and Policy Context

Constitutional & Legal Principles- Article 21- The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental right. Allowing the degradation of the Aravallis potentially violates this constitutional guarantee**.**

'Polluter Pays' Principle- The verdict risks diluting the strict accountability established in landmark cases like *MC Mehta v. Union of India (1996)*.

Weakening Statutory Protections- Environment Protection Act (1986) & Forest Conservation Act (1980) Limiting the geographical definition of "Aravalli" shrinks the area where these strict laws apply.

Open Season for Encroachment- The redefinition effectively regularises existing illegal encroachments and incentivizes new mining and real estate projects in ecologically fragile zones.

Way Forward

Judicial Review- The Supreme Court must reconsider the 100-metre criterion, prioritizing scientific evidence and Ecological Impact Assessments (EIA) over administrative convenience.

Holistic Definition- A definition based on ecological function (vegetation, hydrology, geology) is needed, rather than an arbitrary height limit.

Integrated Conservation- Afforestation- Aggressive greening projects along the Aravalli stretch.

Community Involvement- Strengthening community-based monitoring to check illegal mining.

Coordinated Urban Planning- A unified approach between Rajasthan, Haryana, and NCR authorities to prevent urbanization from consuming the hill range.

Conclusion

The Aravalli range is a hydrological and ecological lifeline for Northwest India. The acceptance of the "100-metre criterion" is a retrograde step that threatens to undo decades of environmental jurisprudence. To prevent inevitable desertification and ecological imbalance, the state and judiciary must adopt a science-based, holistic approach to conservation, rather than reducing nature to arbitrary numerical definitions**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/aravallis-need-the-supreme-courts-shield-10437688/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 26.12.2025

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1. Doping Menace- On Indian Sport and Dope Positive Cases(TH) -1

2. After Year of Successes, ISRO Set for Big Leaps(IE) -2

1. Doping Menace- On Indian Sport and Dope Positive Cases(TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.(Sports Governance, Statutory Bodies (NADA), Health and Integrity in Sports.)

Doping Menace- A Credibility Crisis for Indian Sports

Introduction- The Paradox of Indian Sports

India aspires to become a global sporting powerhouse, aiming to host prestigious events like the 2036 Olympics. However, this ambition is severely compromised by a persistent doping crisis. India has repeatedly topped global charts for dope-positive cases, undermining its credibility. This issue is not merely about individual athletes erring but reflects deeper structural weaknesses in incentives, enforcement, and awareness within the country's sports ecosystem.

Doping as a Strategic Barrier

Credibility Crisis- India has been ranked as the country with the highest number of dope-positive cases for the third consecutive year.

Threat to Hosting Aspirations- India is preparing to host the 2029 World Police and Fire Games and the 2030 Centenary Commonwealth Games. High doping rates weaken the geopolitical leverage required for a successful 2036 Olympics bid. Reputational Damage- Persistent doping scandals erode international trust and cast doubt on the legitimacy of Indian athletes' achievements.

Statistical Reality- What the Data Reveals

WADA Report (2024)- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) data presents a grim picture

India- Recorded 260 Adverse Analytical Findings (AAFs) out of 7,113 tests, resulting in a 3.6% positivity rate.

Global Comparison- India far exceeded other nations like France (91 cases) and Italy (85 cases).

Testing Volume- Despite the high number of positive cases, India ranked only seventh in total testing volume, suggesting the problem might be even more widespread if testing were scaled up further.

Post-COVID Trends- The positivity rate has remained stubbornly high 2022- 3.2%, 2023**-** 3.8%

Official Response vs. Ground Realities

NADA's Stance- The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) defends the numbers, arguing that higher positivity is a result of expanded targeted testing. They highlight a dip to 1.5% positivity in 2025 (up to Dec 16) as a sign of improvement.

Initiatives Taken- Launch of the 'Know Your Medicine' app to help athletes check banned substances. Increased awareness drives across sporting camps.

Systemic Failures- Despite these measures, ground realities indicate a "systemic malaise" Frequent incident of athletes literally evading tests (running away from collection officers). Suspensions of support staff, indicating an organized culture of doping rather than isolated incidents.

Structural Incentives & The Root Cause

Perverse Incentives- The current reward system encourages "win at all costs"

Sports Quota Jobs- Guaranteed government employment for medal winners.

Cash Rewards- Massive financial incentives for podium finishes. These benefits often push athletes to take health risks and shortcuts via doping.

Legal Framework- The National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025 aims to strengthen the legal framework. However, laws are ineffective without strict enforcement.

Way Forward- Necessary Reforms

Institutional Independence- India must ensure NADA operates with institutional independence, free from political or administrative interference, a key requirement under International Olympic Committee (IOC) scrutiny.

Adequate Funding- Increased budget allocation for NADA to upgrade testing facilities and expand the testing pool.

Scientific Advancement- Investment in scientifically advanced controls and forensic intelligence to detect sophisticated doping methods.

Realigning Incentives- The sports ecosystem needs to value long-term athlete health and ethics over immediate medal tallies.

Conclusion

To secure its status as a sporting nation and protect its Olympic aspirations, India must treat doping as a systemic challenge rather than a peripheral lapse. A combination of a truly independent NADA, robust funding, and scientific capacity is non-negotiable. Ultimately, aligning athlete incentives with ethics and health is essential to sustain trust, performance, and legitimacy on the global stage.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/doping-menace-on-indian-sport-and-dope-positive-cases/article70437025.ece

2. After Year of Successes, ISRO Set for Big Leaps(IE)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topic- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention**.**

ISRO Set for Big Leaps- Technological Milestones & Future Outlook

Introduction- A Year of Strategic Evolution

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has concluded the year with landmark successes that underscore India's transition into a major global space power. Moving beyond isolated successes, ISRO has demonstrated a system engineering approach with incremental yet strategic advancements. From the LVM3-M6 heavy-lift launch to the collaborative NISAR mission, these achievements reflect a long-term vision focused on commercial dominance, international partnership, and the ambitious goal of independent human spaceflight through the Gaganyaan programme.

Key Technological Achievements

Heavy-lift Launch Capability (LVM3)

Record Payload- The successful LVM3-M6 mission deployed a 6,100 kg commercial satellite, marking ISRO's highest payload delivery to Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

Dual-Orbit Mastery- Consecutive successes (LVM3-M5 and M6) prove ISRO's ability to launch heavy satellites to both LEO and Geosynchronous Orbit (GEO)—a capability previously limited to a few elite space agencies.

Technological Maturity- This signifies self-reliance in launching heavy communication and observation satellites, reducing dependence on foreign launch providers like Arianespace.

Commercial Space Leadership

Global Provider- ISRO has successfully launched 434 foreign satellites from 34 countries, establishing itself as a reliable, cost-effective global launch hub.

Policy Synergy- These milestones align with reforms under IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre) and NSIL (NewSpace India Limited), which aim to commercialise space activities and boost private sector participation.

Strategic Innovation & Scientific Missions

SpaDeX (Satellite Docking Experiment)

Capability- Tests autonomous docking and undocking of spacecraft**.**

Significance- This technology is the foundational building block for the future Bharatiya Antariksha Station (Indian Space Station), on-orbit satellite servicing, and interplanetary sample return missions.

NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar)

Collaboration- A high-end joint mission with NASA using dual-frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar.

Applications- Critical for disaster management, monitoring climate change, agriculture, and water resource management.

Stature- Elevates India from a "beneficiary" of space data to an equal partner in high-end global space science**.**

The Gaganyaan Programme

Objective- To demonstrate independent human spaceflight capability.

Upcoming Focus- Uncrewed missions will validate the Crew Module safety, Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS), and human-rated launch vehicles.

Broader Policy & Economic Context

National Space Policy 2023- Recent achievements validate the policy's focus on capacity building and global competitiveness.

Strategic Autonomy- Enhanced launch capabilities reduce reliance on foreign systems for critical communication, navigation, and security needs.

Economic Potential- With the global space economy projected to exceed $1 trillion by 2040, India aims to capture a larger share through downstream applications (data usage) and space startups.

Challenges Ahead

Safety vs. Frequency- Balancing the high operational tempo of commercial launches with the zero-error tolerance required for human missions (Gaganyaan) is a significant operational challenge.

Space Debris & Sustainability- Increased launch frequency exacerbates orbital congestion. India must strictly adhere to UN COPUOS guidelines and debris mitigation policies.

Private Sector Integration- While frameworks exist, effectively managing regulatory oversight, intellectual property (IP) rights, and national security concerns within the private sector remains complex.

Resource Constraints- Deep-space and heavy-lift missions require continuous massive investment in cryogenic technology and ground infrastructure.

Way Forward

Human Spaceflight Readiness- Prioritize rigorous testing of crew escape systems and life support to ensure astronaut safety for Gaganyaan.

Reusable Technology- Accelerate development of reusable launch vehicles (RLV) and high-thrust propulsion to drastically reduce launch costs.

Space Diplomacy- Leverage the success of NISAR to forge further high-value partnerships for earth observation and climate monitoring**.**

Sustainability- Formulate national guidelines for active debris removal and end-of-life satellite disposal to ensure long-term orbital sustainability.

Talent Pipeline- Invest in academic collaborations to train the next generation of mission specialists and scientists to sustain this growth**.**

Conclusion

ISRO's recent trajectory is not just a series of launches but a calculated rise in technological depth. By mastering heavy-lift capabilities, entering the domain of space docking, and preparing for human spaceflight, India is firmly positioning itself as a dominant space power for the coming decade.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/after-year-of-successes-isro-set-for-big-leaps-10439210/lite/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 27.12.2025

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1. Social scourge- On India and child marriages(TH) -1

2. Rebuilding Trust in Police, in Shadow of Doubt, Under Scrutiny(IE) -2

1. Social scourge- On India and child marriages(TH)

General Studies 1- Society

Topic- Role of women and women's organizations, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

Child Marriage in India- A Social Scourge

Introduction

Child marriage remains a critical barrier to development in India, undermining health, disrupting education, and perpetuating intergenerational poverty. While India has aligned its goals with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate child marriage by 2030, the gap between policy intent and ground reality persists. Despite a decline in national figures, regional disparities and socio-economic vulnerabilities continue to challenge the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

India's Commitment and Policy Framework

Global Alignment- India is a signatory to the UN SDGs, explicitly committing to ending child marriage by 2030.

National Campaigns- The Union government recently marked the one-year anniversary of the Bal Vivah Mukt Bharat Abhiyan (Child Marriage Free India Campaign) with a focused 100-day nationwide awareness drive.

Intent vs. Reality- While there is strong policy intent backed by multiple schemes, achieving the zero-marriage target is still a "work in progress" due to implementation bottlenecks.

Trends and Progress

Statistical Decline- According to data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS**)**, the prevalence of child marriage has seen a significant steady decline

1. 2005–06- 47.4%
2. 2019–21- 23.3%

Uneven Progress- While national averages have improved, the progress is not uniform across all regions or social groups, masking deep-rooted issues in specific pockets of the country.

Regional Disparities

High Prevalence Zones- The practice remains alarmingly high among women aged 18–29 in specific eastern and northern states.

Critical States- West Bengal, Bihar, and Tripura.

States of Concern- Significant numbers are also reported in Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Root Causes- These geographical patterns are indicative of entrenched regional inequalities, cultural norms, and local socio-economic realities that differ vastly from better-performing states.

Poverty and Education Linkages

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has established a strong correlation between socio-economic deprivation and early marriage.

The Wealth Gap

1. Poorest Quintile- 40% of girls from the poorest families marry before age 18.
2. Richest Quintile**-** Only 8% of girls from the wealthiest families face the same fate.

The Education Shield

1. No Education- 48% of uneducated girls are married early.
2. Higher Education**-** The figure drops drastically to 4% for those with higher education, proving that schooling is a potent deterrent.

Legal Framework and Gaps

Primary Legislation- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is the central law governing this issue.

Enforcement Issues- Low Conviction- Enforcement remains weak, with crime records data indicating infrequent application of the law and low conviction rates.

The POCSO Conflict- The strict application of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has led to unintended consequences, often criminalizing consensual relationships among adolescents rather than targeting forced child marriages.

Health and Social Consequences

Maternal & Child Health- Child marriage is directly linked to poor health outcomes for both the young mother and her child, including higher risks of stunting and maternal mortality.

Unsafe Healthcare- Fear of criminal prosecution (under POCSO or PCMA) often pushes underage girls toward unsafe, unregulated, and clandestine health services for reproductive needs.

Cycle of Vulnerability- These health risks compound existing social vulnerabilities, trapping families in a cycle of poor health and poverty.

Schemes and Implementation Challenges

Incentive Limitations- Cash-transfer schemes aimed at encouraging girls' education exist, yet states like West Bengal (which has such schemes) still report high incidence rates, suggesting financial incentives alone are insufficient.

Central Schemes- The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign needs to be recalibrated to better reach the most marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Infrastructure Deficit- Retaining girls in school requires more than just fees; it demands supportive infrastructure, including Clean and functional toilets. Safe transport options. Secure school environments.

Global and Developmental Implications

SDG Interdependence- According to the organization *Girls Not Brides*, 9 out of the 17 Sustainable **Development Goals** cannot be achieved without ending child marriage.

Holistic Approach Required- The policy-practice divide will persist unless India addresses the interconnected issues of poverty, education gaps, health risks, and gender inequality simultaneously.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Ending child marriage requires moving beyond legislation and singular schemes.

Multi-Pronged Strategy- Success depends on simultaneously addressing poverty, strengthening educational retention, and improving health access.

Infrastructure- Ensuring safe infrastructure for girls is non-negotiable.

Governance- Stronger implementation of existing laws, deep community engagement, and gender-sensitive governance are essential.

Final Goal- Only by aligning policy intent with ground-level practice can India protect the rights of the girl child and sustainably achieve its SDG commitments.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/social-scourge-on-india-and-child-marriages/article70440466.ece

2. Rebuilding Trust in Police, in Shadow of Doubt, Under Scrutiny(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Governance, Transparency, and Accountability; Role of Civil Services in a Democracy.(Police Reforms, Institutional Trust, and Accountability Mechanisms.)

Rebuilding Trust in Police- A Democratic Necessity

Introduction

Public trust is the cornerstone of democratic policing, essential for internal security and law enforcement legitimacy. Currently, Indian policing stands at a crossroads, striving to balance coercive authority with public engagement. The decline in public confidence, exacerbated by allegations of internal discrimination—highlighted by incidents like the suicide of a senior officer in Haryana—underscores deep systemic challenges. Rebuilding this trust requires a dual approach- addressing citizen expectations for service delivery and ensuring internal organizational fairness**.**

Policing and Democratic Accountability

Source of Authority- In a democracy, police authority is derived from public trust and consent, not merely from the power of the uniform or state coercion.

Citizen Expectations- Modern citizenry demands high standards of transparency, fairness, and responsiveness from law enforcement agencies.

Internal Accountability- Accountability is not just external; it also involves ensuring that officers within the force feel protected, valued, and judged solely on performance and merit, rather than identity or caste.

Operational Measures and Significance

Targeted Operations- Initiatives such as "Operation Trackdown" and "Hotspot Domination" are critical for curbing crime.

Focus- These target habitual offenders, illegal arms suppliers, and high-crime zones.

Symbolism of Action- Such operations serve a dual purpose- they demonstrate the state's presence and effectiveness while signaling a strong commitment to public safety.

Role of Technology- While technology is a force multiplier in policing, it cannot substitute ethical leadership and sound human judgment.

Structural and Cultural Challenges

Internal Discrimination- Allegations of bias within the force highlight the urgent need for fairness in administrative decisions, including postings, promotions, and performance evaluations.

Balancing Hierarchy- The traditional, rigid command structure must be balanced with mechanisms that allow for open feedback and effective grievance redressal for junior officers.

Institutional Reform- Sustainable reform requires embedding transparency, consistency, and accountability into the organizational culture to prevent alienation within the ranks.

Policy and Legal Frameworks

Key Mandates- Reforms must be guided by historical recommendations

National Police Commission (1979)- Emphasized the need to insulate police from political interference. Supreme Court Directives (Prakash Singh vs. Union of India, 2006) Mandated structural reforms, citizen oversight bodies, and merit-based tenures**.** Constitutional Alignment- Operational policing must align with constitutional values of equality, dignity, and impartiality to strengthen its legitimacy.

Global and Developmental Implications

Global Best Practices- Following UNODC (2023) guidelines, successful models worldwide rely on community policing and citizen engagement.

Key Pillars- Visibility, clear communication, and ethical conduct.

Developmental Impact- Internal reforms and fair practices lead to reduced corruption, improved law enforcement legitimacy, and enhanced social cohesion, which are vital for economic and social development.

Conclusion

Restoring trust in India's police force is not merely an administrative task but a democratic imperative. It demands a shift beyond traditional law enforcement to ethical leadership and citizen-centric policing. By combining operational success (like cracking down on crime) with internal fairness and external accountability, the police can rebuild their institutional credibility. Ultimately, the police must align their values and actions with public expectations to uphold democratic ideals and earn the "consent of the governed."

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rebuilding-trust-in-police-in-shadow-of-doubt-under-scrutiny-10440773/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 29.12.2025

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1. Linked civilisations, a modern strategic partnership(TH) -1

2. SC has role in clean-up, not in GST on purifiers(IE) -2

1. Linked civilisations, a modern strategic partnership(TH)

General Studies 1- Society

Topic- Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. (India–Iran Relations (Historical ties, Energy Security, Connectivity Projects, and Strategic Partnership).

Introduction

The relationship between India and Iran is unique in international relations; it goes beyond standard diplomatic statecraft, rooting itself in a "living civilisational relationship." While ancient ties provide the foundation, modern engagement is increasingly driven by hard economic realities, energy security, and the need for regional stability in West Asia.

The Civilisational & Literary Continuum

The historical bond between the two nations is defined by shared ancestry and deep cultural osmosis.

Common Ancestry- Both civilisations trace their roots to the Aryan peoples before they branched out one settling in the Iranian plateau and the other in the Indus–Ganga plains.

Linguistic & Spiritual Roots- There are deep parallels between the Avesta (Zoroastrian scripture) and the Rigveda, confirming a shared spiritual imagination and civilisational origin. This shared linguistic and mythological background has fostered a resilience in the relationship that has survived centuries of political flux.

Persian Influence in India- Persian endured for centuries as the language of art, diplomacy, and poetry in India.

Sabk-e-Hendi (Indian Style)- The cross-cultural milieu gave birth to a specific style of Persian literature known as the "Indian Style."

Cultural Icon- The text highlights Mirza Abdul-Qadir Bedil Dehlavi, a poet whose philosophical depth represents the creative brilliance of this shared heritage.

Pillars of Contemporary Strategic & Economic Convergence

In the current geopolitical landscape, historical sentiment is insufficient; the partnership is now anchored in tangible strategic and economic interests.

Energy Security

Natural Alignment- Iran possesses vast hydrocarbon reserves, while India has rapidly growing energy demands. This creates a natural, symbiotic supplier-consumer relationship.

Connectivity and Trade

Chabahar Port- India's involvement in the development of the Chabahar Port is a strategic anchor, allowing India to bypass Pakistan to access Afghanistan and Central Asia.

INSTC (International North–South Transport Corridor)- Iran holds a central geographical position in this corridor. The INSTC offers a shorter, cheaper, and more efficient route for Eurasian commerce compared to traditional routes (like the Suez Canal).

Security Cooperation & Geopolitics

As the world shifts toward a multipolar order, India and Iran are positioning themselves to influence regional stability.

Counter-Terrorism- Both nations face threats from the spread of extremism and terrorism across West and South Asia.

Intelligence Sharing- Consequently, intelligence cooperation has become a "quiet but vital pillar" of the relationship.
Strategic Autonomy- Despite external pressures (often implying Western sanctions), India has managed its ties with Iran by prioritizing Strategic Autonomy and national interest.
Financial Resilience- To insulate the partnership from external constraints (sanctions), there is a push for flexible financial arrangements, specifically local-currency trade.

Future-Oriented Engagement- Beyond Transactional Ties

The article suggests moving from a buyer-seller relationship to an innovation-driven alliance.
Knowledge-Based Diversification- The future of the partnership lies in diversifying into high-tech sectors, including Information Technology (IT), Nanotechnology, Medical Sciences
Diplomatic Milestone- As the nation's commemorate 75 years of diplomatic relations, the goal is to convert historical goodwill into a modern, forward-looking partnership.

Conclusion

India and Iran are described as "one soul in two bodies**,"** bound by history and aligned by geography. A revitalised alliance offers mutual prosperity and contributes significantly to long-term stability in West Asia. The moment is ripe to shape a collaborative, resilient, and autonomous future that resonates with their ancient harmony.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/linked-civilisations-a-modern-strategic-partnership/article70446666.ece

2. SC has role in clean-up, not in GST on purifiers(IE)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary. Separation of Powers between various organs (Legislature, Executive, Judiciary). Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Overreach.

Judicial Overreach Limits- The Debate on Fiscal Intervention

Introduction

The Indian Constitution relies on a delicate balance of power between the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. While the Judiciary is the guardian of Fundamental Rights and the environment, its recent intervention in fiscal matters—specifically the Delhi High Court's suggestion to reduce GST on air purifiers—has reignited the debate on Judicial Overreach. This incident highlights the tension between judicial activism in public interest and the exclusive domain of the Executive in economic governance.

Judicial Activism vs. Constitutional Boundaries

Role of Courts- Courts often step in to correct "executive inaction," particularly when public interest is at stake (e.g., environmental protection).
Risk of Overreach- Intervention becomes problematic when courts enter policy domains strictly reserved for elected representatives.
Legislative Prerogative- Fiscal decisions, such as taxation, require detailed legislative deliberation, balancing of budgets, and political consensus, which are beyond the court's expertise and mandate.

The Constitutional Role of the GST Council

The power to determine tax rates is constitutionally codified and federal in nature.
Article 279A- The GST Council is a constitutional body established under Article 279A to govern Goods and Services Tax.
Composition & Consensus- It includes representatives from both the Centre and States. Decisions require a three-fourths majority, ensuring a federal consensus**.**
Unilateral Limits- Because of this federal structure, neither the Judiciary nor any single government authority has the power to unilaterally alter GST rates.

Public Health vs. Fiscal Policy

The context of the court's intervention is the severe air pollution crisis, but the text argues that the *method* of intervention (tax cuts) is misplaced.

Valid Judicial Mandate- Monitoring and enforcing environmental laws to protect public health is well within the court's constitutional power**.**

Invalid Policy Prescription- lowering GST is a specific policy choice, not a matter of legal right. Tax cuts on devices (air purifiers) shift the burden of clean air to individuals (buying machines) rather than forcing the state to fix structural causes.

The Need for Structural Solutions

Beyond Band-Aids- Reducing taxes is a short-term, superficial measure. Real solutions require structural reforms in

1. Emission controls.
2. Urban planning.
3. Energy policy.
4. Transport reforms**.**

Constructive Engagement- The text cites the Aravalli region cases as examples of *constructive* judicial engagement, where courts focused on protecting natural resources rather than dictating fiscal terms.

Conclusion

The Judiciary remains indispensable for enforcing environmental compliance and holding the government accountable. However, Constitutional Discipline mandates that fiscal decisions (like GST rates) remain with the GST Council. Effective governance is achieved when institutions respect their defined roles while working toward long-term solutions**.**

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/sc-has-role-in-clean-up-not-in-fixing-gst-rates-on-purifiers-10443690/

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC

DAILY EDITORIALS
January 2026

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 01.01.2026

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1. **The U.S. Tariff Shock, India's Pharma Future (TH)** -1
2. **Tariffs Are Gone. Now, Let's Build on India-Australia Pact (IE)** -2

1. The U.S. Tariff Shock, India's Pharma Future (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests

Introduction

In September 2025, the global pharmaceutical landscape faced a seismic shift with the U.S. announcing a 100% tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical imports. For India, known as the "Pharmacy of the World," this presents a dual reality- a critical threat to its export-driven model and a strategic opportunity to leverage its dominance in generic medicines (which remain currently exempted). The crisis has accelerated India's push for market diversification, domestic reforms (like GST rationalization), and self-reliance in Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).

1. Global Market Context & India's Position

Global Scale- Global pharma exports crossed $850 billion in 2024, driven by aging populations and chronic disease management.

Leading Players

1. Top Exporters- Germany ($119.8 bn), Switzerland ($99 bn), and the U.S. ($90 bn).
2. Top Importer- The U.S. remains the world's largest buyer, importing $212.67 billion (2024).

India's Standing

1. Rank- 3rd largest exporter by volume.
2. Growth- Exports rose from $27 billion (2023) to $30.47 billion (FY2025).
3. US Dependence- Approximately 35% of India's pharma exports are bound for the U.S., making this tariff regime a high-stakes geopolitical issue.

2. The U.S. Tariff Shock- Risks vs. The "Generics Cushion"

The U.S. move is framed as a protectionist measure to boost domestic manufacturing, but its impact is nuanced.

The Threat (Branded Drugs)- The 100% tariff targets branded and patented drugs not manufactured in the U.S.

Impact- Firms with high U.S. exposure (>30%) face rerouting costs, regulatory hurdles, and potential R&D slowdowns.

Domino Effect- If tariffs extend to generics, India could face a 10–15% revenue cut, dragging GDP down by 0.2–0.3%.

The Cushion (Generic Dominance)

Market Share- Generics make up 70% of India's exports to the U.S./Europe.

US Reliance- India supplies 40% of U.S. generics, saving the American healthcare system an estimated $219 billion (2022).

Strategic Safety- Currently, generics are excluded from the tariff, shielding the bulk of India's trade. However, any future inclusion would risk triggering massive drug shortages in the U.S.

3. Domestic Policy Response- The GST Shield

To insulate the domestic market from export volatility, the Indian government implemented significant tax reforms in September 2025.

GST Rationalization

Medicines- Rates slashed from 12% to 5%; 36 essential items (including life-saving drugs) now at Nil rate.

Medical Devices- GST reduced from 18% to 5%, easing the cost of $5 billion worth of imports.

Economic Impact

Consumer Savings- Estimated at $1.2 billion annually.

Consumption Boost- Expected to raise domestic consumption by 8–10%, aided by alignment with the *Ayushman Bharat* scheme.

Supply Stability- No re-labelling requirements for pre-existing stock ensured zero supply disruption during the transition.

4. Strategic Pivot- "Eastern Scale" & Diversification

Recognizing the risks of over-reliance on the West, India is aggressively pivoting towards the Global South and "Eastern" manufacturing hubs.

Diplomatic Expansion

New Alliances- 6 MoUs signed with nations like Trinidad and Tobago; new API pacts with Singapore.

South-South Cooperation- Collaboration with the Serum Institute of India for dengue treatments in low-income countries.

China Factor

Vulnerability- India still imports 72% of its APIs from China ($5 billion/year).

Opportunity- As the U.S. targets China, the "China-plus-one" strategy is driving global firms to look at India, Africa, and Southeast Asia as alternative hubs.

Africa Potential- Platforms like iPHEX aim to double export volumes to Africa, potentially offsetting 20–25% of the risks arising from U.S. tariffs.

5. Structural Challenges & Future Forecasts

Despite the headwinds, the long-term outlook remains bullish, contingent on structural upgrades.

Growth Projections

Market Size- Expected to jump from $50 billion (2024) to $130 billion by 2030 (11–12% CAGR).

Exports- Projected to reach $120–$130 billion.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI)

Goal- Reclaim 20% of domestic API production by 2030 to reduce Chinese dependence.

Value- API sector to grow to ₹1.82 trillion ($22 bn).

Affordability & Access

PMBJP Scheme- 16,912 *Jan Aushadhi Kendras* (as of June 2025) provide generics at 80% lower prices than branded alternatives.

Oncology- The PMBJP basket has cut cancer treatment costs by ~70%, protecting patients from the global trend of rising therapy costs ($8k–$10k hikes in the U.S.).

Conclusion

The U.S. tariff shock of 2025 serves as a wake-up call for India's pharmaceutical sector. While the generics cushion prevents immediate collapse, long-term survival depends on three pillars- diversifying markets towards the Global South, reducing API dependence on China through PLI schemes, and strengthening domestic consumption via GST reforms. By balancing "Western innovation" with "Eastern scale," India can transition from being just a volume player to a resilient global pharma power.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-us-tariff-shock-indias-pharma-future/article70457995.ece#-~-text=U.S.%20tariffs%20risk%20causing%20shortages,and%20equitable%20access%20is%20key.

2. Tariffs Are Gone. Now, Let's Build on India-Australia Pact (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

The editorial highlights a significant milestone in India's trade diplomacy- the successful operationalization of the Australia–India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA). With Australia eliminating all tariffs on Indian goods as of January 2026, the partnership has emerged as a beacon of stability amidst rising global trade protectionism. This agreement has not only accelerated bilateral trade and job creation but also cemented Australia's role as a key partner in India's energy transition and Indo-Pacific strategy.

1. Key Achievement- Complete Tariff Elimination

Zero Duty Access- From January 2026, 100% of Indian exports to Australia now enjoy zero-tariff access. This provides a massive competitive edge for Indian textiles, leather, gems, and jewellery in the Australian market.

Reciprocal Benefits- In return, India has strategically reduced or removed duties on key Australian commodities (like wines, almonds, and lentils), ensuring the deal is mutually beneficial without harming sensitive domestic sectors.

2. Surge in Bilateral Trade and Employment

Trade Volume- Bilateral trade has witnessed exponential growth, crossing AUD 50 billion, with two-way trade effectively doubling in just five years.

Outpacing Global Trends- Indian exports to Australia are growing at a rate significantly higher than India's overall global export growth. This indicates a high degree of "trade complementarity"—meaning Australia needs exactly what India sells, and vice versa.

Job Creation- The expansion in labor-intensive export sectors (like textiles) in India and service sectors in Australia has contributed to substantial employment generation in both nations.

3. Economic Complementarity & Strategic Synergy

The economies of the two nations are naturally compatible rather than competitive-

Australia's Role (Raw Materials)- It serves as a vital supplier of critical minerals (Lithium, Cobalt) and rare earths, which are indispensable for India's "Make in India" initiative, EV battery manufacturing, and renewable energy transition.

India's Role (Finished Goods)- India supplies high-quality manufactured goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products that are in demand in Australian consumer markets.

4. Strategic Significance for India

Reliability in Uncertainty- At a time when Western markets are becoming protectionist and global supply chains are volatile, Australia offers a stable, predictable, and rule-based trade relationship.

Indo-Pacific Engagement- The economic pact deepens India's strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific, complementing the **Quad** security dialogue.

Supply Chain Security- Access to Australian critical minerals allows India to diversify its supply chains, reducing strategic vulnerability and dependence on single-source countries (like China) for key inputs.

5. Future Outlook- Upgradation to CECA

Moving Beyond Goods- The partners are currently negotiating to upgrade the ECTA to a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).

Scope- CECA aims to expand cooperation into deeper areas such as

1. **Services-** Greater access for Indian IT and professional services.
2. **Investment-** Facilitating Australian pension funds to invest in Indian infrastructure.
3. **Digital Economy-** Collaboration on digital trade and standards.

6. Challenges and Concerns

MSME Competitiveness- There is a need to ensure that Indian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) remain competitive despite the increased exposure to Australian imports.

Non-Tariff Barriers- Addressing sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures that often hinder agricultural exports.

Standards- Navigating strict environmental and labor standards that may be incorporated into the broader CECA framework.

Way Forward

Fast-Track CECA- Prioritize negotiations on services and technology transfer to unlock the full potential of the relationship.

Capacity Building- India must strengthen domestic manufacturing standards and skilling to fully utilize the duty-free access provided by Australia.

Leverage Critical Minerals- Actively pursue joint ventures for exploration and processing of critical minerals to secure India's green energy future.

People-to-People Ties- Enhance institutional cooperation in education and tourism to sustain the long-term momentum of the partnership.

Conclusion

The India–Australia ECTA stands as a model of how trusted partners can create mutually beneficial economic frameworks. In a volatile global environment, this partnership not only drives growth and jobs but also secures India's supply chains. Moving towards a full-fledged CECA will be the decisive next step in cementing India's economic and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/tariffs-are-gone-now-lets-build-on-india-australia-pact-10449172/

Editorial of the Day – 02.01.2026

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1. The Water Divide- on Water Contamination, Piped Water Supply in India -1
2. Between India and EU, A Carbon Gap and an FTA Bridge -2

1. The Water Divide- on Water Contamination, Piped Water Supply in India

General Studies 2- Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

The Water Divide- Governance and Public Health Crisis

1. Introduction

Public health serves as a barometer for the State's commitment to its citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable. While India has made strides in expanding access to water, recent tragedies highlight a critical gap between access and quality. The provision of piped water is meaningless if rigorous testing at the point of delivery is absent, turning an essential service into a potential public health hazard.

2. The Mandate of Public Health and Basic Needs

Defining Development- The true measure of public health is not aggregate data but the well-being of the most vulnerable sections of society.
Rights vs. Privileges- Essential services such as safe drinking water, healthcare, education, clean air, **and infrastructure** are basic human necessities, not privileges reserved for the few.
State Responsibility- Institutions are duty-bound to work proactively—not just reactively—to protect citizens' lives.
Current Status- Despite economic growth, India is falling short on these critical human development indicators, necessitating urgent institutional introspection.

3. Case Study- The Indore Tragedy (Administrative Failure)

The Incident- In Indore, Madhya Pradesh, the consumption of municipality-supplied contaminated water led to a severe health crisis.

1. **Casualties-** At least four deaths, including an infant.
2. **Morbidity-** Over 2,000 people fell ill, with 200+ hospitalized and 32 admitted to the ICU.

The Irony of Governance- The tragedy is particularly stark because Indore has been repeatedly ranked as India's cleanest city under the Swachh Survekshan surveys. This exposes a disconnect between surface-level cleanliness and deep-rooted infrastructural hygiene.
Accountability Deficit- The response has been characterized by post-crisis blame-shifting and the formation of committees, which are insufficient excuses for the failure to prevent a predictable disaster.

4. Systemic Lapses- Recurring Crisis in Madhya Pradesh

Pattern of Negligence- The Indore incident is not an isolated accident but the second major water related crisis in the state within two months, indicating systemic rot.
Previous Precedent- In November, a jaundice outbreak occurred at a Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) campus near Bhopal due to contaminated water, leading to student protests.
Failure of Warning Systems- These repeated incidents highlight a lack of early detection mechanisms and public warning systems that could have prevented the loss of life.

5. Policy Gaps and Infrastructural Challenges

Mission vs. Reality- While flagship schemes like the Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission have improved coverage, water safety failures persist. Coverage targets are being met, but quality assurance is lagging.

Infrastructure Decay- The root causes of contamination are structural

1. Aging pipelines that have outlived their utility.
2. Sewage leaks infiltrating drinking water lines (cross-contamination).
3. Chemical contamination in groundwater sources.

Demographic Risk- With India's population nearing 147 crores, the supply of unsafe water is not just a local issue but a grave national health risk that can overburden the healthcare system.

6. The Way Forward

Quality over Quantity- Access to water must be legally coupled with assured quality. Testing must be rigorous at the **point of delivery**, not just at the treatment plant.

Infrastructure Overhaul- Immediate identification and replacement of old pipelines and sealing of sewage leaks are required.

Strict Enforcement- States must enforce strict water-quality norms with zero tolerance for negligence.

Proactive Governance- Implementation of early warning systems and regular public awareness campaigns regarding water safety.

7. Conclusion

The recurring water contamination crises in Madhya Pradesh serve as a grim reminder that public health goals cannot be met through accolades alone. Systemic reform, rather than post-disaster blame games, is the need of the hour. Ensuring safe drinking water through upgraded infrastructure and strict monitoring is non-negotiable to restore citizen trust and prevent further preventable deaths.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-water-divide-on-water-contaminationm-piped-water-supply/article70460544.ece

2. Between India and EU, A Carbon Gap and an FTA Bridge

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Carbon Trade Challenge- CBAM and India's Competitiveness

1. Introduction

The global trade landscape is undergoing a structural shift where carbon footprints are becoming a decisive factor in economic competitiveness. Effective from January 1, 2026, the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has begun imposing taxes on imports based on their embedded carbon emissions. This move directly impacts Indian steel and aluminium exports, necessitating a dual strategy of domestic industrial adaptation and robust international diplomatic negotiation.

2. Understanding the Impact on Indian Exports

Economic Exposure- The EU is a critical market, absorbing approximately 22% of India's total steel and aluminium exports.

Immediate Trade Compression- Even prior to the full implementation of the tax, the transition phase (involving data reporting) led to a 24% decline in exports in FY2025. This indicates that compliance costs and administrative hurdles are already acting as non-tariff barriers.

Price and Margin Erosion

1. Coal-based steel production in India faces the highest financial burden.
2. Realised export prices could potentially drop by 16–22%.
3. Although the legal liability to pay CBAM lies with the EU importer, the cost is effectively passed back to Indian exporters through demands for lower supply prices to offset the tax.

3. Structural Challenges for Indian Industry

Absence of Carbon Credit Offset- India currently lacks a comprehensive national carbon tax or a mature emissions trading system. Consequently, Indian exporters cannot claim "credits" against taxes paid domestically, forcing them to pay the full levy to the EU.

Verification Hurdles- CBAM requires rigorous verification of both Scope 1 (direct emissions) and Scope 2 (indirect emissions from electricity used). Verification must be conducted by ISO 14065-accredited auditors, creating a bottleneck for Indian firms.

The "Default Value" Trap- If Indian exporters fail to provide verified, actual emission data, the EU applies default emission values. These defaults are often 30–80% higher than actual emissions, artificially inflating the tax burden and severely damaging competitiveness.

Technology Disadvantage- The mechanism inherently penalizes coal-intensive production. Competitiveness will now shift toward manufacturers using cleaner methods like Gas-based Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) or Electric Arc Furnaces.

4. The Geo-Economic Debate- Climate Action or Green Protectionism?

Equity Concerns (CBDR)- Applying the high carbon prices of rich nations to developing economies violates the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). It forces developing nations to pay for carbon constraints without having the financial or technological legacy of the West.

Protectionist Trends- Steel and aluminium are rapidly becoming the most "protected" sectors globally. Combined with high US tariffs (50%), CBAM acts as a tool for industrial protection under the guise of climate action. Revenue vs. Emissions Critics argue that CBAM generates revenue for the EU and slows industrial growth in the Global South, while having a minimal impact on reducing actual global emissions.

5. Strategic Role of India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Negotiation Lever- The ongoing FTA talks offer a critical window for India to negotiate transitional relief or specific exemptions for MSMEs and developing sectors.

Mutual Recognition- A key goal for India is to secure mutual recognition of carbon accounting frameworks. If the EU accepts India's reporting standards, compliance costs would drop significantly.

Finance and Tech Transfer- Negotiations must extend beyond trade facilitation to include climate finance and the transfer of low-carbon technologies, balancing industrial needs with environmental goals.

6. The Way Forward

Accelerate Domestic Carbon Markets- India must fast-track the operationalization of the Indian Carbon Market (ICM) under the *Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022*. A domestic price on carbon allows funds to remain in India rather than being paid as tax to the EU.

Technological Upgrade- Incentivize the steel and aluminium sectors to shift toward cleaner production technologies (Green Hydrogen, renewable energy integration) to naturally lower the CBAM burden.

Strengthen MRV Systems- Robust Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems must be established to ensure Indian data is accepted globally, avoiding the punitive "default values."

Diplomatic Push- Use FTA forums to ensure fair treatment, arguing against the imposition of non-tariff barriers that disproportionately hurt developing economies.

7. Conclusion

The implementation of CBAM is a wake-up call that emission efficiency is now as vital as cost competitiveness. India cannot afford passivity; it must aggressively pursue domestic policy reforms to establish its own carbon market while engaging in proactive diplomacy to protect its export interests. Survival in high-value markets like the EU now depends on green transitions as much as economic efficiency.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/between-india-and-eu-a-carbon-gap-and-an-fta-bridge-10450577/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 03.01.2026

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1. Unenviable choice- On the government's fiscal policy space (TH) -1

2. Energy transition will need more than chasing the sun and harnessing the wind (IE) -2

1. Unenviable choice- On the government's fiscal policy space (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Fiscal Dilemma- Balancing Growth-Oriented Capex and Fiscal Targets

1. Introduction

The latest economic data highlights a critical challenge for the Indian government in the fiscal year 2025-26- a constrained fiscal space amidst efforts to stimulate demand. While the government has implemented tax reductions (both GST and Income Tax) to ease economic pressures, these measures have weakened short-term revenue collections. Simultaneously, public expenditure obligations remain high, creating a growing tension between the need to support economic growth through Capital Expenditure (Capex) and the necessity of maintaining fiscal prudence.

2. Narrow Fiscal Space Exposed by GST Trends

Stagnant Revenue Growth- The GST revenue for December 2025 stood at ₹1.74 lakh crore, registering only a marginal rise over the previous month.

Limited Demand Revival- The lukewarm collections indicate that the recent GST rate reductions have not yet triggered a significant revival in consumption demand.

Shift in Consumer Behaviour- Rather than increasing immediate spending, consumers appear to be prioritizing savings and debt reduction. A similar trend was observed following the income-tax relief measures announced in Budget 2025, suggesting that tax cuts are being saved rather than spent.

3. Short-Term Pain from Tax Relaxations

Fiscal Cost of Policy Shifts- While the cuts in GST and income tax were welcomed as necessary policy interventions to support households, they have proven fiscally costly in the short run.

Revenue Contraction- Total tax revenue collections up to November 2025 stood at ₹13.9 lakh crore, which is 3.4% lower year-on-year.

Time Lag in Benefits- The revenue losses from these cuts are "front-loaded" (immediate), whereas the demand-side benefits (increased consumption driving future tax revenue) are likely to materialize only in the medium term.

4. Expenditure Pressures and Inflexibility

Surge in Capital Expenditure- The government has aggressively pushed for growth, with Capital Expenditure (Capex) rising sharply by 28% year-on-year to reach ₹6.58 lakh crore. This is vital for infrastructure and long-term asset creation.

Rigidity of Revenue Expenditure- While revenue expenditure grew at a slower pace (2.1%), it largely consists of non-discretionary items such as salaries, pensions, and interest payments.

Constraint- These expenditures are rigid and cannot be compressed indefinitely, severely constraining the government's fiscal manoeuvrability.

5. Emerging Fiscal Risks

Delayed Impact of New Levies- The newly announced excise duties, GST rates, and cesses on tobacco and pan masala will only come into effect from February 1, 2026. Consequently, the revenue benefits

from these measures will largely accrue in the *next* financial year, offering little relief for the current fiscal targets.

The Nominal GDP Trap

Low Inflation- The economy is witnessing very low wholesale inflation (average –0.08%).

Impact- This results in a lower Nominal GDP than what was budgeted. Since fiscal deficit is calculated as a percentage of Nominal GDP, a lower denominator mechanically inflates the fiscal deficit and debt-to-GDP ratios, even if borrowing remains constant.

6. The Unenviable Choice

The government faces a tough trade-off

Option A- Protect growth-supporting Capex to ensure long-term economic momentum, risking a breach of fiscal deficit targets.

Option B- Cut back on spending to meet fiscal targets, potentially stalling the economic recovery.

7. Conclusion

The government stands at a critical juncture, facing sluggish revenue growth, inflexible expenditures, and delayed benefits from revenue-augmenting measures. While sustaining capital expenditure is vital for long-term growth, doing so in the face of falling revenues risks fiscal slippage. The core challenge for the remainder of the financial year lies in balancing the imperative of fiscal discipline with the need to safeguard economic momentum in an uncertain environment.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/unenviable-choice-on-the-governments-fiscal-policy-space/article70464114.ece#google_vignette

2. Energy transition will need more than chasing the sun and harnessing the wind (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Infrastructure- Energy

Power Sector Reforms- Shifting Focus from Generation to Systemic Optimisation

1. Introduction

India has achieved a significant milestone with solar and wind capacity crossing 180 GW and costs falling sharply. However, the energy transition has moved from a phase of generation constraints to systemic bottlenecks. The core challenge is no longer just adding capacity but addressing structural issues in distribution companies (discoms), tariff designs, and market mechanisms to prevent the renewable transition from becoming financially disruptive and operationally unstable.

2. The Distribution Sector- The Core Bottleneck

Central Role of Discoms- Discoms are the critical interface between power generation and end consumers. Their financial health dictates the pace of grid modernization.

Operational Inefficiencies

High AT&C Losses- Persistently high Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses (approx. 16%) indicate continued power theft, billing inefficiencies, and technical weaknesses.

Lack of Modernization- Financial stress prevents discoms from investing in necessary forecasting tools, balancing capacity, and grid upgrades.

Failure of Past Reforms- Schemes like UDAY and RDSS improved infrastructure and liquidity but failed to fix the fundamental incentive structures and tariff distortions.

3. Rising Renewable Penetration and System Stress

Intermittency Issues- The increasing share of solar and wind energy introduces variability and forecasting uncertainty into the grid.

Peak Demand Management- Misalignment between renewable output (e.g., solar peaks at noon) and consumption patterns leads to sharper, more expensive peak demand periods.

Incentive Mismatch- Discom incentives are currently focused on electricity sales volumes rather than reliability or flexibility, discouraging proactive renewable integration.

4. Cross-Subsidisation and Revenue Erosion

Structural Flaw- Tariffs rely heavily on cross-subsidisation, where Commercial and Industrial (C&I) consumers pay higher rates to subsidize households and agriculture.

The Vicious Cycle- High tariffs drive C&I consumers toward rooftop solar, energy efficiency measures, and open access.

Revenue Loss- The exit of these high-margin consumers erodes the discoms' revenue base while subsidy obligations remain constant.

Result- This force tariffs higher for remaining users, prompting further exit and deeper financial stress.

5. Fixed Costs vs. Volumetric Tariffs

Cost Structure Mismatch- Discom costs are largely fixed (network O&M, long-term Power Purchase Agreements), but revenue is collected via volumetric tariffs (per unit sold).

Impact of Efficiency- Adoption of energy efficiency and behind-the-meter solar reduces sales volume (revenue) without reducing the discom's fixed costs.

Need for Reform- The absence of separate fixed charges distorts price signals. Demand response initiatives may lower peak demand but ironically reduce discom revenues before cost savings are realized.

6. Rooftop Solar and Net Metering Challenges

Hidden Costs- Net metering compensates exported solar power at retail tariffs, which include network and cross-subsidy components, effectively overpaying prosumers at the cost of the discom.

Backup Supplier Dilemma- Discoms act as "backup" providers during non-solar hours (evenings/nights) without adequate remuneration for this reliability service.

Financial Stress- Without tariff restructuring, increased rooftop solar adoption deepens discom financial distress rather than enabling decentralized energy.

7. Technological Solutions- Smart Meters & Automation

Smart Metering- The installation of nearly 49 million smart meters provides the foundation for granular consumption measurement and dynamic pricing.

Time-of-Day (ToD) Tariffs- A nationwide mandate for ToD tariffs is shifting the sector toward cost-reflective pricing.

Automated Demand Response (ADR)

Limitation of Price Signals- Manual demand shifting is unrealistic for households.

Automation- Smart appliances and EV chargers can shift load automatically without consumer intervention.

Benefit- ADR offers grid flexibility comparable to battery storage but at a significantly lower cost.

8. Wholesale Market Limitations and Reforms

Current Fragmentation- Despite a physically interconnected grid, markets are institutionally fragmented. Power exchanges handle only 7–9% of electricity, restricting true price discovery.

Self-Scheduling- Long-term PPAs encourage self-scheduling, preventing the "least-cost dispatch" of power and leading to the curtailment of cheaper renewable energy.

Solution - Market-Based Economic Dispatch (MBED)

Concept- Prioritizes the dispatch of the lowest-cost generation on a national level.

Economic Impact- The CERC estimates annual savings of $1.6 billion from MBED implementation.

Efficiency- It improves liquidity and ensures zero-marginal-cost renewables are utilized effectively.

9. Redefining the Role of Discoms

Paradigm Shift- Discoms must evolve from passive bill collectors to active system managers.

New Incentives- Regulatory frameworks should reward reliability, peak load management, and loss reduction rather than just sales volume.

Performance-Linked Regulation- Aligning discom interests with climate goals ensures that energy efficiency and distributed generation become assets rather than threats to their viability.

10. Conclusion

India's renewable energy journey has reached a critical juncture where system optimization outweighs capacity addition. Success depends on fixing distribution finances, modernizing tariff designs (to recover fixed costs), enabling automated demand response, and integrating wholesale markets. Without these structural reforms, the transition to clean energy risks being inefficient and financially unsustainable.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/energy-transition-will-need-more-than-chasing-the-sun-and-harnessing-the-wind-10452456/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 05.01.2026

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2. Going forward, much depends on states' room for spending (IE) -2

1. High and dry- On gig workers, social security (TH)

General Studies 2- Social Justice

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

High And Dry- Social Security for Gig Workers

1. Introduction

The gig economy in India is at a critical juncture where the rapid expansion of platform-based work has outpaced the legal frameworks designed to protect labour. The recent nationwide strike by gig workers served as a flashpoint, exposing the deep structural insecurity—or "precarity"—inherent in app-mediated labour. While the government has signaled an intent to provide social security through new draft Labour Rules, the current framework risks offering merely formal recognition without addressing the root causes of vulnerability. The challenge lies in moving beyond the "intent" of the law to ensuring social security is genuinely accessible, reliable, and secure in practice.

2. Context of the Strike and Policy Backdrop

Magnitude of Unrest- The fragility of the sector was highlighted on December 31, when nearly one lakh gig workers went on a nationwide strike. This mass mobilization underscored that the precarity in the sector is deepening, not improving.

Power Asymmetry- The power imbalance between platforms and workers was starkly illustrated by a platform CEO publicly praising police intervention against striking workers, signaling a refusal to engage with worker grievances democratically.

Policy Anxiety- The protest was not just about immediate wages but coincided with the release of the draft Labour Rules. Instead of alleviating fears, the release sharpened workers' anxieties about their future legal standing.

Selective Inclusion- A critical grievance is the selective nature of the new legal framework. While gig workers are included under the ambit of "social security," they remain explicitly excluded from protections regarding "wages" and "working conditions," leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

3. Limits of the Current Labour Code Framework

Exclusion from Wage Code- The Code on Wages does not recognize the gig worker-platform relationship as a formal "employment" relationship. Consequently, gig workers are denied basic statutory protections like minimum wage or overtime pay.

Superficial Contribution Model- Platforms are only mandated to make a "gross contribution" (1-2% of turnover) to a social security fund. This acts as a generic welfare cess rather than a defined benefit contribution linked to individual workers.

Algorithmic opacity- The core operational grievances of workers—such as arbitrary algorithmic pay cuts, opaque incentive structures, and dynamic pricing—remain completely unregulated and untouched by the new codes.

Mismatch of OSH&WC Rules- The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH&WC) Rules are designed around traditional, physical workspaces (factories/offices). They rely on the "Shram Suvidha Portal," which fails to capture the dispersed, digital, and mobile reality of app-based work.

4. Flaws in Social Security Eligibility Design

Registration Hurdles- The onus is placed on workers to register on a government portal to claim benefits. Meanwhile, aggregators (platforms) are only required to upload worker data quarterly. This lag creates a data mismatch that can delay or deny claims.

Arbitrary Eligibility Thresholds- To be eligible for social security, a worker must have worked for 90 days with a single aggregator or 120 cumulative days across multiple platforms. This "time-based" threshold ignores the nature of gig work, which is often task-based rather than time-based.

Illusion of Flexibility- While the rules allow for "multi-platform work" to accelerate eligibility (reaching the 120-day mark faster), this does not empower the worker. It effectively locks them into a cycle of continuous work without limiting the platform's control over work allocation.

Penalizing Vulnerability- The fixed time windows for eligibility are rigid. They risk penalizing workers who take breaks due to illness, caregiving duties (disproportionately affecting women), or simple market demand slumps. A worker who falls sick and misses the 90-day target could lose social security access entirely.

5. Need for Redesign to Ensure Real Security

From Promise to Practice- Social security must be designed to be accessible in reality, not just on paper. The current "intent" is insufficient if the administrative barriers (portals, thresholds) prevent access.

Protection During Downturns- Eligibility criteria must be redesigned to protect, rather than exclude, workers during periods of maternity, illness, or economic downturns (when demand for rides/deliveries drops).

Defined Benefits & Guarantees- The rules must move beyond vague "funds" and clearly define Specific benefit entitlements (health, pension, insurance). Minimum fund guarantees (what happens if the fund runs dry?). Robust dispute resolution mechanisms for when claims are rejected.

Data Transparency & Rights- Workers must receive periodic, transparent work statements from platforms. Crucially, they must have the legal right to contest faulty data uploaded by aggregators, ensuring they aren't denied benefits due to clerical errors or platform malice.

6. Conclusion

The current draft Rules, if implemented without change, threaten to institutionalize precarity rather than resolve it. By offering social security that is hard to access while denying wage protection, the state legitimizes the gig model without fixing its exploitative elements. To restore worker trust and prevent further unrest, the government must ensure accessible social security, clear entitlements, and aggregator accountability. Without safeguards for care work, illness, and demand shocks, the reforms will remain "high and dry," failing to protect the very workforce they aim to serve.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/high-and-dry-on-gig-workers-social-security/article70470838.ece

2. Going forward, much depends on states' room for spending (IE)

General Studies 3- Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

State Spending Capacity- Balancing Welfare and Growth

1. Introduction

In recent years, India has witnessed a debate regarding the fiscal health of states, specifically concerning the breach of the 3% fiscal deficit limit and the potential "crowding out" of capital expenditure by populist welfare schemes. The editorial clarifies that the increased fiscal deficits were not

a result of fiscal indiscipline but were enabled by deliberate policy interventions—specifically, enhanced borrowing flexibility and Centre-supported loans. The data indicates that despite rising social welfare costs, states have managed to keep capital expenditure resilient, supported by structural reforms and central assistance.

2. Borrowing Flexibility and Higher Fiscal Deficits

Policy-Driven Expansion- The breach of the traditional fiscal deficit limit (3% of GSDP) by several states was a permitted policy response, not an anomaly.
Relaxed Limits- For the period FY2021–FY2025, states were authorized to borrow beyond the base limit of 3–4% of GSDP.
Crisis Response- Additional borrowing space of 0.5–1.1% of GSDP was specifically granted to support economic recovery during periods of stress (post-pandemic).
Conclusion- The higher deficit numbers reflect utilized flexibility rather than fiscal mismanagement.

3. Role of Central Loans in Expanding Fiscal Space

GST Compensation Loans- To bridge the revenue shortfall caused by the pandemic and GST implementation issues, the Centre extended back-to-back loans worth ₹2.6 trillion to states during FY2021–FY2022.
Special Capex Assistance- The Centre introduced a "Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment," providing 50-year interest-free loans.
Scale- States received ₹3.7 trillion under this window during FY2021–FY2025.
Impact- These loans were over and above normal borrowing limits, directly boosting the funds available for infrastructure without adding to the immediate interest burden.

4. Reform-Linked Borrowings and Incentives

Incentivizing Reforms- The Centre linked additional borrowing permissions to the successful completion of specific structural reforms (e.g., One Nation One Ration Card, Ease of Doing Business).
Quantifiable Impact- Total reform-linked borrowings amounted to ₹1.1 trillion (FY2021–FY2025).
Power Sector Focus- Specific reforms in the power sector allowed states to borrow an additional ₹1.3 trillion, linking fiscal leeway to the financial turnaround of DISCOMs.

5. Carry-Forward of Unutilized Borrowings

Smoothing Spending- Recognizing that capital projects have long gestation periods, states were allowed to carry forward unutilized borrowing limits from FY2021 to FY2022.
15th Finance Commission Support- The Commission permitted the carry-forward of borrowing space within its award period. This prevented a "use it or lose it" rush and allowed states to sustain spending even during fragile recovery phases.

6. Welfare Spending vs. Revenue Deficit Management

Surge in Welfare Costs- There has been a significant rise in cash transfer schemes, particularly targeting women.
Data Point- Cash transfers to women across 11 states skyrocketed from ₹120 billion (FY2023) to an estimated ₹1.5 trillion (FY2026).
Fiscal Prudence- Despite this massive increase in welfare bills, revenue deficits widened only marginally.
Balancing Act- States managed this by rationalizing older, less efficient schemes and adjusting spending under other heads, indicating a degree of fiscal prioritization.

7. Resilience of Capital Expenditure (Capex)

Myth of Crowding Out- Contrary to the fear that "freebies" (welfare) would eat into infrastructure funds, capital expenditure has remained robust.
Strong Growth- The combined capital expenditure and loans by states grew at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 18.5%.

Doubling of Assets- In absolute terms, capital spending by 28 states doubled to ₹8.4 trillion during the FY2021–FY2025 period, proving that welfare and growth-oriented spending co-existed.

8. Future Fiscal Space and the 16th Finance Commission

Critical Dependencies- The sustainability of this high-spending model is uncertain and depends on the 16th Finance Commission.

Key Determiners- Future state capex will be dictated by Vertical devolution (tax sharing ratio). New borrowing limits set for the next cycle. Decisions on whether to continue the "interest-free capex loan" scheme.

Risk- If borrowing flexibility is withdrawn without a corresponding increase in revenue share, states may be forced to cut back on capital expenditure to maintain welfare schemes.

9. Conclusion

The fiscal expansion seen in Indian states over the last five years was an "exceptional" phase driven by central hand-holding and relaxed norms. States successfully utilized this space to balance rising welfare demands with record capital investment. However, as these emergency measures wind down, the 16th Finance Commission bears the responsibility of designing a framework that prevents a hard landing, ensuring states do not have to choose between social security and economic growth.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/going-forward-much-depends-on-states-room-for-spending-10455496/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 06.01.2026

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2. Supreme Court's bail order in Delhi riots case raises deep concerns (IE) -2

1. The Parallel Track that Keeps U.S.-India Ties Going (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The Parallel Track of India-U.S. Relations (2025-2026)

1. Introduction

In the landscape of 2025-2026, India-U.S. relations are defined by a distinct "dual-track dynamic." While high-level political engagements face headwinds due to trade frictions and geopolitical shifts, the institutional relationship—specifically in defence, technology, and bureaucratic cooperation—continues to deepen. This structural resilience ensures that strategic partnership survives leadership-level volatility.

2. Current Political and Economic Frictions

The political track faces significant strain, characterized by muted high-level engagement and economic divergence.

Summit Deferment- The Quad Leaders' Summit, scheduled to be hosted by India, was postponed amidst opaque communication, signaling underlying bilateral tension.

Trade Wars & Tariffs- Relations have worsened due to a U.S. tariff regime on Indian goods. Specific economic pressures are linked to India's continued purchase of Russian crude oil.

Result- India's exports to the U.S. saw a sharp drop in 2025.

Geopolitical Realignment Concerns

New Delhi's Fear- A perceived U.S.–China "G-2" style rapprochement.

U.S.-Pakistan Thaw- Washington has improved ties with Pakistan. Islamabad is offering port access and critical mineral shipments to American firms to serve U.S. geopolitical imperatives.

Different Standards- China and Pakistan are seemingly benefiting from lower tariffs compared to India.

3. Institutional Resilience- The Quad

Despite the postponement of the Leaders' Summit, the functional aspect of the Quadrilateral Security **Dialogue (Quad)** remains active and robust.

Ministerial Continuity- The Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Washington, July 2025) successfully launched initiatives in maritime security and critical technologies.

Operational Momentum- The Quad Counterterrorism Working Group met in December 2025, proving that the grouping's relevance extends beyond "political optics" to ground-level security operations.

Regional Infrastructure

Quad Ports of the Future Conference- Held during India Maritime Week 2025 in Mumbai.

Focus- Convened 24 Indo-Pacific partners to discuss quality infrastructure and regional connectivity, marking infrastructure as a new pillar of cooperation.

4. Defence & Technology- The Core Pillars

Defence cooperation acts as the "backbone" of the relationship, insulating ties from political shocks.

New Strategic Frameworks

10-Year Defence Framework Agreement (Oct 2025)- Signed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth. It focuses on information sharing, technological collaboration, and regional deterrence.

SOSA (2024)- The signing of the Security of Supply Arrangement strengthened defence industrial resilience between the two nations.

Foundational Agreements (The History)- The current resilience is built on past agreements like LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020) which enable logistics, secure comms, and geospatial data sharing.

Industrial Integration

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) & GE Deal- A billion-dollar deal signed in Nov 2025 for fighter jet engines signifies deep industrial integration.

Space Cooperation

NISAR Launch- The NASA–ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite (July 2025) is now aiding in disaster management and agriculture planning.

Military Exercises- Continued regularity of exercises like Yudh Abhyas, Tiger Claw, and Malabar ensures interoperability.

5. Challenges and Way Forward

While the "parallel track" works, reliance solely on defence institutions has limitations.

Existing Constraints- Domestic regulatory hurdles in both nations. Technology interoperability concerns. Analysts warn that full momentum is hard to restore if trade disputes remain unresolved.

The Need for "Institutional Literacy"- Looking toward 2026, there is a need to understand the decision-making cultures (structures and processes) of the partner country. This literacy must expand beyond defence into civilian and non-traditional sectors.

Conclusion

The partnership survives because institutional mechanisms (bureaucracy, military) keep the dialogue alive even when political leaders pause. To future-proof the ties, this cooperation must broaden into the civilian domain to withstand political downturns.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-parallel-track-that-keeps-us-india-ties-going/article70474887.ece

2. Supreme Court's bail order in Delhi riots case raises deep concerns (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity & Governance

Topic- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.

Bail, Dissent, and the UAPA – The Supreme Court's 2026 Ruling

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court's recent decision to deny bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the Delhi riots case—over five years after their arrest—has reignited the debate on civil liberties in India. The judgment highlights the friction between the constitutional norm that "bail is the rule, jail is the exception" and the stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). While five co-accused were granted bail, the continued detention of Khalid and Imam based on their "central role" raises critical questions regarding evidentiary reasoning, judicial overreach, and the criminalisation of democratic dissent.

2. Legal & Constitutional Concerns regarding Bail under UAPA

The judgment reflects the systemic difficulties accused persons face when charged under anti-terror laws.

High Threshold for Bail- The UAPA mandates a rigorous standard for granting bail, making courts historically reluctant to provide relief in terror-related cases. The burden often shifts to the accused to prove innocence at a preliminary stage.

"Substantial" vs. "Impermissible" Detention- The Supreme Court acknowledged that the pre-trial incarceration of over five years was "substantial." However, it ruled that this duration did not yet cross the threshold of "constitutional impermissibility," leaving the definition of "too long" dangerously vague.

Arbitrary Re-application Clauses- The provision allowing the accused to re-apply for bail after one year suggests an arbitrary judicial threshold rather than one based on substantive change in circumstances or evidence.

Hierarchy of Participation- The Court justified the differential treatment (granting bail to some but not others) based on a "hierarchy of participation." Critics argue this effectively acts as a mini-trial, judging the accused's guilt at the bail stage itself, bypassing due process.

3. Expansion of "Terrorist Acts" & Criminalisation of Dissent

The interpretation of what constitutes terrorism under the UAPA is expanding, potentially encompassing standard forms of protest.

Broad Interpretation of Section 15- The prosecution has utilized the phrase "any other means" within Section 15 of the UAPA to widen the definition of terrorist acts.

Blurring Lines- Activities such as non-violent protests, organizing roadblocks (chakka jams), or coordinating via WhatsApp groups are being categorized as terrorism.

Stifling Democracy- The Supreme Court's implicit acceptance of these broad definitions' risks creating a chilling effect, where legitimate democratic dissent is equated with threats to national security.

4. Judicial Overreach and Evidence Assessment

The manner in which the Court evaluated the bail plea raises concerns about the separation of pre-trial evaluation and actual trial adjudication.

Depth of Participation Analysis- The Court engaged in a deep dive into the "depth of participation" of the accused. By doing so without a full trial, it risks giving the prosecution the "benefit of the doubt" rather than the accused.

Pre-judging the Case- This approach blurs the critical line between a prima facie evaluation (standard for bail) and a final adjudication of guilt (standard for conviction).

Need for Restraint- The text highlights a need for greater judicial restraint, particularly when dealing with special laws that allow for the serious deprivation of liberty based on untested evidence.

5. Implications for Democracy and Legal Precedent

The ruling sets a significant precedent for how the state handles political activism and dissent.

Erosion of Presumption of Innocence- Prolonged pre-trial incarceration effectively punishes the individual before conviction, undermining the foundational legal principle that an accused is innocent until proven guilty.

Chilling Effect- The loose framing and application of UAPA provisions serve to deter public participation in protests, as citizens may fear draconian repercussions for political expression.

Future Precedents- This judgment establishes a benchmark for future cases involving dissenters, protesters, and political activists, potentially lowering the bar for the state to deny bail in politically sensitive cases.

6. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's order underscores the delicate and often contentious balance between safeguarding national security and upholding civil liberties. While the Court has affirmed its authority to interpret the law, its reasoning exposes the tension between state interests and democratic freedoms. Moving forward, there is an urgent need for

1. Judicial Vigilance- To ensure "process does not become the punishment."
2. Legislative Clarity- To narrow the definitions within UAPA to prevent misuse.
3. Timely Trials- To prevent the erosion of constitutional rights through indefinite pre-trial detention.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/supreme-courts-bail-order-in-delhi-riots-case-raises-deep-concerns-10457254/

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 07.01.2026

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1. At a crossroads- On Iran's unrest, its re-engagement with the world -1

2. CBAM is a trade barrier. Government must lend exporters a hand -3

1. At a crossroads- On Iran's unrest, its re-engagement with the world

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Crisis in Iran- At A Crossroads

1. Introduction

Iran is currently navigating a critical period defined by a convergence of economic distress, political rigidity, and external geopolitical pressure. What began as a localized strike has rapidly metamorphosed into nationwide unrest, arguably the most significant since the 2022–23 protests. The situation highlights the urgent need for the Islamic Republic to undertake structural reforms and renew engagement with the international community to prevent a total collapse of state legitimacy.

2. The Trigger and Spread of Unrest

The current wave of instability was not spontaneous but the result of accumulating grievances.

The Spark (Dec 28)- The unrest began with a strike by shopkeepers in Tehran, specifically protesting the catastrophic devaluation of the Iranian rial.

Rapid Escalation- The initial economic strike quickly snowballed into broad, nationwide protests. The scale is now comparable to the unrest following the custodial death of Mahsa Amini in 2022.

State Response

Carrot- The government offered assurances to address the specific economic grievances of traders.

Stick- Simultaneously, security forces issued warnings of harsh crackdowns against "rioters."

Human Toll- Reports indicate at least 12 deaths occurred within the first week as the protests spread beyond Tehran.

3. The Geopolitical Backdrop

The timing and external perceptions of the protests have heightened the regime's anxiety.

Post-War Vulnerability- The unrest erupted just six months after a 12-day conflict with Israel, leaving the state apparatus fatigued and sensitive.

Foreign Involvement Narratives

Mossad Claims- On December 29, Israel's Mossad claimed its operatives were "in the field" alongside protesters, fueling regime paranoia.

US Rhetoric- On January 2, Donald Trump warned that the U.S. was "locked and loaded" if protesters were killed, adding external pressure.

Regime Perception- The Iranian leadership views the protests not merely as economic dissent but as a hybrid threat—economic grievances weaponized by external enemies to foster instability.

4. Economic Crisis at the Core

The primary driver of public anger is a debilitating economic collapse, evidenced by alarming macroeconomic indicators.

Inflation Shock- Food inflation hit 64% in October, ranking as the second-highest globally. This has caused severe cost-of-living stress for the average citizen.

Currency Collapse- The Rial has lost approximately 60% of its value since the war in June, obliterating savings and making imports prohibitively expensive.

Energy Insecurity- The country faces daily electricity outages, disrupting both industrial output and household life.

Declining Revenue- Oil exports are projected to decline by ~7% in 2025 compared to the 2024 average, further shrinking state coffers.

Official Helplessness- Highlighting the severity, President Masoud Pezeshkian publicly admitted the government was "stuck" and could not perform "miracles."

Key Economic Indicator	Status	Implication
Food Inflation	64%	Severe cost-of-living stress
Rial Value	-60% (since June)	Loss of savings, import shock
Oil Exports	-7% (2025)	Reduced state revenues
Electricity	Daily Outages	Industrial & household disruption

5. Governance Constraints and the "Repression Loop"

The state finds itself in a cycle of diminishing returns regarding its governance strategy.

Contradictory Policies- While there has been some "social easing" regarding the enforcement of morality police mandates, the "hard limits" on economic policy and national security remain rigid.

The Repression Loop

1. Economic Decline triggers public anger.
2. External Threats (real or perceived) cause the regime to increase repression.
3. Increased Repression fails to solve the root cause, leading to a deeper crisis and further alienation.

6. The Role of External Pressure

Western policies play a significant role in exacerbating the internal situation.

Washington's Strategy- The current U.S. approach relies on an "economic squeeze" combined with military threats.

Domestic Impact- This strategy primarily hurts ordinary Iranians while making the regime more paranoid and insular.

Proposed Alternative- Analysts suggest a policy of engagement that empowers President Pezeshkian to pursue reforms, rather than escalating threats on Israel's behalf, which only bolsters hardliners.

7. The Old Narrative is Failing

The regime's traditional tools for maintaining control are losing efficacy.

Blame Game vs. Reality- The default state narrative attributes all crises to "foreign conspiracies." However, the public increasingly sees the crisis as a structural reality of shrinking opportunities and eroded freedoms.

Societal Shift- The traditional pillars of state legitimacy—Religion and Nationalism—are no longer sufficient to offset the despair caused by economic ruin.

8. The Way Forward (Reforms Needed)

To ensure stability, Iran must pivot from its current trajectory.

Structural Reforms- Initiate genuine economic and political reforms rather than cosmetic changes.

Tackle Corruption- Address systemic corruption that drains state resources.

Restore Opportunity- Create pathways for economic recovery to appease the disillusioned youth and trading class.

Re-engagement- Move away from isolation and re-engage with the international community to lift the burden of sanctions.

Acknowledgment- The state must acknowledge public anger as a result of internal mismanagement, not just external interference.

9. Conclusion

The protests in Iran are a symptom of a deep-seated structural crisis rooted in economic mismanagement, shrinking freedoms, and public disenchantment. While external actors may exploit the situation, the root causes are domestic. Without meaningful reforms and a shift away from reliance on repression, the Islamic Republic risks recurring instability and a potentially irreversible erosion of state legitimacy.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/at-a-crossroads-on-irans-unrest-its-re-engagement-with-the-world/article70478475.ece

2. CBAM is a trade barrier. Government must lend exporters a hand

General Studies 2- Environment
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
Carbon-Linked Trade- Challenges & Opportunities (CBAM)

1. Introduction

Global trade dynamics are undergoing a structural shift where climate policy is increasingly determining market access. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) represents a watershed moment where "carbon intensity" becomes a key metric of trade competitiveness. Scheduled for full implementation in 2026, this policy forces Indian exporters—particularly in steel and aluminium—to grapple with carbon-linked levies that could raise costs by **16–** 22%. While framed as a climate mitigation tool, CBAM poses significant risks to developing economies like India that rely on cost-efficient, albeit carbon-intensive, production methods.

2. Understanding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The Mechanism- CBAM imposes a carbon price on imports entering the EU, equivalent to the carbon price paid by domestic EU producers under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS).
Sectoral Coverage- Initially targets high-carbon sectors- Steel, Aluminium, Cement, Fertilisers, Electricity, and Hydrogen.
Future Scope- There is a high probability of expanding to other sectors, fundamentally altering global trade norms and compliance requirements.

3. Impact on Indian Export Competitiveness

High Exposure- The EU is a critical market, absorbing nearly 22% of India's steel and aluminium exports.
Erosion of Edge- The imposition of carbon levies will significantly increase compliance costs, eroding profit margins.
Market Displacement- Indian exporters risk losing market share to competitors from economies with cleaner production baselines or those with pre-existing trade preferences with the EU.

4. Equity Concerns and Climate Justice

Violation of CBDR- CBAM effectively applies developed-world carbon standards to developing economies. This conflicts with the foundational UNFCCC principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), which argues that developed nations should shoulder a larger burden of climate action.
Disproportionate Impact- Data from UNCTAD suggests that while CBAM may reduce global emissions by a negligible 0.1%, it will disproportionately penalize exports from the developing world, raising questions about its true efficacy versus its economic harm.

5. Trade Protectionism vs. Climate Action

Green Protectionism- Steel and aluminium are already among the most heavily protected sectors globally via tariffs and non-tariff barriers.
Cost Shifting- Critics argue CBAM functions as a "green trade barrier," effectively shielding EU industries from external competition while shifting the cost of climate adjustment onto the Global South.

6. Expanding Global Precedent

The Domino Effect- The UK has proposed a similar mechanism, indicating that carbon-linked trade measures are becoming a global norm rather than an EU-specific policy.
Uncertainty- This creates long-term unpredictability for Indian exporters, who must now prepare for a global trade environment where carbon metrics are as important as price and quality.

7. Domestic Industrial and Technological Constraints

Energy Mix- Indian manufacturing relies heavily on coal-based energy, making the carbon footprint of exports naturally higher than European counterparts.
Capital Intensity- Rapid decarbonization requires massive capital investment and technology upgrades.
Barriers- A lack of access to affordable green finance and restricted technology transfer from developed nations constrains the ability of Indian industries to comply swiftly.

8. The Way Forward (Strategic Response)

Strategic Trade Negotiations
FTA Leverage- Use ongoing India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations to seek sector-specific carve-outs, extended transition periods, or mutual recognition of carbon certificates.
Diplomatic Pressure- Emphasize climate equity and the developmental impact of such unilateral measures in diplomatic dialogues.

Accelerating Green Industrial Transition

Incentivization- Provide targeted incentives for adopting energy-efficient furnaces, green hydrogen in steelmaking, and low-carbon aluminium smelting.
Policy Alignment- Align domestic industrial policies (like PLI schemes) with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to bolster credibility.

Carbon Accounting and Standards

Robust MRV- Develop a rigorous domestic system for Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of carbon emissions.
Harmonization- Ensure domestic carbon standards are harmonized with global norms to reduce "information asymmetries" and compliance friction for exporters.
Financial and Policy Support
Green Finance- Operationalize "Viability Gap Funding" and concessional green credits to help industries upgrade technology.
MSME Support- Create special support structures for MSMEs within export supply chains, as they are most vulnerable to compliance costs.

Multilateral Engagement

Global Forums- Challenge CBAM at the WTO and UN Climate Change Conferences, arguing for rules that balance trade facilitation with sustainability.
Coalition Building- Form negotiating blocs with other affected developing nations (e.g., BRICS, Global South) to strengthen leverage against unilateral green trade barriers.

9. Conclusion

CBAM signals an irreversible structural shift where international trade and climate policy are becoming inextricably linked. While global decarbonization is imperative, the economic burden must not be unfairly transferred to developing nations. For India, the path ahead requires a calibrated strategy-protecting current export competitiveness through diplomacy and negotiation, while simultaneously accelerating a credible domestic green transition to future-proof its economy.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/cbam-is-a-trade-barrier-government-must-lend-exporters-a-hand-10459121/

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 08.01.2026

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1. **Letter against the spirit- On the Election Commission, barring foreigners (TH)** -1
2. **Supreme Court reproach should be a wake-up call for pollution watchdog (IE)** -2

1. Letter against the spirit- On the Election Commission, barring foreigners (TH)

General Studies 2- Constitution / Governance

Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Letter Against the Spirit- ECI's Electoral Roll Revision

1. Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is constitutionally mandated to superintend, direct, and control elections, a core component of which is maintaining accurate electoral rolls. Recently, the debate surrounding the ECI's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has intensified. While the objective of ensuring only Indian citizens vote is undisputed, the methodology employed has raised fundamental questions regarding constitutional duty, democratic fairness, and the protection of genuine citizens' rights against administrative overreach.

2. ECI's Stance Before the Supreme Court

The Commission has taken a rigid legal position to justify its actions.

Constitutional Mandate- In its submission on January 6, the ECI asserted its non-negotiable constitutional responsibility to ensure electoral rolls contain *only* Indian citizens.

Zero Tolerance- The Commission explicitly stated that "not even a single foreigner" can be permitted on the voter list.

Defense of SIR- This argument was the primary defense for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which has resulted in the deletion of millions of names from voter lists across various states.

3. Concerns of Civil Society and Opposition

The criticism is not against the removal of ineligible voters but against the collateral damage to eligible citizens.

Burden of Proof- There is deep concern over the onus being shifted onto ordinary citizens to repeatedly prove their identity and citizenship, causing harassment and inconvenience.

Faulty Rolls- All stakeholders agree that current electoral rolls are faulty and difficult to navigate.

Consensus on Foreigners- Notably, no political party or civil society group has argued for the inclusion of foreigners. The contention is strictly about the *process* of removal and its impact on genuine Indian voters.

4. The Core Conflict- Constitutional Duty vs. Procedural Fairness

The heart of the controversy is a conflict between the *objective* (clean rolls) and the *process* (mass deletions).

Institutional Legacy- Historically, the ECI has built credibility by expanding the "right to vote" as a substantive democratic right, ensuring no eligible citizen is left behind.

Current Risk- The present approach risks reversing this legacy by treating the right to vote as a mere administrative formality that can be stripped away through bureaucratic procedures.

5. Democratic and Ethical Implications

Inversion of Justice- The process appears to violate the principle that "no innocent individual should suffer in the pursuit of wrongdoers."
Distraction and Polarization- An excessive, almost singular focus on the "fear of foreigners" Distracts from other genuine threats to electoral integrity (e.g., money power, criminalization). Potentially fuels political polarization by creating a narrative of "infiltration."

6. Constitutional Authority and Public Trust

Article 324- While Article 324 indisputably grants the ECI independent control over electoral rolls, the exercise of this power is under scrutiny.
Question of Impartiality- The key concern is whether this power is being exercised independently and impartially, or if the ECI is aligning too closely with executive narratives.
Litmus Test- A fair electoral process is defined by the trust of the losers. If the losing side (or the electorate) loses faith in the neutrality of the umpire (ECI), the democratic mandate is weakened.

7. The Unique Responsibility of the ECI

Primary Mandate- While multiple agencies (police, border forces) are tasked with identifying illegal foreigners, **only the ECI** has the specific constitutional duty to enroll every eligible Indian citizen.
Misalignment of Priorities- By prioritizing the *exclusion of foreigners* over the *inclusion of citizens*, the ECI appears to be misaligning its priorities.
Credibility Crisis- Recent rule changes and their selective application have led to accusations that the ECI is diluting its sacred constitutional role.

8. Conclusion

The Election Commission stands at a critical juncture. In its zeal to exclude foreigners, it must not forget its primary mandate- ensuring that no eligible Indian citizen is denied the right to vote. Democracy relies on public trust, which is sustained by fair, humane, and transparent procedures. The ECI must ensure its "intensive revisions" do not become tools of exclusion that impose avoidable hardship on the very citizens it is meant to serve.
Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/letter-against-the-spirit-on-the-election-commission-barring-foreigners/article70483028.ece**

2. Supreme Court reproach should be a wake-up call for pollution watchdog (IE)

General Studies 3- Environment
Topic- Environmental pollution and degradation; Conservation.
Supreme Court's Reprimand- A Wake-Up Call for Air Pollution Governance

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has issued a stern reprimand to air pollution regulatory authorities, specifically targeting the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). The Court highlighted a fundamental failure in diagnosing and addressing the chronic air pollution crisis in Delhi-NCR. By noting that pollution levels remain dangerously high even outside the peak winter months, the judiciary has flagged deep-seated governance deficits, moving the discourse beyond seasonal blame games to structural institutional failures.

2. Background- The Context of the Crisis

Chronic Hazard- Delhi-NCR faces hazardous air quality annually, with the situation becoming catastrophic during winter.
Ineffective Band-Aids- Temporary, reactive measures like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), odd-even vehicle rationing, and construction bans have proven insufficient.

Health & Economy- The situation has evolved from an environmental issue to a public health emergency, causing respiratory diseases, reducing life expectancy, and inflicting massive economic losses through healthcare costs and lost productivity.

3. Key Arguments & Analysis

The "Year-Round" Reality

Beyond Seasonality- The Court emphasized that pollution is not merely a winter phenomenon triggered by stubble burning.

Continuous Sources- Persistent contributors include vehicular emissions, industrial discharge, road dust, construction activities, and waste burning, which degrade air quality throughout the year.

Institutional Failure of Watchdogs (CAQM)

Mandate vs. Reality- The CAQM was established specifically to ensure coordinated regional action across states (Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP, Rajasthan).

Judicial Rebuke- The Supreme Court's criticism points to weak enforcement, poor diagnostic capabilities, and a distinct lack of accountability within the body. It has failed to act as a cohesive regional regulator.

The Trap of Emergency Responses

Reactive Approach- Authorities largely rely on emergency measures during peak pollution episodes rather than tackling root causes.

Policy Credibility- The absence of long-term, consistent planning undermines public trust and policy credibility.

Public Health- A Silent Emergency

Health Impact- Pollution is directly linked to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and stunted cognitive development in children.

Constitutional Violation- The crisis violates Article 21 (Right to Life**)** of the Constitution. The Supreme Court effectively linked the right to a clean environment with the fundamental right to life.

Governance and Federalism Challenges

Trans-boundary Issue- Air sheds do not respect administrative boundaries, necessitating cooperative federalism.

Blame Game- Political blame-shifting between state governments undermines collective action.

Lack of Binding Mechanisms- The absence of strictly enforced, binding coordination mechanisms allows states to evade responsibility.

Urbanization and Planning Failures

1. Unchecked Expansion- Rapid urban growth lacks necessary environmental safeguards.
2. Infrastructure Deficits- Inadequate public transport leads to rising private vehicle ownership.
3. Systemic Issues**-** Shrinking green spaces, poor waste management, and weak enforcement of construction norms contribute significantly to particulate matter (PM) load.

Technology and Data Gaps

1. Underutilization- Real-time air quality monitoring and scientific source-apportionment studies are not being effectively used for policy decisions.
2. Lack of Foresight- The absence of predictive analytics prevents early intervention.
3. Precision Deficit**-** Limited integration of technology results in "carpet bombing" bans rather than precise, targeted interventions.

Climate Change Linkages

Common Sources- Fossil fuel combustion drives both local air pollution and global climate change.

Short-Lived Pollutants- Pollutants like Black Carbon worsen local air quality while accelerating warming. Ignoring this link misses the "co-benefits" of integrated mitigation strategies.

4. Key Issues Identified

1. Fragmented Governance- Overlapping responsibilities among multiple agencies dilute accountability.
2. Data Deficits- Policy is often driven by optics rather than scientific data.
3. Urban Planning Rot- The transport and construction sectors act as permanent pollution engines.
4. Health Neglect**-** Environmental health costs are rarely factored into economic planning.

5. Way Forward

1. Strengthen CAQM- The body needs a clear mandate, teeth for enforcement, and strict performance benchmarks.
2. Source-Based Mitigation- Move from general bans to scientific targeting of specific sources (vehicles, thermal plants, dust).
3. Urban Mobility Reforms- Aggressive promotion of public transport (Metro, buses), Electric Vehicles (EVs), and Non-Motorised Transport (NMT).
4. Regional Coordination- Enforce a binding framework where Punjab, Haryana, UP, and Delhi must collaborate, penalizing non-compliance.
5. Public Participation**-** Enhance transparency to foster citizen awareness and drive behavioral change.

6. Ethical and Constitutional Perspective

Intergenerational Equity- Failing to control pollution compromises the future of the next generation.
State Responsibility- Governance apathy towards such a severe health crisis raises ethical questions about the State's duty to protect its citizens' well-being.

7. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention is a critical pivot point. It signals that the era of "managing" pollution through temporary fixes is over. Without enforcing institutional accountability, embracing scientific planning, and adhering to the constitutional mandate of Article 21, Delhi's air crisis will remain a permanent blot on India's governance record.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/supreme-court-reproach-should-be-a-wake-up-call-for-pollution-watchdog-10460920/

Editorial of the Day – 09.01.2026

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1. Top Court's Green Governance, Cause for Uncertainty (TH) -1
2. Don't Count Faith to Kill a college, lot at Stake (IE) -2

1. Top Court's Green Governance, Cause for Uncertainty (TH)

General Studies 2 & 3 - Governance / Environment

Topic- Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary; Separation of powers between various organs; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies. / Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Top Court's Green Governance- A Cause for Uncertainty

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the Supreme Court of India has undergone a significant transformation in environmental jurisprudence. It has shifted from its traditional role of reviewing the legality of administrative actions to issuing prospective, quasi-regulatory directions. While this "managerial" role emerged due to the failure of statutory regulators, it has inadvertently created a parallel regulatory structure. The sustained use of continuing mandamus—where the Court keeps cases open to issue serial orders—has led to policy flip-flops, creating uncertainty for the State, regulated entities, and the public.

2. The Shift- From Adjudicator to Substitute Regulator

The Court's intervention was initially triggered by regulatory gaps such as fragmented enforcement, delayed notifications, and weak monitoring. However, the nature of this intervention has evolved-

Substitute Regulator- Instead of compelling the executive to fulfill its statutory duties, the Court often assumes the role of the executive itself.

Consequentialist Reasoning- Judicial reasoning has moved from strict "legality" (what the law says) to "consequences" (weighing economic and practical fallout against environmental principles).

Govern First, Manage Later- The trend involves announcing broad, principled rules first and then managing the fallout later through modifications, reflecting an impulse to govern rather than strictly adjudicate.

3. Evidence of Policy Reversals (Key Rulings)

The Court's approach has resulted in several "U-turns" where initial strict orders were later diluted or modified due to practical constraints-

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ)

1. June 2022- Directed a mandatory 1-km ESZ buffer for all protected areas.
2. April 2023- Diluted the order to exempt areas where the Environment Ministry had already notified ESZs, following state protests over implementation.

Diesel Vehicle Ban (Delhi-NCR)

1. Dec 2015- Imposed a ban on registration of diesel cars/SUVs above 2,000 cc.
2. Aug 2016- Lifted the ban and replaced it with a 1%–2% "Green Cess" (compensatory charge), shifting from prohibition to mitigation.

Old Vehicle Scrappage

1. *2025*- Initially ordered no coercive action against 10-year (diesel) and 15-year (petrol) old vehicles.
2. *Later*- Narrowed protection only to vehicles below Bharat Stage-IV standards.

Firecrackers- Alternated between near-total bans in NCR (pollution concerns) and partial relaxations (festivals), permitting "green crackers" due to enforcement and public order challenges.

Ex Post Facto Clearances (Vanashakti vs Union of India)

1. May 2025- Held that post-facto environmental clearances violate core norms.
2. Nov 2025- Reconsidered the stance to avoid disrupting ongoing commercial activity.

4. The Challenge of Expertise

The Court often relies on expert committees to bridge the gap in its technical institutional capacity, but this has created a "push-pull" dynamic

The Aravalli Case (Nov 20)- The Court adopted a uniform definition of "Aravalli hills" based on a committee report to regulate mining.

The Reversal- Within weeks, the order was kept in abeyance, and a *fresh* committee was constituted after realizing the definition had unintended legal consequences.

Regional Variance- Similar to the ESZ issue, uniform expert recommendations often fail when faced with the reality that ecological feasibility differs widely across regions.

5. Consequences for Public Participation and Institutional Integrity

The Court's entry into the administrative domain has significant negative externalities-

De Facto Approving Authority- Project proponents and governments now approach the Court for permissions *before* statutory authorities' complete scrutiny.

Premature Finality- This gives an early sense of finality to projects, discouraging objections in lower forums (National Green Tribunal) or public hearings.

Stifling Review- By becoming the first point of approval, the Supreme Court inadvertently stifles meaningful judicial review in other forums, reshaping the terrain of environmental adjudication.

6. The Need for Stability and Restraint

The current framework of "continuing mandamus"—marked by serial interim orders, affidavits, and constant modifications—makes course correction easy but destroys regulatory stability.

Way Forward for the Court

Return to Core Function- Limit role to reviewing legality and procedural compliance rather than ongoing administration.

Compel, Don't Substitute- Focus on holding the State accountable and compelling it to return to effective regulation.

Define Thresholds- Clearly define when "managerial" directions are necessary and when they should be avoided.

Time-Bound Regulation- Require the executive to take time-bound action supported by public data and reasons.

Avoid Sweeping Rules- Reduce uncertainty by avoiding broad rules that immediately require exceptions. Clarify in advance what constraints justify modifications.

7. Conclusion

To safeguard the environment effectively, the Supreme Court must recalibrate its approach. By establishing clear, enforceable rules rather than flexible, negotiable directives, the Court can ensure stability. This would spare the government from parallel decision-making structures and provide the public with clarity on accountability, ultimately strengthening both the rule of law and environmental protection.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/top-courts-green-governance-cause-for-uncertainty/article70487766.ece

2. Don't Count Faith to Kill a college, lot at Stake (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (National Medical Commission)

The Katra Medical College Decision- Legal, Social, and Constitutional Stakes

1. Introduction

The National Medical Commission (NMC) recently ordered the closure of a newly approved MBBS course at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence (SMVDIME) in Katra. While officially attributed to gaps in teaching resources following an inspection, the decision has ignited a fierce debate. It is viewed not merely as an administrative step but as a complex flashpoint involving

procedural irregularities, alleged religious discrimination, and the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity in education.

2. Process and Due Diligence Concerns

The manner in which the closure was ordered raises significant questions about the robustness of the regulatory framework.

Bypassing Safeguards- Standard regulatory protocol dictates that institutions facing adverse actions be given a show-cause notice, an opportunity to respond, and access to an appeals mechanism. In this instance, the NMC reportedly bypassed these essential procedural safeguards.

Procedural Injustice- The "short-circuiting" of established processes suggests a failure of procedural justice.

Erosion of Trust- When regulatory bodies deviate from transparent processes that protect the rights of institutions for remediation, it erodes the trust that educators, students, and the public place in governance structures.

3. Allegations of Prejudice and Political Influence

Underlying the administrative reasons are allegations that the decision was influenced by ideological pressure rather than educational merit.

Student Composition- A significant portion of the admitted students were Muslim, selected entirely on merit through a nationally competitive examination.

Discriminatory Demands- This demographic outcome sparked protests from several organizations arguing that an institution affiliated with a religious trust should reserve seats for specific communities.

Regulatory Capitulation- The NMC's response appears to have accommodated these discriminatory demands rather than upholding neutrality. This signals a dangerous intertwining of ideological pressures with educational governance, undermining the constitutional principle of equality.

4. Constitutional Protections and Minority Rights

The decision presents a conflict with India's constitutional framework regarding discrimination and minority rights.

Prohibition of Discrimination- The Constitution (under Article 15) strictly prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.

Minority Institution Rights- While Articles 29 and 30 allow minorities to establish institutions to preserve culture, these right balances management autonomy with universal access.

Lack of Justification- In the case of SMVDIME, neither the protections for minority institutions nor general equality provisions justify the NMC's action. There is no evidence that the college failed educationally in its short tenure; rather, the shutdown appears rooted in external pressures unrelated to academic standards.

5. Impact on Students and Social Trust

The fallout of this decision extends beyond the administration to the immediate stakeholders—the students.

Disruption of Education- The primary victims are meritorious students whose academic aspirations have been abruptly halted.

Chilling Effect- The move sends a negative signal to future applicants regarding the stability and fairness of professional courses in the region.

Career Uncertainty- The livelihoods and career prospects of the faculty and staff are now in jeopardy.

Social Cohesion- In a region like Jammu & Kashmir, which is historically sensitive, actions perceived as discriminatory can deepen communal distrust, undermine integration efforts, and weaken the social fabric.

6. Urgency of Judicial Review and Policy Clarity

The situation demands immediate legal and judicial intervention to restore order and fairness.

Judicial Scrutiny- Courts must assess whether constitutional rights and principles of natural justice were violated by the NMC.

Setting a Precedent- A clear judicial directive is necessary not just for this specific case but to reinforce the principles of non-discrimination and procedural justice across the entire educational sector.

7. Conclusion

The closure of SMVDIME is a litmus test for India's commitment to the rule of law, equal opportunity, and secular governance. It highlights the dangers of regulatory bodies acting as instruments of social exclusion rather than guardians of the public interest. To prevent the further erosion of state legitimacy, it is crucial to reverse this decision and reaffirm that educational governance must be grounded in merit and constitutional standards, immune from ideological pressure.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/vaishno-devi-medical-college-dont-count-faith-to-kill-a-college-lot-at-stake-10463115/

Editorial of the Day – 10.01.2026

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1. Somaliland is No Longer a Diplomatic Endnote (TH) -1
2. US Exit from Global Climate Governance Can be an Opportunity (IE) -2

1. Somaliland is No Longer a Diplomatic Endnote (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Somaliland's Recognition & Great Power Rivalry in the Horn of Africa

Introduction

In December 2025, Israel's decision to recognize Somaliland as an independent sovereign state caused a significant diplomatic rupture in the Horn of Africa. This move transcends regional politics, positioning Hargeisa (Somaliland's capital) at the center of global great-power competition. It threatens to militarize the Red Sea corridor further, provoke Cold War-style proxy rivalries, and challenge existing sovereignty norms, creating a complex strategic dilemma for China.

I. China's Core Strategic Dilemma

China views the Horn of Africa through a lens of three competing vital interests. The recognition of Somaliland forces Beijing to balance these often-contradictory goals

Upholding the "One China" Principle- Protecting its domestic stance on sovereignty (specifically regarding Taiwan).
Securing Maritime Corridors- Protecting trade flows through the Red Sea.
Managing Power Rivalry- Countering the influence of the US and its allies in Africa.

II. The Sovereignty & Taiwan Factor

The Legitimacy Paradox- China condemns the move as "legitimizing separatism," viewing Somaliland as an inseparable part of Somalia. However, Somaliland's 30+ years of stability, functioning institutions, and competitive elections contrast sharply with Somalia's instability, exposing the limits of Beijing's rigid sovereignty doctrine.
The Taiwan Connection- Somaliland is a diplomatic outlier; in 2020, it established official ties with Taiwan. Alongside Eswatini, Somaliland is one of the few African entities aligned with Taipei. Israel's recognition risks validating a state that openly defies the "One China" principle, making Hargeisa a sensitive flashpoint for Beijing.

III. Strategic and Economic Stakes (The "Jugular Vein")

China's concerns are not just ideological but deeply geostrategic, centered on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden).
Maritime Silk Road- Beijing views this route as the "jugular vein" of its global commerce and energy security.
Djibouti Military Base- Established in 2017, China's first overseas base in Djibouti was designed to protect these specific maritime interests.
Threat to Regional Balance- Israel's entry disrupts the carefully managed security architecture China has cultivated, threatening to introduce a rival influence in China's logistical backyard.

IV. The Risk of a Rival Security Ecosystem

New Logistics Hub- International legitimacy could allow Somaliland to evolve into an alternative security and logistics hub supported by Israel, the UAE, and potentially the US.
Dilution of Leverage- A rival ecosystem near Djibouti would dilute Beijing's leverage, derived from its heavy investment in regional ports and political ties.

The "Trade-off" Dilemma- If China exerts excessive pressure, it risks pushing Hargeisa closer to rivals (Taiwan, West). If it is too passive, it risks losing diplomatic space regarding Taiwan.

V. China's Policy Options & Hybrid Tactics

To manage this crisis without damaging its image as a "non-interfering" partner, China is likely to employ specific tactics

Hybrid Tactics- Utilizing selective economic pressure, elite lobbying, and targeted information campaigns to shape narratives on "territorial integrity."

Diplomatic Leverage- Using its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to block any momentum toward wider UN recognition of Somaliland.

Avoidance of Overt Coercion- Heavy-handedness is avoided to prevent contradicting its diplomatic stance of non-interference.

VI. Geopolitical Complexities & Realignment

The Palestine Card- China is using its vocal pro-Palestinian stance to counter Israel diplomatically. By framing itself as a champion of Arab/Palestinian rights, it garners support from the Global South and Arab states against Israel's move in Somaliland.

Regional Realignment- The status quo is further eroded by other actors

a. Ethiopia- The 2024 MoU to recognize Somaliland in exchange for port access.
b. USA- Rising Congressional interest in Somaliland as a democratic partner.
c. UAE- Tacit backing of Somaliland's autonomy.

Conclusion

Somaliland is no longer a diplomatic footnote but a pivot point in global strategy. Israel's recognition has forced China into a delicate balancing act between its rigid sovereignty principles and geopolitical pragmatism. The move exposes the vulnerabilities in China's security framework in the Horn of Africa, as it faces the potential rise of a rival, Western-aligned security architecture at the gateway to the Red Sea.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/somaliland-is-no-longer-a-diplomatic-endnote/article70491838.ece

2. US Exit from Global Climate Governance Can be an Opportunity (IE)

General Studies 2 & 3- International Relation / Environment

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests / Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Reimagining Leadership in Climate Action & The International Solar Alliance

Introduction

The global climate governance architecture is currently undergoing a significant stress test due to the retreat of the United States from key multilateral platforms. As one of the world's largest historical emitters and a primary agenda-setter, the US disengagement raises critical questions regarding the continuity of funding, coordination, and political momentum in global climate action. However, this vacuum presents a strategic opportunity for emerging economies like India to reshape climate diplomacy.

I. The US Retreat- Context and Implications

The US has scaled back its engagement with several multilateral climate mechanisms, including high-profile initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Symbolic vs. Financial Weight- While the direct US financial contribution to some of these mechanisms was limited, its symbolic leadership and role in setting global agendas carried immense weight.

Structural Vulnerability- The withdrawal exposes the fragility of current climate governance structures, which have historically been overly dependent on a few powerful Western nations for direction and momentum.

Erosion of Trust- The retreat underscores the volatility of relying on developed nations whose commitment may fluctuate with domestic political changes.

II. Shift in Global Leadership (Features & Importance)

The vacuum left by the US is catalyzing a shift towards a more multipolar climate order.

Rise of the "Global South"- It highlights the growing institutional capacity of middle-income countries—specifically India, Brazil, and South Africa—to move beyond mere participation and assume leadership roles.

Reforming Outdated Hierarchies- The situation underlines the urgent need to reform multilateral institutions. Current structures often reflect post-World War II power dynamics rather than contemporary geopolitical realities.

III. Analysis of the Transition

Pros- Opportunities for Emerging Economies

Development-Aligned Agendas- Creates space for emerging economies to craft climate agendas that respect their specific developmental needs and poverty alleviation goals.

Multipolar Governance- Encourages a shift away from US-centric models toward a multipolar approach, democratizing global decision-making.

Self-Reliance- Reduces the psychological and political dependency on developed nations for moral leadership.

Cons- Risks to Global Action

Fragmented Bargaining Power- Without the convening power of the US, collective bargaining in global negotiations may be weakened.

Resource Scarcity- There is a significant risk of reduced flows in climate finance and technology transfer, which the US often facilitated.

Loss of Momentum- Leadership fragmentation may slow down coordinated rapid responses required for climate emergencies.

IV. Impacts and Challenges

Redistribution of Responsibility- The immediate impact is a shift in the burden of leadership. Platforms like the ISA are becoming critical vehicles for India's global diplomacy.

Shift in Diplomacy- Diplomatic focus may move from "target-setting" (often pushed by the West) to "equity, adaptation, and implementation" (prioritized by the Global South).

Key Challenges

Resource Constraints- Developing nations face limited financial depth and technology gaps compared to the West.

Diplomatic Coordination- Achieving consensus among diverse developing nations is diplomatically complex.

Institutional Inertia- Reforming existing multilateral bodies faces resistance from entrenched powers.

V. Suggestions and Way Forward

Strengthen South-South Cooperation- Prioritize frameworks for sharing climate finance and adaptive technologies among developing nations.

Coalition Building- Build robust coalitions of middle-income countries to provide stable, long-term leadership irrespective of Western political cycles.

Push for Equity- Use this moment to reshape governance around fairness and "Common But Differentiated Responsibilities" (CBDR).

India's Role- India must seize this moment to lead the narrative on practical implementation and shared responsibility, turning the crisis into a structural reform opportunity.

VI. Spotlight- The International Solar Alliance (ISA)

The ISA represents the practical manifestation of the shift towards non-Western leadership in climate action.

1. Origin and Membership

Establishment- Launched in 2015 as a joint initiative by India and France during COP21 in Paris.
Institutional Landmark- It is the first international intergovernmental organization to have its headquarters located in India.
Global Reach- Currently comprises 125 Member and Signatory countries dedicated to the global adoption of solar energy.

2. Core Mission

Energy Security- To enhance global energy access and security.
Transition Enabler- To position solar power as the central pillar in the transition toward a low-carbon, sustainable future.

3. Strategic Pillars of Action

Catalytic Finance Hub- Aims to mobilize USD 1 trillion in investments by 2030 to fast-track solar deployment.
Global Capability Centre & Digitisation- Focuses on capacity building, innovation, and utilizing digital platforms to streamline solar adoption across member nations.
Regional & Country Engagement- Promotes decentralized action by encouraging partnerships and interventions tailored to specific regional and national contexts.
Technology & Policy Support- Facilitates the transfer of emerging technologies and provides policy guidance, best practices, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

4. Significance

Transformative Change- Aims to democratize access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy.
Holistic Development- Supports sustainable development goals (SDGs), enhances energy equity, and improves quality of life in underserved communities globally.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/us-exit-from-global-climate-governance-can-be-an-opportunity-10465031/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 12.01.2026

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1. **Young Love- On Weaponisation of the POCSO Act- POCSO Act Must Not Allow Parental Pushback (TH)** -1
2. **Express view on India-US relation- Hope ties with US hit reset, but hope isn't strategy (IE)** -2

1. Young Love- On Weaponisation of the POCSO Act- POCSO Act Must Not Allow Parental Pushback (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

Sub Topic- Issues relating to Women and Children; Role of family and kinship in social control. against adolescents

Balancing Adolescent Autonomy and Protection- The POCSO Act Dilemma

Introduction

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, enacted to shield children from sexual abuse, is facing scrutiny for its unintended weaponization against consensual adolescent relationships. The Supreme Court's recent acknowledgment of this issue highlights a critical conflict- a law designed for protection is being misused to enforce parental authority, thereby undermining the autonomy of adolescents and criminalizing consensual intimacy.

I. Judicial Recognition of Misuse

Supreme Court's Observation (Jan 9, 2026)- The Apex Court has formally acknowledged the growing trend of the POCSO Act being "weaponized" by families.

Stakeholder Concerns- Legal scholars, child rights experts, and young adults have raised alarms that the law is increasingly used to punish young men involved in consensual relationships rather than predatory offenders.

Shift in Focus- The judiciary notes that the law is drifting from its core purpose of preventing exploitation to becoming a tool for enforcing social and familial control.

II. Structural Flaws in the POCSO Framework

Rigid Age of Consent- The Act sets a strict age of consent at 18 years, adhering to international standards but failing to account for evolving adolescent maturity.

Strict Liability Model- Under current provisions, the consent of a minor is legally irrelevant. This means consensual acts between peers (e.g., a 17-year-old and a 19-year-old) are treated with the same severity as predatory abuse.

Mandatory Minimum Sentences- Provisions intended to deter heinous crimes compel judges to impose harsh sentences indiscriminately, even in cases of non-exploitative teenage romance.

III. Familial Control and Social Boundaries

Weaponization by Families- Parents opposing relationships often file false charges of kidnapping and sexual assault against the partner.

Social Policing- This misuse is particularly prevalent in cases of elopement across caste or religious lines, effectively using state machinery to punish socially "undesirable" matches.

Blurring Lines- The legal framework struggles to distinguish between "consensual intimacy" and "coercive abuse," allowing parental resistance to override adolescent agency.

IV. Institutional Responses & Recommendations

Law Commission (2023 Report)

Nuanced Approach- While it rejected lowering the general age of consent, it strongly warned against equating teenage intimacy with predatory violence.

Judicial Discretion- Recommended introducing "guided judicial discretion" for sentencing in cases involving adolescents aged 16–18 years.
Supreme Court's Directive- The Court has ordered its judgment to be shared with the Law Secretary to facilitate policy corrections and curb misuse.

V. The Need for Non-Punitive Interventions

Support Deficit- Adolescents caught between personal desires and family expectations currently lack institutional support.
Service Gaps- There is a severe shortage of
1. Confidential counseling services.
2. Comprehensive sexuality education.
3. Family mediation mechanisms.

Consequences of Neglect- Over-reliance on policing and prosecution exacerbates vulnerability, leaving young couples exposed to familial retaliation and the stigma of criminalization.

Conclusion

The current application of the POCSO Act risks perpetuating harm rather than preventing it. To safeguard the true rights of adolescents, the state must shift from a purely punitive approach to one of proportionality. Legal reforms introducing judicial discretion must be accompanied by robust social infrastructure—education, counseling, and mediation—to protect young people from both exploitation and over-criminalization.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/young-love-on-a-weaponisation-of-the-pocso-act/article70497928.ece

2. Express view on India-US relation- Hope ties with US hit reset, but hope isn't strategy (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India-US Strategic Partnership
India–US Relations- Moving Beyond Optimism to Strategic Depth

Introduction

India–US relations currently stand at a pivotal juncture defined by geopolitical flux and economic reconfiguration. While high-level diplomatic engagements have generated significant optimism, the partnership now requires a transition from rhetorical goodwill to concrete strategic depth. A mature relationship cannot rely solely on leadership chemistry; it must be anchored in institutional mechanisms, policy predictability, and a mutual respect for each other's strategic constraints.

I. Context and Evolution of Ties

Transformation Arc- Over the last two decades, the relationship has fundamentally shifted from a period of "estrangement" to deep "engagement," spanning defence, technology, and education.
Current Geopolitics- The partnership is now being tested and shaped by macro-factors- protectionist trade trends, the restructuring of global supply chains ("China plus one"), conflicts in Europe/West Asia, and Chinese assertiveness.
Indo-Pacific Convergence- India's rise as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific aligns perfectly with US interests, yet this strategic convergence is occasionally tested by divergences on trade, immigration, and climate commitments.

II. Key Areas of Engagement & Friction

1. Trade and Economic Engagement

Friction Points- Despite rising bilateral trade volumes, structural irritants persist-

Tariffs & Market Access- Ongoing disputes over agricultural and industrial goods.
Digital Taxation- Differences over data localization and digital services taxes.
Visa Policies- H-1B visa issues affecting Indian professionals.
Opportunities- The focus on "friend-shoring" and supply chain resilience offers a pathway to deeper integration.
Gap- The absence of a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or broad trade framework limits the potential for long-term economic synergy.

2. Strategic and Defence Cooperation

Foundational Agreements- The signing of LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA (detailed below) has institutionalized military cooperation.
Shift in Dynamic- There is a pressing need to move from a "buyer-seller" relationship to one based on **co-development and co-production**.
Emerging Domains- Future cooperation must focus on high-tech domains like Cyber Security, Space, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) rather than just traditional hardware.

3. Strategic Autonomy vs. Alignment

India's Stance- India strictly adheres to "Strategic Autonomy," engaging with the US while maintaining historical ties with Russia and leadership within the Global South.
US Expectations- The US often expects closer alignment on global geopolitical issues (e.g., Ukraine, Iran).
The Challenge- The core diplomatic challenge lies in managing these divergences without allowing them to breed mistrust.

4. Domestic Reforms as Foreign Policy Enablers

Internal-External Link- India's external diplomatic weight is directly proportional to its internal economic strength.
Reforms- Improvements in labour laws, ease of doing business, and regulatory certainty are not just domestic economic tools but foreign policy assets that enhance India's credibility and leverage.

III. Broader Analysis of the Partnership

Multi-Alignment Paradigm- The relationship should be viewed through the lens of multi-alignment rather than traditional alliance politics. India acts as a bridge between the West and the Global South.
New Pillars- Technology cooperation—specifically in semiconductors, clean energy, and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)—is replacing traditional aid/trade as the central pillar.
Values vs. Interests- While "shared democratic values" provide the normative glue, hard transactional interests (security and economics) continue to dictate actual policy outcomes.

IV. Challenges Ahead

Political Unpredictability- Leadership changes in the US can lead to policy shifts (e.g., isolationism vs. interventionism).
Divergent Worldviews- distinct approaches to dealing with systemic rivals like China and historical partners like Russia.
Regional Balance- Balancing commitments to the QUAD (India, US, Japan, Australia) while managing sensitivities of other neighbors and regional powers.

V. The Foundational Defence Agreements

Agreement	Full Form	Year	Key Purpose
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement	2016	• Allows mutual access to military bases for refueling and supplies. • Note- Does *not* allow permanent basing; usage is case-by-case. • Critical for HADR (Disaster Relief) and operational reach.

COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement	2018	• Enables transfer of encrypted, secure communication equipment. • Allows real-time sharing of high-end military data (air/sea/land). • Enhances interoperability between militaries.
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement	2020	• Facilitates sharing of geospatial intelligence (maps, satellite imagery). • Crucial for the accuracy of missiles, drones, and precision weapons. • Acts as the final pillar for high-tech warfare cooperation.

VI. Way Forward

Institutionalize Frameworks- Build mechanisms that survive political cycles and leadership changes in both capitals.

Sector-Specific Agreements- Instead of a massive FTA, focus on mini-deals in technology, space, and critical minerals.

Make in India" for Defence- Aggressively pursue defence co-production (e.g., jet engines, drones) to reduce dependency and boost local manufacturing.

Climate & Green Tech- Deepen cooperation on climate finance and technology transfer for the green transition.

Conclusion

India–US relations have outgrown the phase of platitudes. To convert mutual optimism into a durable partnership, both nations must exercise strategic patience and invest in institutional depth. As the adage suggests regarding this partnership- "Hope is good, but hope backed by strategy is better."

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/express-view-on-india-us-relation-hope-ties-with-us-hit-reset-but-hope-isnt-strategy-10468226/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 13.01.2026

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1. A Bill that reimagines higher education regulation (TH) -1

2. Equality is not the enemy of growth – oligarchy (IE) -2

1. A Bill that reimagines higher education regulation (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

Sub Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation (Higher Education Regulatory Reform).

Reimagining Higher Education Regulation- The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025

Introduction

The poet Tiruvalluvar (in his 140th Thirukkural) emphasized that education is futile unless it teaches individuals to live responsibly within society. Echoing this ethos, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a holistic educational framework fostering social relevance. To realize the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 (introduced in Lok Sabha on Dec 15, 2025) aims to radically transform India's higher education regulation through a "light but tight" framework, nurturing future-ready leaders.

I. The Urgent Need for Change

Despite the massive expansion of India's higher education sector (1,000+ universities, crores of learners), the regulatory architecture remains outdated and inefficient.

Fragmented Regulation- Multiple statutory bodies with overlapping roles have led to a labyrinth of complex approvals, inspections, and compliance burdens.

Process Over Purpose- Institutions are forced to prioritize paperwork and procedural compliance over their core missions of teaching, research, and innovation.

Reduced Agility- Excessive regulation stifles institutional flexibility, making it difficult to collaborate, innovate, or update curricula to match modern needs.

Outcome Deficit- The focus on "checking boxes" rather than educational quality has weakened overall learning outcomes.

II. Rationale Behind the Bill

The Bill addresses the gaps highlighted by NEP 2020 by shifting from a regime of heavy-handed inspection to one of facilitative regulation.

"Light but Tight" Philosophy- Implements strong standards (tight) but with minimal procedural friction (light).

Unified Architecture- Seeks to repeal older, fragmented Acts to create a single, modern regulatory framework.

Apex Umbrella Body- Proposes a centralized body with clearly separated verticals for regulation, accreditation, and standard-setting to ensure credibility and eliminate conflicts of interest.

Tech-Driven Transparency- Introduces a technology-enabled single-window system based on public self-disclosure, fostering accountability and continuous quality assurance.

III. Transformative Impacts

1. Youth Empowerment & Enhanced Learning Outcomes

Access & GER- Streamlined regulations will remove capacity bottlenecks, expanding access to quality institutions and raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).

Focus on Quality- Institutions can pivot their energy toward value-based learning and interdisciplinary pathways rather than administrative hurdles.

Lifelong Learning- Support for reskilling and upskilling ensures employability across evolving career landscapes.
Student Agency- Robust feedback and grievance redressal mechanisms turn learners into active stakeholders who can demand quality and drive institutional improvement.

2. Global Alignment with Indian Roots

Best Practices- Enables Indian institutions to adopt global best practices while remaining anchored in national values.
True Credibility- International standing will be built on genuine outcomes, ethics, and research culture, rather than mere imitation of Western models.
Talent Mobility- A unified standards framework facilitates student/faculty mobility and collaborative research, helping attract international talent and retain Indian scholars.

3. Modern, Transparent Governance

Reduced Discretion- The single-window digital system reduces human discretion, delays, and regulatory uncertainty.
Earned Trust- A culture of meaningful, audited public disclosure replaces the old inspection raj, fostering trust.
Differentiated Autonomy- High-performing institutions are granted greater autonomy to drive excellence, while common standards ensure a baseline of quality for all.

Conclusion

Atmanirbharta (Self-reliance) in higher education is achieved when institutions are empowered to set ambitious goals and innovate responsibly. By harmonizing standards, regulation, and accreditation into a coherent framework, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, promises to build an ecosystem that nurtures capable, socially responsible citizens—fulfilling Tiruvalluvar's vision of education that serves both individual growth and the collective good.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bill-that-reimagines-higher-education-regulation/article70502373.ece#google_vignette

2. Equality is not the enemy of growth – oligarchy (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topic- Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.
Sub Topic- Effects of Liberalization on the economy; Changes in Industrial Policy and their effects on Industrial Growth (Issues of Crony Capitalism/Oligarchy).

Introduction

A prevailing economic narrative often suggests a trade-off between equality and economic growth. However, this perspective is increasingly being challenged by the reality that the true barrier to sustainable, inclusive development is not the pursuit of equality, but the entrenchment of oligarchic interests. The central problem lies in structural economic distortions where a small elite monopolizes resources and policy influence, thereby stifling competition and limiting broader societal progress.

I. The Core Misunderstanding- Inequality vs. Oligarchy

Misplaced Focus- Public discourse often centers on simplistic metrics of inequality (like the Gini coefficient) without analyzing the root causes.
The Real Enemy- The actual impediment to growth is Oligarchy—a system where a minuscule economic elite captures markets and policy mechanisms to serve their exclusive interests.
Growth Illusion- Focusing solely on GDP growth rates without addressing wealth distribution creates an illusion of progress while denying the majority access to essential resources, education, capital, and employment.

II. Key Challenges & Mechanisms of Oligarchy

1. Concentration of Power & Suppression of Innovation

Market Dominance- High concentration of wealth leads to market dominance by a few large conglomerates.

Stifled Competition- Emerging businesses and startups struggle to survive as established players use their financial muscle to suppress competition, ultimately hurting innovation and efficiency.

2. Policy Capture (Regulatory Capture)

Elite Influence- Economic elites often exercise disproportionate influence over policymaking.

Profit over Public Interest- Policies are frequently tailored to protect incumbent profits (e.g., through tax loopholes or favorable regulations) rather than advancing the public interest, weakening the regulatory frameworks meant to ensure fair play.

3. Barriers to Social Mobility

The Opportunity Trap- Extreme inequality creates a rigid class structure where individuals are trapped in low-income brackets.

Access Denied- The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and credit prevents talented individuals from non-elite backgrounds from contributing effectively to the economy.

III. Implications of Unchecked Oligarchy

Economic Stagnation- Widening inequality shrinks the middle class—the primary engine of consumption. Reduced consumer demand eventually slows down long-term sustainable growth.

Political Instability- Persistent inequality fuels social unrest, dissatisfaction, and a loss of trust in democratic institutions, which can lead to volatile electoral outcomes.

Global Competitiveness- As many nations grapple with these issues, India's ability to dismantle these structures will determine its long-term economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

IV. Proposed Solutions & Structural Reforms

1. Policy Focus on Structural Reform

Taxation- Implement progressive taxation reforms to redistribute excessive wealth accumulation.

Support for SMEs- Create a supportive ecosystem for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to break the monopoly of large conglomerates.

Fair Competition- strictly enforce competition laws to prevent cartelization and market abuse.

2. Regulate Oligarchic Influence

Anti-Monopoly Laws- Strengthen the legal framework to check the dominance of large corporations.

Political Transparency- Enforce transparency in political funding to sever the nexus between big capital and policymaking.

3. Invest in Public Services (The Level Playing Field)

Human Capital- heavily invest in quality public education and healthcare. This ensures that the ability to succeed is based on talent, not the wealth of one's parents.

Safety Nets- Robust social safety nets to protect the vulnerable during economic transitions.

4. Balanced Growth Models

Beyond GDP- Shift economic planning from purely GDP-centric targets to models that integrate income distribution and social welfare indices as core metrics of success.

V. Way Forward

Inclusive Policymaking- Draft policies that prioritize the needs of the poor and the middle class, ensuring they are active participants in the growth story rather than just passive beneficiaries.

Institutional Strength- Empower institutions (like the Competition Commission of India, Labor Courts, etc.) to enforce labor rights and ensure fair access to essential services without fear or favor.

Accountability- Promote a culture of accountability where market power is constantly scrutinized to prevent it from morphing into political authority.

Conclusion

The narrative must shift from viewing equality as a hindrance to growth to recognizing that oligarchic structures are the true drag on economic dynamism. Allowing a small elite to dominate the economy creates systemic risks. Policymakers must realize that dismantling these entrenched interests is not just a social justice imperative but a prerequisite for a vibrant, competitive, and resilient economy.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/p-b-mehta-writes-equality-is-not-the-enemy-of-growth-oligarchy-is-10469844/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 14.01.2026

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1. Language Of Harmony- On the Malayalam Language Bill (TH) -1

2. Delhi and Berlin seek common ground (IE) -2

1. Language Of Harmony- On the Malayalam Language Bill (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Sub Topic- Linguistic Diversity & Regionalism, Constitutional safeguards for Linguistic Minorities, Inter-State Relations (Inter-State Council).

Language of Harmony- The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025

1. Introduction

The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025, passed by the Kerala Assembly, represents a legislative effort to cement the status of Malayalam as the official language of the state. While aimed at cultural and administrative enrichment, the Bill has sparked inter-state friction, particularly with Karnataka, regarding the rights of linguistic minorities. The legislation attempts to balance the promotion of regional identity with the Constitutional safeguards guaranteed to minority language speakers (specifically Tamil and Kannada).

2. Background and Operational Context

The Legislation- The Bill mandates the use of Malayalam for official purposes and promotes its development across various sectors.

The Conflict- Political leaders from neighboring states (primarily Karnataka) have opposed the Bill, fearing it will disenfranchise Kannada and Tamil speakers living in Kerala.

The Defense- The Kerala government asserts these concerns stem from a misunderstanding of the Bill's provisions, arguing that it strengthens Malayalam without violating the rights of minorities.

3. Core Objectives of the Bill

The primary aim is the "cultural and administrative enrichment" of the state through its mother tongue-

Official Adoption- Formally adopting Malayalam as the Official Language of the State of Kerala.

Mandatory Usage- Mandating Malayalam for all official purposes, within the bounds of the Constitution of India.

Sector-Wide Promotion- Encouraging the language's use in

1. Governance & Administration
2. Judiciary (Court proceedings)
3. Information Technology (IT)
4. Education

4. Provisions for Education

The Bill integrates language policy directly into the educational curriculum-

First Language Status- Malayalam is proposed as the first language for school children in the state.

Curriculum Alignment- Educational measures are aligned with the National Education Curriculum while ensuring the "mother tongue" takes precedence in state schools.

5. Safeguards for Linguistic Minorities (Key Provisions)

To address the concerns of exclusion, the Bill includes specific statutory protections for Tamil and Kannada speakers

Communication Rights- In "notified areas" (regions with high minority populations), linguistic minorities can communicate with State authorities in their respective mother tongues (Tamil/Kannada).

Mandatory Replies- The State Secretariat, Heads of Departments, and local offices are legally bound to issue replies in the minority language (Tamil or Kannada) when addressed in such.
Educational Exemptions - Students whose mother tongue is not Malayalam can pursue education in other available languages.
Exemption from Exams- Students from other states or foreign countries are exempt from passing Malayalam examinations in Class IX, Class X, and Higher Secondary levels.

6. Legislative History and Judicial Intervention

The journey of the Bill highlights the friction between State autonomy and Central clearance
The Delay- An earlier iteration (2015) was pending Central clearance for 10 years.
Supreme Court Intervention- The Centre returned the Bill only after a Supreme Court ruling stating that Bills **cannot be indefinitely delayed** by the Governor/Centre.
Re-enactment- The Kerala government subsequently revised and passed the 2025 version.

7. Federal Perspective on Language Policy

The text offers a critical analysis of India's linguistic federalism
Linguistic Reality- The linguistic reorganization of states (1956) was an approximation. Migration and historical overlapping have blurred strict language boundaries, making states like Kerala and Karnataka inherently multilingual.
Central Policy- The Centre's stance is to promote all Indian languages. State-level promotion is legitimate provided it does not trample minority rights.
Nation-Building Challenge- Promoting regional languages while preventing inter-community hostility remains a key challenge for Indian federalism.

8. Way Forward

To ensure harmony between linguistic assertion and national integration
Inclusive Policies- National and regional policies must reflect multilingual realities rather than pursuing narrow, exclusionary agendas.
Reviving Institutions- The Inter-State Council, currently described as "largely dormant," must be strengthened and empowered to resolve such friction.
Dialogue- Good-faith dialogue across linguistic groups is essential for cooperative federalism.
Space for All- All Indian languages must find due space in the public sphere and administration.

Conclusion

The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025 serves as a case study in managing diversity. It demonstrates that regional language assertion is compatible with constitutional obligations if safeguard mechanisms are robust. However, the friction surrounding the Bill underscores the need for active institutional forums like the Inter-State Council to mediate perceptions and ensure that the "Language of Harmony" does not become a cause for discord.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/language-of-harmony-on-the-malayalam-language-bill/article70505903.ece

2. Delhi and Berlin seek common ground (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub Topic- India-Germany Relations, Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests (Defense, Trade, Mobility).
India–Germany Relations- Finding Common Ground

1. Introduction

The India–Germany relationship has reached a pivotal moment following the conclusion of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's official two-day visit to India in January 2026. Marked by substantive engagements with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar, the visit signifies a

shift from conventional diplomacy to a strategic, economic, and people-centric partnership. This engagement, coinciding with the celebration of 75 years of diplomatic relations, underscores Berlin's intent to elevate ties beyond traditional European priorities.

2. Strengthening Strategic and Economic Ties

The visit highlighted a mutual commitment to building consensus on key areas such as trade, security, and technology.

Record Bilateral Trade- Economic relations remain the anchor of the partnership. Bilateral commerce has crossed the USD 50 billion mark, a record high that reflects robust investment confidence from German companies in India.

Focus on Future-Ready Sectors- At the India-Germany CEO Forum, discussions centred on high-tech cooperation. Key focus areas included Green Technologies, Semiconductors, and Critical Minerals, which are essential for the economic resilience of both nations.

Elevated Engagement- As Chancellor Merz's first official visit since assuming office, the engagement signals a "broadening and deepening" of the partnership.

3. Key Agreements and Institutional Frameworks

A total of 19 agreements and MoUs were signed during the visit, spanning defence, clean energy, and infrastructure.

Defence Cooperation

1. Adoption of a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap.
2. Focus on deepening industrial collaboration and the co-development of defence systems, aiming to reduce India's import dependencies.

Connectivity and Logistics

Visa-Free Transit- Germany announced a visa-free airport transit facility for Indian passport holders to boost connectivity.

Logistics Pacts- Agreements on postal and express services were signed to facilitate cross-border e-commerce and trade.

Clean Energy & Tech- Frameworks established for cooperation in renewable energy projects and climate action.

4. Shared Values- Mobility, Culture, and Education

Beyond strategic deals, the visit emphasized "soft power" and human capital exchange.

Skilled Labour Mobility- Focus on facilitating the movement of trained professionals, particularly in healthcare, to address Germany's workforce shortages.

Education and Research

1. Expansion of the education roadmap.
2. Invitations extended to German universities to establish campuses in India to foster academic and research collaboration.

Cultural Diplomacy- Chancellor Merz's participation in the International Kite Festival and visit to Sabarmati Ashram symbolized deep mutual respect for heritage and a warmer diplomatic tenor.

5. Global and Security Cooperation

Both nations reaffirmed their commitment to a rules-based international order while respecting India's strategic autonomy.

Multilateral Alignment- Collaboration on global challenges such as Climate Change and multilateral security issues.

Supply Chain Resilience- Discussions focused on diversifying supply chains to reduce vulnerabilities and external dependencies.

Strategic Autonomy- Germany acknowledged India's need to balance engagements with other global partners while strengthening bilateral security ties.

6. Conclusion

The editorial concludes that the India–Germany relationship has evolved from transactional interactions to a multi-dimensional alliance. By finding common ground in sustainable development, secure supply chains, and human connectivity, both democracies are laying the foundation for long-term stability. The partnership is now poised to contribute not just to bilateral gains, but to broader global economic growth and stability.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/delhi-and-berlin-seek-common-ground-10472226/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 15.01.2026

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1. An Exploration of India's Minerals Diplomacy (TH) -1

2. US exit from several climate bodies can mean both reliefs, challenges for India (IE) -3

1. An Exploration of India's Minerals Diplomacy (TH)

General Studies 2 & 1- IR & Geography

International Relation- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Distribution of key natural resources across the world.

Geography- Critical Minerals Diplomacy, Energy Security, India's Bilateral & Multilateral Relations (Australia, Japan, USA, Africa, etc.).

1. Introduction

India's transition to clean energy is fundamentally dependent on securing a steady supply of critical minerals and rare earth elements. With global supply chains tightening due to China's export controls, the need for access has become urgent. India is currently executing a strategy focused on diversifying trade linkages, promoting sustainable production, and building transparent markets to secure its energy future.

2. Strategic Approach- Balancing Domestic & Global Needs

India employs a two-pronged strategy-

Global Access- Forging bilateral and multilateral partnerships to secure immediate resources. Over the past five years, nearly a dozen partnerships have been established across continents.

Domestic Capability- Strengthening internal mineral policies to support long-term self-reliance.

The Crucial Question- The current focus is evaluating what these engagements have delivered and whether a strategic recalibration is necessary.

3. Country-Specific Analysis of Partnerships

A. Australia- The Dependable Anchor

Status- The most reliable partner due to political stability, vast reserves, and strategic clarity.

Progress- Moved beyond mere intent to long-term supply discussions, joint research, and targeted investments.

Key Initiative- Under the India–Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership (2022), five specific lithium and cobalt projects have been identified for potential investment.

B. Japan- A Model for Resilience

Approach- Focuses on institutional planning rather than reactive deal-making.

History- Successfully diversified supply, stockpiled resources, and boosted R&D after China restricted rare-earth exports a decade ago.[1]

Scope- Cooperation extends beyond Indian Rare Earths Limited to joint extraction, processing, and stockpiling, including operations in third countries (via a cooperation agreement signed last year).

C. Africa- Opportunity with Conditions

Potential- High mineral abundance with a growing local demand for value addition. India leverages historical trade ties here.

Recent Deals

1. Namibia- Agreements on Lithium, Rare Earths, and Uranium.
2. Zambia- Acquisition talks for Copper and Cobalt.

Challenge- India must adopt a long-term industrial mindset to compete with more coordinated global rivals.

D. United States- Potential Amid Volatility

Status- High potential for technology and downstream innovation, but engagement is largely limited to dialogue.

Hurdles- Policy volatility (e.g., Inflation Reduction Act incentives), tariffs on Indian goods, and shifting trade rules.

Initiatives- TRUST and the Strategic Minerals Recovery Initiative focus on collaboration in rare-earth processing, battery recycling, and clean separation technologies.

E. European Union- Standards-Driven Alignment

Focus- Intertwines regulation, sustainability, and industrial strategy (e.g., Critical Raw Materials Act, European Battery Alliance).

Requirement- For meaningful progress, India must align with EU expectations on transparency, lifecycle standards, and environmental norms.

F. West Asia- Midstream Promise

Potential- Emerging as a key midstream processing partner.

Investments- UAE and Saudi Arabia are investing heavily in refining capacity, battery materials, and green hydrogen, with sovereign funds acquiring mining assets abroad.

limitation- The region currently lacks deep institutional frameworks for long-term mineral cooperation.

G. Russia- A Hedge, not a Base

Assets- Substantial reserves of rare earths, cobalt, and lithium; strong scientific ties with India.

Limitations- Sanctions, financing constraints, and logistical uncertainty reduce dependability.

Role- Acts as a strategic hedge for diversification but cannot serve as the foundation of India's strategy.

4. New Frontiers and Emerging Partners

A. Latin America- Strategic Focus

Regions- Argentina, Chile, Peru, and increasingly Brazil (central for Copper, Nickel, Rare Earths).

Action- Increased public and private sector investment in exploration.

Key Milestone- Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL) signed a ₹200 crore exploration and development agreement with Argentina.

Requirement- Strategy must move beyond extraction to include local processing and value-chain partnerships to counter intense competition.

B. Canada- The Emerging Partner

Status- Re-emerging as a key partner following the restoration of diplomatic ties.

Reserves- Significant holdings of Nickel, Cobalt, Copper, and Rare Earths.

Cooperation- A recent Trilateral Agreement (India-Australia-Canada) strengthens potential, though political stability remains crucial for long-term success.

5. The Way Forward- Developing Integrated Partnerships

A. Value Chain Strategy (Country-by-Country)

India must move beyond "ore securing" to a segmented strategy-

Upstream (Extraction)- Focus on Africa, Australia, Canada, Latin America.

Midstream (Processing Hubs)- Focus on West Asia (The Gulf) and Japan.

Downstream (Tech & Recycling)- Focus on the European Union and the United States.

Diversification- Maintain Russia as a hedge.

B. Processing Capacity

The Choke Point- Securing ore is insufficient; refining and midstream capacity is the real bottleneck.

Vulnerability- Without domestic refining, India remains vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions.

Focus- Prioritize technology, innovation, and on-ground execution over mere announcements.

C. Domestic Framework & ESG

Standards- Outcomes will be limited unless India strengthens its domestic framework for Responsible Mining.

Global Norms- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards and transparency are becoming decisive factors in global partnerships.

Conclusion

India has successfully built an impressive network of critical minerals partnerships, signaling strong strategic intent. The priority now must shift from expansion to execution—deepening effective arrangements, reassessing underperforming ones, and prioritizing technology acquisition and processing capacity. Only by ensuring supply certainty through the entire value chain can India translate its minerals diplomacy into durable energy security.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-exploration-of-indias-minerals-diplomacy/article70510652.ece#google_vignette

2. US exit from several climate bodies can mean both relief, challenges for India (IE)

General Studies 3 - Environment

Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- Climate Change Negotiations, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), Clean Energy Transition, India & China's Role in Climate Action.

Climate Change and Global Responsibility

1. Introduction

Climate change stands as a defining challenge of the 21st century. While the global community has set ambitious targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and clean energy transition, progress is uneven due to disparities in historical emissions, financial resources, and technological capacity. The narrative centers on the tension between developed nations, who bear historical responsibility, and developing giants like India and China, who must balance rapid economic growth with environmental sustainability.

2. The Global Divide- Developed vs. Developing Countries

The core friction in global climate progress lies in the differing responsibilities and capabilities of nations.

Historical Responsibility vs. Current Contribution

Developing Nations (India/China)- Have limited historical responsibility for past emissions but are becoming major contributors due to rapid industrialization and urbanization.

Developed Nations- Bear high historical responsibility and possess superior financial/technological resources.

Expectations from Developed Economies

Fossil Fuel Phase-out- Must lead in reducing reliance on coal and expanding clean energy.

R&D Investment- Expected to invest heavily in advanced clean technologies.

Support Mechanisms- Crucial obligation to provide Climate Finance and Technology Transfer to the Global South.

The Action Gap

1. A significant lag exists in developed nations fulfilling financial commitments to poorer countries.
2. This gap forces developing nations to choose between accelerating clean energy adoption and maintaining economic growth stability.

3. India and China- Progress Amid Challenges

Both nations are pivotal to the global energy transition, facing the "twin tasks" of sustaining growth and curbing emissions.

A. India's Strategic Approach

Ambitious Targets- India has set aggressive renewable energy targets, steadily increasing solar and wind capacity.

Innovation- Focus on distributed renewable systems and expanding energy access in both rural and urban sectors.

Diplomatic Stance- Champions the principle of Equity in global forums. India links climate mitigation with development rights, arguing for fairness in responsibility and support.

B. China's Climate Actions

Commitments- As the world's largest emitter, China has pledged to peak carbon emissions earlier than previously anticipated.

Manufacturing Leader- dominates the global supply chain for renewable technologies, specifically Solar Panels and Batteries.

Proof of Concept- China demonstrates that economic development and clean energy expansion can proceed concurrently.

C. Common Structural Challenges

Coal Dependence- Both nations continue to rely on coal for energy security and baseload industrial power.

Infrastructure Bottlenecks- Investment gaps in Energy Storage and modern Grid Infrastructure hinder the full integration of renewables.

Energy Efficiency- A pressing need exists to improve efficiency to reduce consumption without stifling growth.

4. The Role of Developed Countries

The text emphasizes that individual action is insufficient; collective responsibility is key.

Mitigation & Support- Developed nations must strengthen domestic mitigation while fulfilling promises of assistance.

CBDR Principle- The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) remains the bedrock of international negotiations. It dictates that contributions must align with a country's capabilities and historical culpability.

5. Way Forward for India

To successfully navigate this transition, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy-

Renewable Expansion- Continue the aggressive push for solar and wind capacity addition.

Adaptation- Enhance strategies to protect vulnerable communities from climate impacts (adaptation vs. mitigation).

Global Advocacy- Push internationally for fair finance and equitable technology flows.

Conclusion

The transition to a green economy is not solely about emission reduction; it is fundamentally about supporting sustainable economic development globally. India and China play critical roles by sustaining their renewable transitions and pushing for equitable frameworks. Success depends on the international community recognizing the duality of this challenge—ensuring that climate action does not come at the cost of the developmental needs of the Global South.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/us-exit-climate-bodies-relief-challenges-india-10462603/

Editorial of the Day – 16.01.2026

Index

1. **Jana Nayagan controversy shows — film certification process is punishment (IE)** -1

1. Jana Nayagan controversy shows — film certification process is punishment (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topic- Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Sub Topic- Fundamental Rights (Article 19), Censorship vs. Certification, Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Judicial Activism in Arts

Film Certification, Free Expression, and Democratic Maturity

1. Introduction

Recurring controversies surrounding film certification in India have reignited the debate on the limits of freedom of expression. These disputes are not merely isolated cultural clashes but symptoms of a deeper institutional malaise- the tension between state regulation and creative liberty in a constitutional democracy. The central question is whether the state should act as a moral gatekeeper or a facilitator of informed choice.

2. Context and Background- Classification vs. Control

Original Intent- The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) was originally conceived as a classification body. Its primary mandate was to guide audiences regarding age-appropriateness and content sensitivity (e.g., 'U', 'A', 'UA' ratings).

The Shift- Over time, the system has drifted from "certification" to "content control."

Current Reality- The CBFC often functions as a moral gatekeeper, imposing cuts, enforcing delays, or enacting *de facto* bans. This reflects an expanding regulatory mindset that prioritizes "perceived social order" over constitutional freedoms.

3. Core Constitutional Issue

The debate centers on the delicate balance between Fundamental Rights and State Restrictions-

Article 19(1)(a)- Guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

Article 19(2)- Permitting "reasonable restrictions" in the interests of public order, decency, morality, or national security.

The Conflict- Restrictions must satisfy the tests of Reasonableness, Proportionality, and Necessity. Excessive intervention by the certification board often fails these tests, undermining the constitutional spirit.

4. Challenges in the Current System

The systemic inadequacies of the current framework include-

Subjective Decision-Making- Decisions are often driven by individual interpretations of morality or social sensitivity rather than objective, codified standards.

Lack of Transparency- Filmmakers frequently face arbitrary objections without clear, reasoned explanations, aggravating the sense of unfairness.

The "Chilling Effect"- The uncertainty of the process forces filmmakers into self-censorship. To avoid regulatory hurdles, artistic intent is diluted even before the film reaches the scrutiny stage.

Outdated Framework- The system fails to acknowledge the rising media literacy and critical capacity of modern Indian audiences, treating them with "moral paternalism."

Burden on Judiciary- The frequent need for courts to adjudicate certification disputes highlights the failure of the regulatory mechanism to resolve issues internally.

5. Constitutional and Democratic Perspective

Role of Citizens- A mature democracy must trust its citizens to engage critically with diverse, and even controversial, viewpoints.
Empowerment over Dictation- Certification should aim to empower viewers with information (content descriptors) rather than dictating what narratives are acceptable.
Democratic Resilience- Respecting creative freedom strengthens society by encouraging dialogue and dissent, rather than weakening the social fabric.

6. Global Practices

Mature Democracies- Most global jurisdictions favor classification over censorship.
Role of Boards- Film boards in these countries limit their role to providing age ratings and content warnings (e.g., violence, strong language), leaving the final choice to the viewer.
Philosophy- These systems acknowledge social pluralism and reject the state's role as a moral parent.

7. Suggested Reforms

To align the Indian framework with constitutional values, the following reforms are essential-
Objective Guidelines- Establish clear, narrowly defined, and objective guidelines to minimize subjective interpretation.
Independent Review- Create an independent and accountable review mechanism to check arbitrary decisions.
Shift to Certification- Move decisively away from the "censorship" model to a "viewer-oriented certification" model.
Time-Bound Process- Mandate time-bound decisions to prevent "indirect suppression" through indefinite delays.
Stakeholder Consultation- Institutionalize regular consultation with artists, filmmakers, and civil society.

8. Way Forward and Conclusion

Modernizing India's film certification framework is a test of its democratic maturity. A transparent, fair, and constitutionally grounded system is necessary to ensure that artistic expression flourishes. Social sensitivities should be addressed through reasoned engagement rather than coercive control. Ultimately, a democracy that is confident in its own stability does not need to fear the silver screen.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/jana-nayagan-controversy-shows-film-certification-process-is-punishment-10476426/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 17.01.2026

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1. On mute- On the U.S., geopolitical turmoil, India's response (TH) -1

2. Indians are eating is changing. Farms that feed them need to as well (IE) -2

1. On mute- On the U.S., geopolitical turmoil, India's response (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighborhood- relations.

Sub Topic- India-US Relations, Strategic Autonomy, West Asia (Iran) Policy, Global Geopolitics & Unilateralism.

On Mute- The Cost of Strategic Silence

1. Introduction

India stands at a critical geopolitical crossroads amidst a rapidly shifting global order characterized by great-power rivalry and economic coercion. The article highlights India's current foreign policy dilemma- facing aggressive unilateral actions from the United States (under a renewed Trump administration in 2026), New Delhi has adopted a "muted" and cautious approach. The central argument is that India must balance its global ambitions and partnerships with a firm assertion of Strategic Autonomy to protect its national interests, rather than resorting to silence or appeasement.

2. Global Geopolitical Turmoil (The External Environment)

The new year (2026) has witnessed an escalation in geopolitical tensions driven by the U.S. administration's aggressive foreign policy

Unlawful Intervention- The U.S. has engaged in intervention in Venezuela, including the alleged kidnapping of its leadership, which breaches international law.

Regime Change Threats- Washington has issued threats of regime change against other South American nations (Cuba, Colombia).

Territorial Expansionism- There is open rhetoric regarding the annexation of Greenland, destabilizing established global norms.

3. Escalating U.S. Economic Coercion

The U.S. is utilising economic tools as weapons against rivals, which directly impacts India's strategic choices punitive Tariffs-Legislation is being considered to impose tariffs of up to 500% on countries importing Russian oil or uranium.

Pressure on Iran

a. Intensified stance citing crackdowns on protesters.
b. New sanctions and threats of military action.

Secondary Sanctions- President Trump has announced an additional 25% tariff on any country trading with Iran.

Targeting Strategic Assets- The U.S. is pressuring India to withdraw from the Chabahar Port project, a critical strategic asset for India's connectivity to Central Asia, despite significant financial investments already made.

4. India's Muted Response

In the face of these developments, New Delhi's diplomatic reactions have been notably restrained-

On Venezuela- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) expressed only "deep concern" but stopped short of condemning the specific actions (kidnapping/breach of law).

On South America- Complete silence regarding threats to Cuba or Colombia, likely dismissed as non-strategic concerns.

On Iran (The "Confusing" Silence)- Despite deep historical ties and proximity, the government has avoided commenting on U.S. threats or domestic protests in Iran.
Action Taken- Responses have been limited to issuing travel advisories for Iran and Israel and preparing evacuation plans for students.
Trade Policy- Officials have signaled a further reduction in trade with Iran, which is already at historical lows.

5. Rationale Behind India's Caution

The analysis suggests that India's reluctance to criticize the U.S. is driven by specific diplomatic calculations

1. Reviving Bilateral Ties- Hope to reset India-U.S. relations after a "tense year."
2. Trade Deal Expectations- Optimism regarding the resolution of the India–U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement, encouraged by assurances from the U.S. Ambassador.
3. Technology Partnerships- Desire to secure inclusion in the U.S. high-technology partnership framework, 'Pax Silica'.
4. Risk Aversion- Policymakers fear that speaking out now would cause a dip in relations without offering immediate strategic gain.

6. The Costs of Strategic Silence

The article argues that this cautious approach has tangible negative consequences
Economic Strain- U.S. threats and tariffs are already hurting ordinary Indians and the broader economy.
Reputation Damage- Silence risks damaging India's global reputation as an independent power.
Diplomatic Strain- It places strain on other partnerships, particularly as India prepares to host the **BRICS+ Summit**, where members may view India's silence as alignment with Western unilateralism.

7. Lessons from the Past (2019 Precedent)

History serves as a warning against appeasement-
The 2019 Experience- India halted imports of Iranian and Venezuelan oil under U.S. pressure.
The Outcome- This "appeasement" did not safeguard India's interests; instead, it resulted in the loss of cheap energy sources and diplomatic leverage.
The Lesson- Yielding to pressure does not guarantee security; only a firm assertion of autonomy works.

8. Conclusion

The narrative concludes that silence and accommodation are ineffective strategies for a rising power.
Failure of Appeasement- Yielding to external pressure leads to economic loss and the erosion of policy independence.
The Way Forward- To protect sovereignty and strengthen global partnerships, India must act with **confidence and clarity**.
Final Imperative- A consistent assertion of Strategic Autonomy is essential to shape a balanced, multipolar world order rather than succumbing to dependence.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/on-mute-on-the-us-geopolitical-turmoil-indias-response/article70515169.ece

2. Indians are eating is changing. Farms that feed them need to as well (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topic- Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country; marketing of agricultural produce; issues and related constraints.
Sub Topic- Food Security & Nutrition, Crop Diversification, MSP & Procurement Policy, Supply Chain Management.
Agriculture & Diet- Aligning Production with Changing Consumption

1. Introduction

India is undergoing a significant dietary transition driven by rising incomes, rapid urbanization, and evolving lifestyles. Consumption patterns are shifting away from a heavy dependence on traditional

staples (rice and wheat) toward a more diverse basket including proteins (pulses, dairy), horticultural produce (fruits, vegetables), and millets. However, India's agricultural production systems and policy frameworks remain archaic, heavily biased towards cereals. This has created a structural disconnect between what Indian farms produce and what modern Indian consumers demand.

2. Background- The Legacy of Food Security

Historical Context- Post-Independence policy prioritized calorie security to prevent famine, successfully using instruments like Minimum Support Price (MSP), public procurement, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) for rice and wheat.

Current Rigidities- While these policies ensured basic food security, they have become rigid. They fail to respond to modern drivers such as higher disposable incomes, women's workforce participation, and increased nutritional awareness.

The Mismatch- Cropping patterns in 2026 continue to reflect 1970s incentives rather than current consumption realities.

3. Key Drivers of Change and Current Mismatch

Demand Shift- There is a clear move towards "high-value" agriculture—fruits, vegetables, dairy, and animal proteins—and "nutri-cereals" like millets.

Production Stagnation- Production remains cereal-centric.

Economic Impact- The gap is filled by imports (especially edible oils) or results in high price volatility (pulses), affecting inflation and food security.

Market Signals- Consumers are signaling a need for diversification, but farmers lack the supply chain support and price safety nets to respond.

4. Core Issues in the Current Framework

Policy Bias Toward Staples- MSP and procurement are effectively functional only for wheat and paddy. Lack of price assurance for pulses, oilseeds, and horticulture discourages farmers from shifting away from cereals.

Weak Post-Harvest Infrastructure- Perishable high-value crops suffer from inadequate cold storage and processing facilities. High post-harvest losses reduce farmer incomes and consumer availability.

Import Dependence (Edible Oils)- Domestic oilseed cultivation has declined relative to demand, leading to massive import bills. This exposes domestic food prices to international geopolitical and market fluctuations.

Fragmented Markets- Farmers lack integration with modern value chains. Price discovery mechanisms for non-cereal crops remain opaque and inefficient.

5. Challenges to Transition

Policy Realignment- Shifting the mammoth machinery of government support from cereals to a diversified basket is politically and administratively difficult.

Infrastructure Investment- Building the necessary cold chains and logistics for perishables requires massive capital.

Risk Mitigation- Farmers perceive high risks in shifting to new crops; ensuring their profitability during the transition is a major hurdle.

6. Proposed Solutions & Reforms

A. Reform MSP and Procurement

Expand Coverage- Extend effective price support and procurement to pulses, oilseeds, and millets.

Decentralization- Align procurement policies with regional consumption patterns (e.g., procuring millets in dryland states for local distribution).

B. Strengthen Agro-Infrastructure

Storage & Processing- heavily invest in cold storage and value-addition facilities to reduce wastage.

Financing- Leverage the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) to build post-harvest assets at the farm gate.

C. Demand-Responsive Farming

Digital Integration- Use platforms like eNAM (National Agriculture Market) for transparent price discovery.

Institutional Support- Encourage Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and contract farming to link small farmers directly to retail markets and processors.

D. Farmer Support & Climate Resilience

Transitional Safety Net- Use income support schemes (like PM-Kisan) and crop insurance to cushion farmers against the risks of diversification.

Sustainability- Promote water-efficient crops (millets/pulses) to address both nutritional needs and the water crisis, integrating these into the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture.

7. Relevant Government Schemes

1. PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi- Direct income support to cushion financial risks.
2. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)- Financing for post-harvest management infrastructure.
3. National Food Security Mission (NFSM)- Focuses on increasing the production of rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals, and nutri-cereals.

8. Way Forward and Conclusion

Aligning farm output with dietary changes is no longer optional—it is critical for India's nutritional security and economic stability.

Conclusion- A shift from "Food Security" (calories) to "Nutritional Security" (diet diversity) requires structural reforms in marketing and infrastructure.

Action Plan

a. Launch aggressive Crop Diversification Programmes backed by research and credit.
b. Conduct public awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption.
c. Embed climate-resilient practices into the core national agricultural strategy to ensure that the diet shift is environmentally sustainable.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/what-indians-are-eating-is-changing-farms-that-feed-them-need-to-as-well-10478454/

Editorial of the Day – 19.01.2026

Index

1. **Crisis in education- On the Supreme Court, higher education and student well-being (TH)** -1
2. **India has surpassed China in rice production. But this love for paddy is not without pitfalls (IE)** - 3

1. Crisis in education- On the Supreme Court, higher education and student well-being (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighborhood- relations.
Sub Topic- Higher Education System in India, Governance in Higher Education, Judiciary (Judicial Activism/Intervention).
Crisis in Higher Education- Systemic Reforms and Supreme Court Intervention

1. Introduction

The Higher Education sector in India is currently facing a critical juncture characterized by deep-rooted systemic failures. The Supreme Court of India has recently intervened decisively in the matter of student suicides, identifying them not merely as isolated incidents but as symptoms of broader institutional decay. This decay is attributed to rapid privatization, inadequate institutional capacity, and persistent vacancies in faculty and governance roles.

2. Supreme Court Intervention on Student Suicides

The Court has issued firm directions to the Central and State governments to ensure accountability and transparency.
Context of Intervention- The directions stem from an ongoing case regarding student suicides.
Root Causes Identified
Unchecked Expansion- Rapid expansion of higher education driven largely by privatization without a corresponding improvement in educational quality.
Student Distress Factors- Acknowledgment of growing distress caused by

1. Financial pressures.
2. Social factors and social injustice.
3. Severe academic stress.

3. Constitutional Mechanisms and Specific Directions

To ensure these directions are not ignored, the Court invoked its extraordinary powers.
Use of Article 142- The Court invoked Article 142 of the Constitution to ensure the effective and mandatory implementation of its directions.
The Nine Directions
Data Management (7 Directions)- Focus on systematic record-keeping, mandatory reporting, tracking of student suicides, and ensuring separate data treatment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
Institutional Capacity (2 Directions)- Immediate filling of critical posts- Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Faculty. Explicit recognition that these administrative and academic roles are critical to maintaining student well-being.

4. The Crisis of Faculty Vacancies in Public HEIs

The shortage of human resources is a primary driver of institutional failure.
Magnitude of the Issue- Ground reports indicate approximately 50% faculty vacancies in many public universities across India.
Direct Impact- This chronic shortage directly compromises

1. Teaching Quality- Overburdened existing staff and reliance on ad-hoc teachers.
2. Research Output- Stagnation in knowledge creation.
3. Student Support- Lack of adequate mentoring and support systems, which are crucial for preventing student distress.

5. Case Study- The Decline of the University of Madras

The University of Madras serves as a microcosm of the wider crisis affecting State-run HEIs.

A. Historical Significance

Legacy- A leading institution in Tamil Nadu, known for its high-quality research and conduct of examinations for affiliated colleges.

Regional Context- Tamil Nadu leads India in higher education enrolment and has a strong legacy of women's education.

Expansion- Teaching activities expanded significantly from the late 1970s.

B. Institutional Decline (Last Decade)

Staffing Crisis

Zero Appointments- No new faculty appointments have been made in the last decade.

Reduced Strength- Teaching strength has plummeted to nearly half of the sanctioned posts.

Erosion of Research Capacity

Weakened Centers- Once-prestigious centers for advanced studies in Philosophy, Botany, and Mathematics still exist but are functionally weakened.

Neglected Fields- Research in Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences has suffered.

Policy Gap- Research focused on Tamil Nadu, which is vital for evidence-based public policy, has been largely neglected.

6. Governance Paralysis and Appointment Bottlenecks

The inability to fill vacancies is exacerbated by administrative and political hurdles.

Vice-Chancellor Appointments- Stalled due to conflicts involving

a. Recalcitrant Governors.
b. Legal uncertainties following the Supreme Court's observations on a Presidential reference concerning the powers of Governors.

Faculty Recruitment Challenges

Procedural Delays- Recruitment must follow UGC-prescribed procedures, which typically require at least six months.

Financial Constraints- Demands substantial financial commitment, necessitating support from the Union government.

Talent and Integrity Issues

a. Limited pool of qualified faculty.
b. Issues of corruption in recruitment.
c. Political or ideological appointments that weaken academic standards.

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Supreme Court has set a demanding four-month timeline for compliance, serving as a wake-up call for the education sector.

Prerequisites for National Goals- Rebuilding institutional foundations is not optional. Adequate staffing, effective governance, and robust research ecosystems are essential prerequisites.

Risk to Vision- Without these systemic reforms, ambitious national visions like 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) risk remaining purely aspirational rather than achievable.

Final Imperative- Student well-being is intrinsically linked to sound governance. Restoring academic integrity and strengthening public universities are urgent necessities.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/crisis-in-education-on-the-supreme-court-higher-education-and-student-well-being/article70522242.ece

2. India has surpassed China in rice production. But this love for paddy is not without pitfalls (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country; Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; Food processing and related industries.

Sub Topic- Food Security, Public Distribution System (PDS), Buffer Stocks, Agricultural Exports, and Environmental Impact of Agriculture.

India's Record Rice Output- Agricultural Triumph and Policy Implications

1. Introduction

India has achieved a historic milestone in the 2024-25 agricultural year by producing approximately 150.18 million tonnes of rice, surpassing China's output of 145.28 million tonnes. This achievement firmly positions India as the world's largest rice producer. This record output is not just a statistical victory but a testament to long-term improvements in agronomy, irrigation, and institutional support, signaling a major shift in global food supply chain dynamics where India is now a central pillar.

2. Driving Factors Behind Record Output

The surge in production is the result of a convergence of climatic, technological, and institutional factors

Favourable Monsoons- The 2024 monsoon season provided adequate and well-distributed rainfall. This created ideal conditions for paddy cultivation in major rice-bowls of India- West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh.

Expanded Cultivation Area- The net sown area for rice has increased, driven by positive market signals.

Institutional Support- Assured government procurement at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) incentivized farmers to dedicate more land to paddy.

High-Yielding Varieties (HYV)

Scientific Innovation- Collaborative efforts by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and state universities have led to the adoption of superior seed varieties.

Recent Release- 184 new crop varieties across 25 crops were recently released, significantly boosting per-hectare productivity.

Technology and Mechanisation

a. Enhanced access to fertilizers and pesticides.
b. Increased mechanization of farm operations (sowing, harvesting).
c. Improved irrigation infrastructure reducing dependency on erratic weather in some regions.

3. Economic and Policy Significance

This surplus production has dual implications—strengthening domestic stability while enhancing global influence.

A. Food Security and Domestic Stability

Buffer Stocks- The record output ensures robust buffer stocks for the government.

Social Welfare- It secures the supply chain for the National Food Security Act (NFSA), allowing the government to provide subsidized food grains to vulnerable populations without fear of shortage.

B. Export Competitiveness and Global Impact

Global Leadership- India is the leading global exporter of rice.

Export Surge- Following the removal of export curbs, rice exports rebounded by approximately 19.4%, reaching 21.55 million tonnes in 2025.

Geopolitical Soft Power

a. **Price Stabilizer-** Abundant Indian supplies dampen global food inflation.
b. **Market Share-** India has reclaimed markets in Asia and Africa, benefiting net food-importing nations with lower costs.

4. Challenges from Surplus (The Problem of Plenty)

Paradoxically, record production brings its own set of economic and logistical challenges.

Excess Stocks & Storage Crisis-

a. Government granaries hold reserves far exceeding the strategic buffer norms.
b. This increases carrying costs (storage, maintenance, wastage) and strains infrastructure.

Price Deflation- Oversupply leads to a crash in domestic and international market prices.

Farmer Distress- Without effective MSP intervention, open market prices may fall below the cost of production, squeezing farmer incomes.

5. Policy Responses to Manage Surplus

To manage the "excess," the government has pivoted from restriction to liberalization and diversification.

Export Policy Adjustments

reversal of Restrictions- The government lifted export bans/curbs, allowing free shipment to clear domestic stockpiles.

Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)

a. Diversion for Fuel- Surplus rice stocks are being diverted for ethanol production.
b. Dual Benefit- This reduces the storage burden on the Food Corporation of India (FCI) while helping India meet its renewable fuel targets.

Procurement Strategy- Continued procurement at MSP acts as a safety net to prevent a price crash for farmers, despite the fiscal pressure it puts on the exchequer.

6. Impact on Rural Economy

Income Boost- Higher yields generally translate to higher income, provided price stability is maintained via MSP.

Employment Generation- The boom stimulates allied sectors including transportation, warehousing, milling, and export logistics.

Risk- If demand (export or domestic) lags behind supply, farm-gate prices could collapse, necessitating state intervention.

7. Environmental and Sustainability Concerns

The focus on quantity has raised serious ecological questions that need addressing for long-term viability.

Water Intensity- Rice is a water-guzzling crop; intensive cultivation depletes groundwater tables, especially in semi-arid regions like Punjab and Haryana.

Methane Emissions- Flooded paddy fields are a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Need for Reform- The current success relies heavily on resource-intensive practices that may not be sustainable.

8. Conclusion and Way Forward

India's emergence as the top rice producer is a victory for its agricultural policies and scientific capabilities. However, to sustain this without ecological or economic collapse, the following measures are essential-

Market Diversification- Aggressively expand export markets and promote value-added rice products (e.g., rice bran oil, processed foods) to absorb surplus.

Ethanol Utilization- Scale up rice-to-ethanol infrastructure to responsibly manage buffer stocks.

Sustainable Farming- Promote System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) to save water. Encourage crop diversification away from rice in water-stressed areas.

Price Stability Mechanisms- Implement robust crop insurance, calibrate MSP scientifically, and use demand forecasting to protect farmers from volatile price cycles.

Source- https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-has-surpassed-china-in-rice-production-but-this-love-for-paddy-is-not-without-pitfalls-10475138/

Editorial of the Day – 20.01.2026

Index

1. Fractured Yemen- On the Persian Gulf region's geopolitical fault line (TH) -1

2. America's Greenland claim could mean for NATO, Russia, and Canada (IE) -3

1. Fractured Yemen- On the Persian Gulf region's geopolitical fault line (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic- Regional stability in the Middle East (West Asia); Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

The recent resurgence of violence in Yemen has exposed the deep-seated political fragmentation within the country and the widening geopolitical rift between Gulf powerhouses. The conflict has evolved beyond the original civil war into a proxy struggle involving the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and the UAE-supported Southern Transitional Council (STC). This internal discord threatens to dismantle state institutions further and exacerbate one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises.

1. Background to the Crisis

Internal Fragility- The renewed clashes highlight the inability of Yemen's central institutions to hold the country together.

Gulf Rivalries- The conflict is no longer just internal but serves as a theater for the divergent interests of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Geopolitical Fault Lines- The confrontation has revealed deep cracks in the traditional alliances within the Gulf region.

2. Escalation of Fighting (Early December)

STC Offensive- The Southern Transitional Council (STC) launched a surprise military offensive targeting key oil-rich governorates

a. Hadhramaut
b. Al-Mahra

Temporary Gains- The STC managed to briefly capture nearly half of the territory formerly known as South Yemen.

Government Counter-Attack- The Saudi-backed government forces responded swiftly. With the aid of Saudi air power, they successfully reclaimed the territories lost to the STC.

3. Critical Developments in Aden (January 7)

Reclaiming the Capital- Government troops successfully entered Aden (the interim capital), forcing the STC into a defensive position.

Diplomatic Intervention- The military pressure compelled the STC to send a delegation to Riyadh for negotiations.

Dissolution and Treason

a. Outcome in Riyadh- The STC announced its dissolution.
b. Leadership Crisis- STC leader Aidarous al-Zoubaidi was charged with treason and reportedly fled to the UAE to escape prosecution.

4. Saudi–UAE Tensions

The conflict has strained the relationship between the two Gulf allies, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Accusations- Saudi Arabia explicitly accused the UAE of arming Yemeni separatists to undermine the central government.

Military Action (Mukalla)- Saudi forces conducted air strikes on the Mukalla port, allegedly targeting weapons shipments intended for the separatists.

UAE Withdrawal- Following a rare public rebuke from Saudi Arabia, the UAE declared two major shifts

1. A withdrawal of its forces from Yemen.
2. An official end to its counterterrorism operations in the country.

5. Shifting Alliances in the War

The alliances have evolved significantly since the conflict began in 2014.

Initial Coalition- Originally, the UAE joined the Saudi-led coalition to fight the Houthis (Ansar Allah) after they seized Sanaa in 2014.

Houthi Resilience- Despite years of war, the Houthis remained militarily strong and resilient.

Diverging Strategies

UAE- Shifted focus to backing the separatists (STC) in the south, challenging the central government.

Saudi Arabia- Facing direct security threats on its southern border, Riyadh pursued a dual strategy- seeking a ceasefire with the Houthis in the north while attempting to stabilize the south through the recognized government.

6. Consequences on the Ground

Houthi Consolidation- The infighting between the government and the STC in the south created a power vacuum, allowing the Houthis to consolidate control over northern Yemen, including major population centers.

Humanitarian Catastrophe- Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. Yemen faces

a. Acute famine risks.
b. Total economic collapse.
c. Destruction of critical infrastructure.

Current Situation and Way Forward

The Status Quo

Uneasy Calm- A fragile peace currently exists in southern Yemen.

Lingering Tensions- despite the official dissolution, STC representatives in the UAE deny that the council has truly disbanded, suggesting potential for future insurgency.

The Path to Stability

Federal Governance- Sustainable peace relies on creating a federal governance framework. This must

a. Reflect current power realities.
b. Address historical grievances of all factions.

Gulf Cooperation- Saudi Arabia and the UAE must reconcile their strategic differences.

a. They must prioritize long-term stability over regional rivalry.
b. Active facilitation of dialogue among all Yemeni factions is required.

Conclusion

Lasting peace in Yemen is contingent upon an inclusive political process that integrates all factions into a viable federal structure. The "Fractured Yemen" scenario demonstrates that military solutions are insufficient; success depends on the ability of external actors—specifically Saudi Arabia and the UAE—to align their strategies. Only through coordinated efforts can the conflict be reduced, enabling humanitarian recovery and a transition toward sustainable regional security.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/fractured-yemen-on-the-persian-gulf-regions-geopolitical-fault-line/article70525927.ece

2. America's Greenland claim could mean for NATO, Russia, and Canada (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
Sub Topic- Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate (NATO); Geopolitics of the Arctic Region.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the Arctic is undergoing a seismic shift driven by renewed US interest in acquiring Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Recent escalations in rhetoric and policy proposals by US President Donald Trump regarding the control of Greenland have sparked significant concerns about NATO's cohesion and the strategic balance with Russia. Situated at the crossroads of North America and the Arctic, Greenland's strategic value—ranging from resource potential to military surveillance—has made it a focal point of intense competition. This analysis explores the implications of such a move on the transatlantic alliance and the broader great power rivalry in the region.

Detailed Analysis & Developments

1. Context and Background

The Proposal- US President Donald Trump has actively pushed for the US to acquire control over Greenland, citing the need to counter foreign influence.
Sovereignty Status- Greenland is an autonomous territory under the Kingdom of Denmark. Denmark has firmly rejected the notion of a sale or cession, emphasizing self-determination.
Strategic Driver- The move is driven by the intensifying race for the Arctic, where melting ice is opening up new shipping routes, resource deposits, and arenas for military competition.

2. Strategic Significance of Greenland

Geopolitical Leverage
Surveillance Reach- Offers a prime location for enhanced surveillance capabilities (radars, listening posts) over the entire Arctic region.
Proximity to Rivals- Provides a forward operating base closer to Russian military deployments in the High North.
Resource Access- Potential access to vast, untapped deposits of critical minerals and rare earth elements essential for modern technology and defense (reducing reliance on China).
Military Basis
Existing Infrastructure- The US already operates Thule Air Base (now Pituffik Space Base), the US military's northernmost installation.
Early Warning Systems- It is a critical component of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) for ballistic missile early warning systems protecting the US mainland.

3. Trump's Position and Actions

Unilateral Ambition- President Trump insists the US must control Greenland "one way or the other," framing it as a "large real estate deal" vital for national security.
Justification- He claims Denmark is failing to adequately check growing Russian and Chinese influence/investment in the territory.
Coercive Tactics
Economic Threats- Threatened to impose tariffs on European NATO allies if they oppose the US move.
Use of Force- Refused to explicitly rule out the use of force, breaking diplomatic norms and stoking international tension.

4. Impacts on NATO- A Fractured Alliance

Threat to Cohesion

Danish Stance- Denmark views the proposal as an insult to its sovereignty and warns that coercive moves could irreparably damage transatlantic ties.

Allied Unity- Other NATO members have rallied behind Denmark, rejecting unilateral US takeover ideas and reaffirming that Greenland's defense is a collective responsibility.

Undermining Norms

Trust Erosion- An attempt by one NATO member to annex the territory of another fundamentally violates the core principles of trust and reciprocity essential to the alliance.

Trade-Security Rift- Linking trade tariffs to security policy risks creating deep divisions, weakening the operational unity required for collective defense.

Operational Risks

Complicated Coordination- Unilateral US moves could disrupt joint exercises like *Operation Arctic Endurance*, making it harder to present a united front against adversaries.

5. Russia's Role and Reaction

Strategic Opportunism

Observing the Rift- Russia is keenly observing the internal NATO discord. A fractured alliance reduces the unified pressure on Moscow regarding its own Arctic expansion.

Reduced Negotiation Pressure- NATO infighting may reduce pressure on Moscow to negotiate cooperative Arctic security measures.

Exploiting Divisions

Diplomatic Wedges- Russia may use the division to strengthen ties with specific Nordic nations or other European states alienated by US aggression.

Energy Leverage- Weakened Western unity could allow Russia to advance its energy and resource interests with less resistance.

Economic Fallout

Global Instability- Transatlantic trade disputes could destabilize global markets, affecting energy, shipping, and mining sectors.

Pivot from US- European nations might be incentivized to seek alternative security or economic partnerships, reducing US influence in Europe.

6. Risks and Challenges

Military Escalation- A coercive attempt could theoretically trigger defensive deployments by Denmark and NATO, leading to an unprecedented intra-alliance standoff.

Credibility Loss- Public infighting reduces NATO's deterrence credibility in the eyes of adversaries like Russia and China.

Legal Obstacles

International Law- Forced annexation violates the UN Charter and principles of self-determination.

Sanctions- Such a move would likely invite international sanctions and legal challenges, isolating the US diplomatically.

Possible Solutions and Way Forward

Diplomatic & Cooperative Pathways

Respect for Sovereignty- The US must return to diplomatic norms, respecting Danish sovereignty while addressing security concerns through established channels.

Multilateral Frameworks- Utilize the Arctic Council and NATO mechanisms to collaboratively manage Russian presence and monitor Chinese investment, rather than acting unilaterally.

Economic Partnership- Instead of annexation, the US and NATO should support Greenland-led development through infrastructure investment and economic cooperation, securing influence through partnership rather than coercion.

Conclusion

The US ambition to control Greenland highlights the deepening great power rivalry in the Arctic, but pursuing it through coercion risks shattering NATO cohesion. The path forward requires a delicate balance- protecting alliance norms and respecting sovereignty while advancing a coordinated strategy to counter Russian and Chinese influence. How NATO navigates this internal crisis will define the resilience of the transatlantic alliance and the security architecture of the Arctic for the coming decade.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/contradictions-america-greenland-nato-russia-10480857/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 21.01.2026

Index

1. Augean mess- On the SIR and the genuine voter (TH) -1

2. Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM) (IE) -2

1. Augean mess- On the SIR and the genuine voter (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Sub Topic- Election Commission of India (ECI); Electoral Reforms; Issues arising out of the electoral process; Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Introduction

The editorial "Augean Mess" critiques the Election Commission of India's (ECI) ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. While the administrative objective was to ensure the accuracy and integrity of voter lists by removing duplicates and errors, the actual outcome has been the widespread disenfranchisement of genuine voters across 12 States. The process has become so flawed that it has necessitated judicial intervention, raising fundamental questions about administrative fairness and the protection of the constitutional right to Universal Adult Franchise.

1. Concerns over the SIR Process

Systemic Flaws- The SIR is currently in the "claims and corrections" phase. However, rather than functioning as a precise tool to clean the rolls, it has acted as a "dragnet," indiscriminately trapping and removing genuine voters.

Widespread Impact- The scale and nature of complaints arising from 12 different States indicate that these issues are systemic failures of the process, not merely incidental errors.

2. Supreme Court Intervention

Judicial Directive- The Supreme Court was forced to intervene, directing the ECI to "ease the strain and stress" faced by millions of voters, with specific reference to the situation in West Bengal.

Root Causes of Errors- The erroneous verification notices sent to voters were attributed to

Outdated Data- The use of the 2002 electoral list for voter mapping, which is obsolete.

Technological Failure- Technical glitches in software that was deployed hastily without adequate testing.

Precedent- This follows similar judicial corrective guidelines issued previously to mitigate voter hardship in Bihar.

3. Lessons from Bihar's SIR

Temporary Relief- In Bihar, the Court permitted the use of Aadhaar as an additional identity document to provide relief to electors facing exclusion.

Gender Bias Anomaly- A disturbing pattern emerged in the final voter rolls where more women electors were deleted than men, pointing to deep-seated flaws in the verification methodology.

Unaddressed Irregularities- Independent analyses by *The Hindu* of deleted lists in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal revealed irregular patterns. Despite these findings warranting deeper scrutiny, the ECI offered no response.

4. Tamil Nadu's Alarming Deletions

Aggressive Deletion- The deletion drive in certain booths was so aggressive that it resulted in a statistical impossibility The sum of (Votes cast in 2024) + (Deleted names) exceeded the Original Electorate.

Implication- This mathematically proves that voters who actually exercised their franchise in the 2024 General Election have been subsequently removed from the rolls.

Erasure vs. Correction- Instead of deduplicating entries, the flawed exercise often led to the complete erasure of elector names.

5. Flaws in the 'Claims and Corrections' Phase

Illogical Burden on Voters- While lakhs of citizens are trying to restore their names, the ECI insists they register afresh using Form 6.

Procedural Issues

Misclassification- This approach treats long-standing voters as new entrants to the system.

Lack of Accountability- By forcing fresh registration, the ECI prevents an audit of exactly how many genuine voters were wrongly deleted in the first place.

6. The Uttar Pradesh Mismatch

Data Discrepancy- A staggering mismatch was discovered by the State Election Commission while preparing rolls for rural local body elections.

The Anomaly- The rural electorate alone was found to exceed the ECI's total voter count for the entire State in its draft rolls.

Integrity Questioned- Such a massive discrepancy raises serious doubts regarding the ECI's data integrity and the methodology used for the revision.

7. Broader Constitutional Implications

Delayed Judicial Review- By failing to rule early on the constitutionality of "aggressive self-enumeration," the Supreme Court is now left managing the fallout of a deeply flawed exercise.

Threat to Franchise- What was intended to be a routine administrative task—cleaning the rolls—has morphed into a process that threatens the bedrock of democracy- Universal Adult Franchise.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The debate has shifted from a technical discussion on "cleaning electoral rolls" to a core democratic concern- Are genuine voters being systematically scrubbed out of democracy? The ongoing SIR exercise highlights a troubling shift from electoral cleansing to voter exclusion. To preserve the legitimacy of Indian elections, the process requires immediate transparency, accountability, and corrective oversight. The ECI must ensure that administrative zeal to refine lists does not come at the cost of the fundamental right to vote.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/augean-mess-on-the-sir-and-the-genuine-voter/article70529525.ece

2. Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM) (IE)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Sub Topic- Air Pollution (PM2.5 and PM10), Management of Air Quality, Government Policies (NCAP, CAQM), and Environmental Chemistry.

Introduction

India's battle against winter air pollution is undergoing a critical paradigm shift. While traditional narratives focus on visible sources like stubble burning and vehicular smoke, scientific evidence now indicates that a significant portion of winter pollution is dominated by Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM). These are pollutants formed not by direct emissions, but through complex chemical reactions in the atmosphere involving precursor gases. This realization demands a fundamental restructuring of regulatory frameworks, moving from "visual pollution control" to "chemical precursor management."

1. Understanding the Shift- From Primary to Secondary Pollution

Traditional View- Air pollution was historically attributed to visible primary sources

a. Vehicular tailpipe emissions.
b. Crop residue (stubble) burning.
c. Construction dust and industrial smoke.

Scientific Reality- During winter, a major fraction of PM2.5 is secondary in nature.
Mechanism- It forms in the atmosphere when precursor gases chemically interact.
Key Precursors- Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2), Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x), and Ammonia (NH_3).
The Catalyst (Meteorology)- Winter conditions amplify this chemical process through

a. Temperature Inversion- Traps pollutants close to the ground.
b. Low Wind Speed- Prevents dispersion of pollutants.
c. High Humidity**-** Accelerates the chemical reactions that create secondary particles.

2. Sources of Precursor Gases

Power Plants & Industry- Major sources of Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2) and Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x).
Vehicles- Significant contributors to NO_x.
Agriculture- A critical but often overlooked source of Ammonia (NH_3).
Origin- High usage of urea/fertilizers and livestock emissions.
Impact- Ammonia reacts with acidic gases to form secondary aerosols (ammonium sulfate and ammonium nitrate).

3. Critical Issues in Current Strategy

Policy Mismatch- Regulations disproportionately target visible sources (dust, smoke) while neglecting invisible chemical precursors.
Reactive measures- heavy reliance on emergency responses (GRAP stages, odd-even schemes, construction bans) rather than preventive emission control.
Regulatory Gaps

a. Inadequate regulation of agricultural ammonia emissions.
b. Weak enforcement of industrial emission standards.

Monitoring Deficits- Limited real-time monitoring infrastructure for gaseous pollutants compared to PM monitoring.

4. Multi-dimensional Challenges

Scientific Challenges

a. Policymakers often lack understanding of secondary aerosol chemistry.
b. Attributing pollution to specific sectors is difficult due to the complex atmospheric mixing of gases.

Institutional Challenges
Siloed Approach- Lack of coordination between Pollution Control Boards (PCBs), Agriculture Departments, and Urban Local Bodies.
Outdated Frameworks- Rules have not evolved to match new scientific insights on secondary PM.

Economic Challenges

High Transition Costs- Industries face high costs adopting cleaner tech (e.g., Flue Gas Desulphurization).
Agricultural Resistance- Farmers fear livelihood losses if fertilizer use is restricted without alternatives.
Governance Challenges

a. Absence of legally binding emission caps for precursor gases at regional levels.
b. Governance is city-centric, ignoring the regional nature of air sheds.

5. Dimensions of Impact

Environmental

a. Ecosystem stress due to acid deposition.
b. Climate forcing- Secondary aerosols and black carbon contribute to regional warming/cooling patterns.

Health

1. PM2.5 Toxicity- Deep lung penetration causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
2. Vulnerability**-** Disproportionate impact on children, the elderly, and the urban poor.

Economic

a. Productivity losses due to health-related absenteeism.
b. Escalating public healthcare expenditure.

Social

Environmental Injustice- Lower socio-economic groups often live in areas with higher exposure but have the least resources to mitigate it.

Solutions & Way Forward

1. Strategic Policy Measures

Target Precursors- Shift focus from monitoring PM concentration to actively reducing SO2, NO and NH3 emissions.

Sector-wise Standards- Implement strict emission standards for precursor gases across industry, transport, and agriculture.

Policy Integration- Air quality goals must be embedded into national Energy (power plant emissions) and Agriculture (fertilizer policy) policies.

2. Technological Interventions

Power Sector- Mandatory and expedited adoption of Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) technology in thermal power plants to cut SO2.

Transport- Accelerate Electric Mobility (EVs) and adoption of cleaner fuels (BS-VI).

Agriculture- Promote Precision Agriculture to optimize fertilizer use, thereby reducing ammonia emissions.

3. Institutional & Governance Reforms

Airshed Approach- Move from city-centric plans to Regional Airshed Governance (treating the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain as one airshed).

Empower CAQM- Strengthen the Commission for Air Quality Management to enforce inter-state coordination.

Fiscal Federalism- Link central fiscal transfers to states with tangible pollution reduction targets.

4. Data & Monitoring

Real-time Gas Monitoring- Mandate the monitoring of gaseous precursors alongside PM10/PM2.5.

Advanced Modelling- Utilize satellite data and AI-based modelling for accurate pollution forecasting and source apportionment.

5. Behavioural Change

a. Farmer Awareness- Campaigns linking fertilizer overuse to local air pollution and health.
b. Household Transition- Incentivize the shift to cleaner household energy to reduce indoor precursors.

Conclusion

Resolving India's air pollution crisis requires looking beyond the smoke. The battle against Secondary Particulate Matter demands a transition from episodic "firefighting" to structural, science-driven reform. By targeting the invisible chemistry of the atmosphere—specifically precursor gases like ammonia and sulphates—and adopting a multi-sectoral, airshed-based approach, India can break the cycle of seasonal health emergencies and move toward sustainable urban living.

Source**-** **https-//indianexpress.com/todays-paper/2026/01/21/**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 22.01.2026

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1. Lowering the age of juvenility for crimes is a step back (TH) -1

2. Supreme Court for free digital oversight body, but the 'how' wide open (IE) -3

1. Lowering the age of juvenility for crimes is a step back (TH)

General Studies 2- Social Justice

Topic- Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Sub Topic- Issues relating to children; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Critical Analysis of Lowering the Age of Juvenility

Introduction

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, marked a paradigm shift in India's legal framework by introducing a "transfer system" allowing children aged 16–18 accused of heinous crimes to be tried as adults. A new Private Member's Bill (introduced in December 2025) now proposes further lowering this threshold from 16 to 14 years. This proposal raises significant debates regarding the balance between retributive justice (punishment) and rehabilitative justice (reform), challenging the foundational principles of child rights and protection.

1. The Proposed Legislative Change

The Amendment- The Bill seeks to amend the JJ Act to treat children aged 14–15 years as adults if accused of "heinous offences."

Definition of Heinous Offence- Crimes that carry a minimum punishment of seven years' imprisonment or more.

Immediate Consequence- If passed, young adolescents (14–15) would face adult criminal trials and potential incarceration in adult prisons, stripping them of the protective shield of the juvenile system.

2. Philosophical and Legal Flaws

Shift from Reform to Retribution- The Indian juvenile justice system was historically built on the premise that children are developmentally distinct from adults and possess a unique capacity for reform. The 2015 Act (post-2012 Delhi gang rape) diluted this by prioritizing punitive measures over care and reintegration.

Lack of Empirical Support- The Parliamentary Standing Committee had previously opposed the introduction of the transfer system, noting it was inconsistent with both domestic needs and international justice standards. The shift assumes "adult-like" criminal intent without scientific backing regarding adolescent brain development.

3. Arbitrariness in the 'Transfer System'

Subjectivity in Assessment- Currently, 16–18-year-olds undergo a preliminary assessment by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) to determine if they should be tried as adults. These assessments rely on vague criteria like "mental capacity" or "understanding consequences," which diverts focus from the child's social context and developmental reality.

Lack of Scientific Tools- There are no reliable psychological tools to retrospectively assess a child's mental state at the time of the offence. Decisions are often influenced by irrelevant factors, such as the child's demeanour during arrest (e.g., lack of visible tears) or expressions of fear, leading to inconsistent outcomes.

Risk of Expansion- Extending this flawed system to 14-year-olds would entrench institutional arbitrariness at an even more vulnerable developmental stage.

4. Data Analysis- Myth vs. Reality (NCRB 2023)

The Narrative- Proponents argue that serious crimes by 14–16-year-olds are rising, necessitating deterrence.

The Data Refutation

Low Volume- Cases involving *Children in Conflict with the Law* (CICL) accounted for only **0**.5% of total crimes in India.

Age Distribution- Of all apprehended CICLs, 79% were aged 16–18. Only 21% fell into the 12–16 age bracket.

Conclusion- The data contradicts the claim that younger adolescents (14–16) are primary drivers of serious crime, making the legislation a reaction to perceived fear rather than statistical reality.

5. Structural Vulnerability and Systemic Failure

Socio-Economic Roots- Adolescent offending is frequently a result of poverty, neglect, and social inequality rather than inherent "criminal intent."

Dual Status- Many CICLs are simultaneously "children in need of care and protection," indicating a failure of the state to provide basic welfare before the crime occurred.

Consequences of Adult System

Disrupted Development- Exposure to adult criminal processes halts education and harms cognitive/psychological growth.

Stigma- It creates permanent social stigma, hindering reintegration.

Illegal Detention- Despite existing safeguards, children are often illegally detained in adult jails, proving that the system struggles to enforce current laws, let alone new, stricter ones.

6. Way Forward- Fix the System, Not the Child

Prioritize Prevention- The focus must shift from criminalizing childhood vulnerability to early intervention and strengthening family/educational support systems.

Mental Health Infrastructure- Accessible mental health care is required to address behavioral issues before they escalate to crime.

Uphold Child Rights- Blurring the line between childhood and adulthood violates the principle of the "best interests of the child" and equality before the law.

Systemic Accountability- Instead of punishing children for the state's failure to protect them, reforms should focus on strengthening institutions designed to support at-risk youth.

Conclusion

The solution to juvenile crime does not lie in stripping children of legal protection. Treating systemic failures—such as lack of education, poverty, and weak support structures—as grounds for harsher punishment shifts the burden onto those least capable of bearing it. Meaningful reform requires strengthening the community systems designed to support children before harm occurs, rather than lowering the age of incarceration.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/lowering-the-age-of-juvenility-for-crimes-is-a-step-back/article70534626.ece

2. Supreme Court for free digital oversight body, but the 'how' wide open (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions (Fundamental Rights); Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Sub Topic- Freedom of Speech and Expression; Media Regulation; Communal Harmony and Public Order; Challenges to internal security through communication networks (GS III intersection).

Regulating Media – Balancing Freedom of Speech and Communal Harmony

1. Introduction

Context- In the last three years, Indian regulatory authorities have issued numerous orders to TV and digital news platforms. Significantly, nearly 60% of these orders cited violations of the communal code.

The Core Conflict- This statistic highlights the friction between two democratic pillars-

1. Individual Liberty- Freedom of speech and expression (Article 19(1)(a)).
2. Societal Stability- Maintenance of communal harmony and public order.

New Challenges- The explosion of digital platforms has complicated accountability, creating a media landscape where information travels faster than regulation can manage.

2. Constitutional and Legal Framework

The Guarantee (Article 19(1)(a))- Ensures the right to freedom of speech and expression for all citizens. Acts as the bedrock of democracy, empowering the media to function as a "watchdog" over governance and society.

The Restrictions (Article 19(2))- Freedom is not absolute. The State can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of

1. Public order (crucial for communal harmony).
2. Security of the State.
3. Friendly relations with foreign states.
4. Decency or morality.
5. Contempt of court and Defamation.

Institutional Mechanisms-

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA)- An independent body that enforces ethical codes for broadcast and digital media. It handles complaints and issues directives/fines for violations.

Press Council of India (PCI)- A statutory body that governs print media, upholding journalistic standards and addressing grievances regarding misconduct.

3. Media's Role in Communal Harmony

The Dual Nature of Media- Media acts as a double-edged sword in a diverse society like India.

Constructive Role

a) Disseminates information on government policies and development.
b) educates citizens on rights and social justice.
c) Exposes corruption and holds power accountable.

Destructive Potential

Sensationalism- Creating "breaking news" hysteria often biases coverage, which can inadvertently or deliberately inflame communal passions.

Digital Amplification- social media and digital news platforms can amplify unverified rumors and misinformation instantly.

Velocity of News- The race to be "first" often bypasses verification, leading to the rapid spread of checked, potentially dangerous narratives.

4. Analysis of Regulatory Data

Significance of the "60%" Statistic- The high volume of communal code violations suggests a systemic issue rather than isolated incidents.

Inadequacy of Self-Regulation- Current self-regulatory mechanisms are failing, particularly in the digital space where oversight is technically challenging.

Reactive vs. Proactive- The current system relies heavily on post-facto punitive action (punishing after the damage is done). The data indicates a need for preemptive measures to prevent the telecast/publication of inflammatory content in the first place.

5. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Strengthening Ethical Standards- Media houses must move beyond basic compliance to institutionalizing strict codes of conduct. Internal editorial reviews must be robust to ensure neutrality and accuracy before content goes live.

Enhancing Media Literacy- The public must be empowered to critically evaluate news sources. Citizens need the skills to identify bias and misinformation, reducing their susceptibility to manipulation on social media.

Balanced Regulatory Oversight- Regulators should adopt a "reformative" approach rather than just a "punitive" one. Guidance, warnings, and educational interventions should accompany fines to encourage long-term behavioral change in media houses.

Leveraging Technology

a) Explore AI-driven solutions for real-time fact-checking and monitoring of hate speech.
b) *Caveat*- Technology must be deployed carefully to avoid censorship or encroachment on legitimate free speech.

6. Conclusion

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right, but it carries the heavy burden of responsibility. The recurring violations of communal codes signal a breach of trust between the media and the society it serves. To preserve India's diverse fabric, the media ecosystem must evolve to inform without inflaming and educate without bias. A robust democracy requires a media that is not just free, but also fair, accountable, and ethically grounded.

Source- https-//www.newindianexpress.com/editorial/2025/Nov/30/sc-for-free-digital-oversight-body-but-the-how-wide-open

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 23.01.2026

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1. BRICS India summit needs a green and resilient agenda- (TH) -1

2. Noida is like many modern Indian cities. It has a broken system – (IE) -2

1. BRICS India summit needs a green and resilient agenda

General Studies 2 - International Relation **Topic -** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic - BRICS Summit 2026; Climate Diplomacy; South-South Cooperation; Global Climate Finance.

BRICS India Summit – A Green and Resilient Agenda

Introduction

As India prepares to host the BRICS Summit in 2026, it stands at a pivotal juncture to shape the global narrative. Building on the institutional capacity demonstrated during its successful G20 presidency in 2023, India is uniquely positioned to define a summit focus that addresses the urgent concerns of the Global South. The provided text argues that Climate Resilience and an Inclusive Green Agenda must be central to this summit, reinforcing India's leadership while navigating a polarized global order.

1. BRICS as a Stabilising Force in a Polarised World

Filling the Global Vacuum -

Weakened Multilateralism - Collaborative global action is under strain due to geopolitical polarization.

Western Retreat - The U.S. is increasingly questioning the credibility of climate cooperation and promoting fossil fuel expansion. Its withdrawal from various international platforms has created a leadership void.

European Fatigue - European nations, traditionally climate leaders, are now preoccupied with domestic fatigue and security pressures.

BRICS' Role - In this context, BRICS can step in as a "stabilizer," fostering collective action on sustainability where traditional powers are receding.

India's Diplomatic Tightrope -

Managing Perceptions - Washington often views BRICS with suspicion, seeing it as an anti-American bloc challenging the dollar-centric order.

Balancing Ties - India must balance its leadership in BRICS with its robust strategic partnership with the U.S.

Key US-India Priorities - Maintaining a viable trade deal, avoiding punitive tariffs, and managing sensitivities regarding Russian oil imports.

Strategic Autonomy - India's success lies in "multialignment"—demonstrating the ability to lead the Global South while maintaining independent relations with the West, as seen during the G20 Delhi Summit.

2. Climate Change as a Shared Priority

Consolidating Developing-Country Coordination -

The BASIC Group - The existing coalition of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China remains effective and relevant.

Expanded Weight - An expanded BRICS platform amplifies the voice of developing economies.

Precedent (Belém) - Recent discussions have successfully protected development needs while navigating the transition away from fossil fuels.

Common Vulnerabilities -

Shared Risks - All BRICS nations face severe climate impacts, including permafrost thaw (Russia), stress on the Amazon (Brazil), Himalayan fragility (India/China), and coastal/riverine risks.

Mutual Interest - Collective action on adaptation, resilience, and equity is not just charity but a self-preservation imperative for the bloc.

Leadership in Global Governance -

Steering the Process - BRICS nations (Brazil, Egypt, UAE) have been instrumental in sustaining climate momentum post-COVID through their leadership in recent COP summits.

Countering Unilateralism - BRICS serves as a platform to respond to unilateral trade measures that dilute UNFCCC principles, such as Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAM).

3. The Centrality of Climate Finance

A Key Milestone - The BRICS Leaders' Framework Declaration on Climate Finance (Rio, July 2025) set the stage for prioritizing financial equity.

India's Voice - India has been a vocal champion for the Global South, articulating demands for accessible and adequate finance.

Engaging Global Institutions -

Institutional Void - With the U.S. reducing climate commitments and private capital retreating from ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) investments, public institutions are crucial.

Proposal - There is a strong case for inviting leadership from the World Bank and IMF to the BRICS Summit to bridge the funding gap.

Leveraging Economic Weight -

The Expanded Bloc - Now including Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the UAE.

The Numbers - Represents ~50% of the world's population, ~40% of global GDP, and ~26% of global trade.

Impact - This scale provides significant leverage to reshape the global financial architecture for climate action.

4. A Chance for India to Drive Change

Leadership Opportunity -

As the 2026 Chair, India can steer the group toward a Resilience and Inclusive Green Agenda. This focus unites the developing world and aligns perfectly with India's national interests.

Geopolitical Balancing - A proactive agenda allows India to balance China's ambitions for global climate leadership. It reinforces India as a credible, independent voice on sustainability.

Global Resonance & Continuity - An India-led focus on resilience will resonate with all members.

Strategic Link - It aligns with the priorities of Ethiopia, which is set to host COP32 in 2027, ensuring continuity in the climate narrative from India's presidency to future summits.

Conclusion

The 2026 BRICS Summit is a timely opportunity for India to reposition the grouping not as an anti-Western bloc, but as a stabilizing force in a fragmented world. By prioritizing climate resilience, equity, and sustainable development, India can leverage the economic weight of the expanded BRICS to address the urgent needs of the Global South. This approach will strengthen global climate governance while reinforcing India's own strategic autonomy and credibility as a bridge between the developed and developing worlds.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/brics-india-summit-needs-a-green-and-resilient-agenda/article70539161.ece

2. Noida is like many modern Indian cities. It has a broken system

General Studies 1 - Indian Society **Topic -** Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Sub Topic - Urban Governance; Municipal Administration; Accountability in Public Service; 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

Cracks Beneath Urban "Development"

Introduction

While Indian cities like Delhi, Indore, and Noida boast visible signs of modernity—such as metro networks and high-rises—recent urban tragedies expose a crumbling foundation of governance. These incidents are not mere accidents but symptoms of systemic apathy, weak accountability, and a dangerous neglect of routine administration. They highlight a paradox where physical infrastructure grows while the quality of governance and safety standards declines.

1. Core Issues - The Governance Deficit

Failure of Responsive Governance -

Delayed Response - Incidents are characterized by sluggish emergency responses and poor disaster management.

Ignored Grievances - Citizens' complaints regarding basic threats (e.g., contaminated water, unsafe structures) often hit a wall of bureaucratic silence.

Violation of Trust - This non-responsiveness violates the core principle of citizen-centric administration, leaving the public vulnerable.

The Accountability Crisis -

Scapegoating - When tragedies occur, blame is typically shifted to lower-level functionaries (junior engineers, clerks) rather than addressing institutional lapses at the top.

Symbolic Action - As noted by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), accountability remains symbolic (punishing a few) rather than systemic (fixing the process), ensuring that failures recur.

Neglect of Routine Administration -

"Concrete" Bias - There is an excessive focus on new, visible infrastructure projects ("concrete achievements") to gain public or political recognition.

The Cost of Neglect - This sidelines the "invisible" but critical work - maintenance of existing assets, routine safety audits, and regular inspections.

CAG Flags - The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has repeatedly flagged Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for poor asset management and lack of maintenance records.

2. The Infrastructure Paradox

Creation vs. Care - Urban budgets are skewed heavily towards Capital Expenditure (CapEx) for new projects. Operation and Maintenance (O&M) funds are chronically insufficient.

NITI Aayog's Warning - Inadequate maintenance reduces the lifespan of expensive infrastructure and drastically increases disaster vulnerability (e.g., collapsing bridges, waterlogging due to clogged drains).

3. Erosion of Civil Service Ethos

Visibility over Service - The pursuit of media visibility and recognition is undermining the traditional civil service values of anonymity and neutrality.

ARC Recommendation - Civil servants must re-prioritize actual service delivery and public welfare over the optics of development.

4. Structural & Constitutional Dimensions

Structural Failures -

Fragmentation - Urban governance is fractured across multiple agencies (Municipalities, Development Authorities, Parastatals) leading to a lack of coordination.

Capacity Crunch - ULBs suffer from severe staff shortages and a lack of technical skills at the local level.

Lack of Metrics - There are no performance metrics linking staff appraisals to service quality or safety compliance.

Constitutional Mandates -

Article 243W - Mandates ULBs to function as institutions of self-government responsible for public safety and basic services.

74th Amendment - The spirit of this amendment—devolution of power—remains unfulfilled as states have been reluctant to devolve funds, functions, and functionaries.

Article 21 - The Supreme Court interprets the Right to Life to include the right to safe and dignified living conditions, making urban safety a constitutional right.

5. Way Forward - Fixing the System

Paradigm Shift - Move focus from "Asset Creation" to "Asset Management."
Mandatory safety audits for all public infrastructure. Creation of dedicated Urban Maintenance Funds.
Strengthen Accountability - Clear fixing of institutional responsibility rather than individual blame games. Time-bound action on citizen complaints (e.g., strengthening Right to Public Services Acts).
Professionalize Urban Administration - Capacity building for municipal staff. Utilization of technology (GIS, AI, IoT) for real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance.
Citizen-Centricity - robust grievance redressal systems. Active community participation in urban monitoring (social audits).

Conclusion

Urban development cannot be judged solely by the scale of infrastructure but by the quality of governance. True progress lies in safety, responsiveness, and accountability. Unless the "un-glamorous" tasks of routine maintenance and ethical administration regain centrality, India's urban modernity will remain a fragile illusion, constantly vulnerable to preventable tragedies.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/noida-is-like-many-modern-indian-cities-it-has-a-broken-system-10489546/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 24.01.2026

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1. Right To Dignity- On ASHA And Anganwadi Workers' Protests (TH) -1

2. The Familiar World Order Will Not Return. What India and EU Can Build (IE) -2

1. Right To Dignity- On ASHA And Anganwadi Workers' Protests (TH)

General Studies 2- Social Justice

Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Sub Topic- Issues related to Scheme Workers (ASHA/Anganwadi); Labour Reforms; Centre-State Financial Relations regarding welfare schemes.

Right to Dignity – The Struggle of ASHA and Anganwadi Workers

Introduction

The persistent protests by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers highlight a critical failure in India's welfare architecture. Despite being the backbone of the nation's public health and nutrition delivery systems (including flagship schemes like ICDS and NHM), these workers are trapped in precarious employment. They are denied fair wages, social security, and legal recognition, signaling a deep erosion of the social contract between the State and its essential workforce.

1. Context and Background of Protests

Current Agitation- Protests, particularly in West Bengal, have intensified with workers demanding a monthly wage of ₹15,000.

Core Grievance- The demand focuses on ending the "honorarium" system and granting permanent employee status.

Paradox of Value- These workers are indispensable for national welfare programs (maternal health, immunization, nutrition) yet remain outside the safety net of formal labor protections.

2. Historical Denial of 'Worker' Status

Origin of Exclusion- Under the Indira Gandhi government, when the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched, Anganwadi staff were deliberately denied formal 'worker' status.

Institutionalization- This precedent allowed the State to bypass standard labor laws. Even as a national union emerged in 1989 due to increasing workloads, the State continued to expand schemes without creating permanent government posts.

Liberalization Era- The classification of these employees as 'scheme workers' during the economic liberalization period further institutionalized their job insecurity.

3. Judicial and Policy Exclusion

The 'Ameerbi' Ruling (1996)- The tribunal ruling in *State of Karnataka vs. Ameerbi* explicitly excluded Anganwadi workers from being treated as government employees/civil servants.

Expansion Without Protection- In 2004, the "Right to Food" was expanded, heavily increasing the workload and dependence on these workers. The ASHA programme (mid-2000s) adopted the same exploitative model, branding workers as "activists" or "volunteers" to avoid paying statutory wages.

4. Administrative Apathy and Budgetary Cuts

Ignored Recommendations- The 45th Indian Labour Conference (2010s) recommended

1. Job regularisation.
2. Minimum wages.
3. Pension and gratuity coverage.

Bipartisan Failure- Both UPA and NDA governments failed to implement these recommendations.

Fiscal Assault (2015)- The Union government slashed the ICDS budget in 2015, triggering recurring financial distress and protests among workers.

5. Centre–State Fiscal Imbalance

The 2018 Freeze- The Central government froze its contribution to the honoraria of ASHA and Anganwadi workers in 2018.

Burden Shift- This forced State governments to bear the brunt of wage demands.

Regional Inequality

Wealthier States (or those with strong unions) could supplement wages from their own funds.

Fiscally Weaker States lagged behind, leading to significant wage disparities for the same work across different regions.

6. Erosion of the Social Contract

Parallel to Gig Economy- The situation of scheme workers mirrors the weak protections for gig workers under new labour codes.

Shift in Priorities- State policy has shifted towards "business metrics" and "fiscal headroom" at the cost of labor welfare.

Exploitative Nature- The continued denial of rightful status is described as "knowingly exploitative," given the State's reliance on their labor for health indices.

7. Way Forward- Restoring Dignity

Legal Reclassification- The Centre must reclassify these "volunteers" as statutory employees under the Code on Social Security.

Statutory Guarantees- This change must ensure

1. Minimum Wages.
2. Pension Coverage.
3. Social Security benefits (PF, ESI).

Fiscal Bridging- Both Centre and States must collaborate to bridge funding gaps and ensure "Equal Pay for Equal Work" across all regions.

Conclusion

The treatment of ASHA and Anganwadi workers as "volunteers" is a convenient legal fiction that allows the State to underpay its most essential workforce. To uphold the constitutional values of dignity and equity, the government must move beyond "honorariums" and institutionalize their rights through the Code on Social Security. Recognizing them as workers is not just an economic necessity but a moral imperative for a just republic.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/right-to-dignity-on-asha-and-anganwadi-workers-protests/article70542869.ece**

2. The Familiar World Order Will Not Return. What India and EU Can Build (IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- India-EU Relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Global Groupings (G20, TTC).

India–EU Relations in a Transforming World Order

Introduction

The strategic importance of India–EU relations was underscored by the presence of the European Council President and the European Commission President as chief guests at India's Republic Day and the concurrent EU–India Summit. This high-level engagement occurs against the backdrop of a shifting global order, characterized by geopolitical uncertainty, economic fragmentation, and the declining effectiveness of traditional multilateral institutions.

1. Nature of the Changing World Order

Weakening Transatlantic Framework- The traditional security and trade architecture led by the US is facing strain, creating a vacuum in global leadership.

Impact of Conflict- The Russia–Ukraine war has fundamentally altered the European security architecture and disrupted energy supply chains, forcing Europe to look for new partners.

China-Centric Vulnerabilities- There is a growing realization of the strategic risks associated with economic and technological over-dependence on China.

Decline of Multilateralism- Institutions like the WTO are facing paralysis, signaling a decline in rule-based multilateralism.

Rise of Multipolarity- The world is moving towards strategic autonomy and selective partnerships rather than rigid blocs.

2. Strategic Rationale for the Partnership

A. European Union's Perspective

Strategic Sovereignty- The EU aims to build capacity in defence, digital technologies, and critical supply chains to reduce reliance on external powers.

De-risking- A specific desire to reduce over-dependence on the US (for security) and China (for supply chains).

Indo-Pacific Pivot- The EU is actively searching for stable, democratic partners with large markets in the Indo-Pacific region, with India being a prime candidate.

B. India's Perspective

Foreign Policy Recalibration- India is adjusting its policy to navigate current geopolitical turbulence (e.g., balancing relations between the West and Russia).

Economic Transformation- India views external partnerships as essential tools to support domestic economic growth and technological modernization.

Strategic Autonomy- India seeks to maintain its independence while deepening ties, avoiding formal alliance entanglements.

3. Major Pillars of Cooperation

I. Trade and Economic Engagement

FTA Revival- Negotiations for the India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were revived in 2021 after a decade-long hiatus.

Current Status- The EU is already one of India's top trading partners and a leading source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Expected Benefits of FTA

a. **Market Access-** Expanded access for Indian goods and services in Europe.
b. **Investment-** Attraction of high-quality technology and capital.
c. **Value Chains-** Stronger integration of India into global value chains (GVCs).
d. **Resilience-** Improved supply-chain resilience against geopolitical shocks.

Connectivity- Collaboration on strategic connectivity projects like the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

II. Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation

Strategic Importance- Technology is now viewed as a determinant of geopolitical influence.

Shared Concerns- Both sides worry about the concentration of technological power (Big Tech monopolies) and the ethical implications of digital tools.

Institutional Mechanism- The establishment of the EU–India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to steer cooperation.

Priority Sectors

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI).
2. Semiconductor manufacturing.
3. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
4. Research and Innovation ecosystems.

Mobility- Expansion of programs to facilitate the movement of students, researchers, and scientists.

III. Defence and Security Cooperation

Emerging Partnership- Europe is becoming a key supplier for India's access to advanced defence platforms.

Strategic Alignment

1. EU- Needs defence modernization and rearmament.
2. India- Focuses on Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) and defence indigenisation.

Key Areas

1. Maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.
2. Cybersecurity and Space governance.
3. Joint Defence manufacturing and R&D.

Counter-Terrorism- Continued cooperation on intelligence sharing and capacity building.

IV. Role of Individual European States

France- A long-standing strategic partner in defence (Rafale, Scorpene), nuclear energy, and space.

Germany- A major economic engine with increasing engagement in defence.

Italy & Spain- Rising importance in trade and industrial collaboration.

Nordic Countries- Leaders in sustainability, green technologies, and innovation.

V. Cooperation in Global Governance

Rules-Based Order- A shared commitment to upholding international law.

Institutional Reform- Joint advocacy for reforming the UN Security Council, global financial institutions, and trade bodies.

Global Issues

a. **Climate Change-** Commitment to the Paris Agreement.
b. **Development-** Sustainable development initiatives in the Global South.
c. **Financing-** Infrastructure financing and development partnerships.

4. Key Challenges in the Partnership

Russia–Ukraine Conflict- Divergent voting patterns and positions (India's neutrality vs. EU's active opposition).

Geopolitical Balancing- India's continued relations with Russia vs. the EU's complex engagement with China.

Values Gap- Occasional friction regarding political values and human rights discourse.

Economic Barriers- Regulatory hurdles and market-access issues (e.g., EU's carbon tax/CBAM).

Perception- Influence of negative public narratives and perception gaps between the two regions.

5. Way Forward

FTA Conclusion- Prioritize the early conclusion of a balanced, forward-looking Free Trade Agreement.

Deepening Ties- Strengthen technology and defence industrial cooperation to move beyond buyer-seller relationships.

People-to-People- enhance academic exchanges and tourism to build cultural understanding.

Multilateral Coordination- Align positions in global forums to advocate for shared interests.

Pragmatism- Focus on shared interests rather than getting bogged down by ideological rigidity.

Conclusion

The old-world order defined by past alliances is fading. India and the EU must leverage this global turbulence as a strategic opportunity. By building a partnership anchored in democracy, strategic autonomy, and economic resilience, they can act as stabilizing forces and contribute meaningfully to shaping an inclusive, multipolar global order.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-familiar-world-order-will-not-return-what-india-and-eu-can-build-10491525/**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 27.01.2026

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1. Mind the time- On the financial burden of India's ageing population (TH) -1

2. Let's recover the lost meanings of Ganaraj to face the political challenge of our time (IE) -2

1. Mind the time- On the financial burden of India's ageing population (TH)

General Studies 1- Indian Society

Topic- Population and associated issues.

Sub Topic- Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Introduction

A recent RBI report has flagged the uneven nature of India's demographic transition, debunking the myth of a uniform nationwide demographic dividend. While southern states are rapidly ageing, northern states continue to see a surge in their working-age population. This divergence creates complex fiscal, political, and social challenges that require region-specific policy interventions rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

1. The Three-Speed Demographic Transition (Key Details)

The report categorizes states into three distinct groups based on their demographic trajectory-

Ageing States (The South)

States- Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Projection- By 2036, the elderly population will exceed 22% in Kerala and 20% in Tamil Nadu.

Implication- Immediate pressure on pension and healthcare systems.

Youthful States (The North/East)

States- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand.

Projection- Working-age populations will continue to grow well beyond 2031.

Implication- Massive demand for education, skilling, and job creation.

Transitional States (The Middle)

States- Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Status- Balancing fading demographic growth with emerging ageing pressures.

2. RBI's Fiscal Advice

For Ageing States- Rationalize subsidies to create fiscal space for rising pension and healthcare burdens.

For Youthful States- Invest heavily in human capital (Education & Health) to harvest the demographic dividend before the window closes.

3. Critical Analysis- The Political & Economic Dilemma

The Southern Disadvantage (Double Whammy)

Fiscal Penalty- Success in population control leads to reduced Central tax devolution (as Finance Commissions often use 2011 population data).

Political Penalty- Impending Delimitation threatens to reduce their parliamentary representation, punishing them for better governance

The Northern Trap (Unrealized Potential)

Stagnant Spending- Despite a "window of opportunity," education spending in youthful states has stagnated or declined.

Employability Crisis- Mere population growth without quality skilling leads to unemployment, not a dividend.

4. Challenges in the Changing Labour Market

Automation Threat- Youthful cohorts are entering the workforce just as AI and automation are disrupting traditional labor-intensive sectors.
RBI's Risk- The advice to expand labor-intensive sectors might be outdated, risking a scenario where states "age before getting rich."

5. Social Dimensions of Ageing

Feminization of Ageing- Women live longer but often possess fewer assets. Many were never part of the formal workforce, leaving them without pension coverage and financially dependent.
Erosion of Family Support- The RBI's assumptions rely on traditional family care for the elderly.
Reality Check- Migration and the rise of nuclear families are rapidly eroding this informal safety net.

6. Way Forward

Beyond Fiscal Measures- Fiscal consolidation alone cannot solve the crisis; a holistic approach is needed.
New Industrial Policy- Focus on generating large-scale employment in future-ready sectors like Green Energy and the Care Economy.
Proactive Systems for Youthful States- They must build healthcare and pension systems *now* to cushion the fiscal shock when their fertility rates eventually decline.

Social Security Expansion

Social Pensions- Must be significantly expanded to prevent old age from becoming synonymous with poverty.
Public Geriatric Care- Without a major expansion of public facilities, "graceful ageing" will become a luxury available only to the wealthy, deepening inequality.

Conclusion

India's demographic transition is not a singular national event but a fragmented process with distinct regional timelines. Addressing this requires a nuanced federal approach- balancing the fiscal needs of ageing states with the developmental urgency of youthful ones. Without robust social security and future-ready industrial policies, the demographic dividend risks turning into a demographic disaster.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-hindu-editorial-on-january-27-2026-mind-the-time/article70553485.ece

2. Let's recover the lost meanings of Ganaraj to face the political challenge of our time (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity
Topic- The Preamble, Significant provisions, and basic structure.
Sub Topic- Democratic ideals, Republicanism vs. Democracy, and Ethical Governance.

Introduction

Republic Day 2026 has reignited the debate on the true meaning of India as a 'Ganarajya' (Republic). While the Constitution and Indian passports use the term 'Ganarajya,' Republic Day is officially celebrated as 'Ganatantra Divas.' This distinction highlights a conflict between Ganatantra (Procedural Democracy) and Ganarajya (Normative/Ethical Republicanism), raising questions about the ethical soul of the Indian state.

1. Ganatantra- The Procedural View (The Limited Meaning)

Negative Definition- In political science, a "Republic" is often simply defined as a state where the head is not hereditary (unlike a monarchy). This definition is analytically weak because even authoritarian regimes can be republics.
Electoral Mechanism- In common usage, *Ganatantra* refers to the machinery of elections, representation, and majority rule.

Conceptual Redundancy- Since *Ganatantra* overlaps heavily with *Loktantra* (Democracy), it becomes a repetitive concept limited to procedures, lacking a deeper moral imagination.

2. Ganarajya- The Normative View (The Ethical Meaning)

Republic as a Moral Order- *Ganarajya* envisions the state not just as a system of governance, but as a community of equals.
Active Citizenship- Citizens are not passive voters but active custodians of power who hold rulers accountable.
Civic Virtue- The republic survives on shared ethical norms, civic responsibility, and public reasoning, not just laws.
Beyond Institutions- The strength of *Ganarajya* lies in the public conscience and moral restraints on power, rather than just in courts or parliament.

3. Indian and Global Republican Traditions

Western Republicanism- Historically, it emphasized "freedom as non-domination" (not being subject to the arbitrary will of another), rather than just the absence of a king.
Ancient Indian Parallels- Concepts like "Samanna-rajya" (rule by equals) existed in early India.
Caution- Ancient *Ganas* (like Vaishali) were lineage-based oligarchies, not modern mass democracies, but they still enrich our historical imagination of rule by discussion.
Continuity- Modern Indian republicanism is a blend of these civilizational ethics and modern constitutional values.

4. Jan-Gan-Man- The Indian Expression of Ganarajya

The article reinterprets the national anthem's trio of words to explain the Republic-
Jan (The People)- The ultimate source of sovereignty and legitimacy.
Gan (The Collective)- Represents citizens as a political community of equals, transcending fragmented identities (caste/religion).
Man (The Conscience)- Refers to the collective ethical conscience and moral judgment of the nation, which stands above temporary public opinion.

5. Contemporary Challenges & The 'Swadharm' of the Republic

Ethical Assault- Current political challenges are not just about "democratic backsliding" (weak institutions) but an assault on the ethical foundations of the republic.
Limits of Legal Defense- Merely defending the text of the Constitution is not enough if the values behind it lose public legitimacy.
Historical Roots- These values (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) were forged during the century-long freedom struggle, not just written in the Constituent Assembly (1946–49).
Swadharm (Ethical Duty)- The core duty of *Ganarajya* is to uphold equality, dignity, and freedom from domination.

Conclusion

To address modern political crises, India must move beyond the ritualistic celebration of *Ganatantra* (machinery of state) and recover the lost ethical meaning of Ganarajya (community of equals). The true defense of the Republic lies in active citizenship, civic virtue, and the preservation of its moral soul—its *Swadharm*.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yogendra-yadav-writes-lets-recover-the-lost-meanings-of-ganarajya-to-face-the-political-challenge-of-our-time-10496087/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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1. Manufacturing Woes- on Non-Fossil Fuel Capacity and PLI Schemes (TH) -1

2. India-EU FTA- After Two Decades of Negotiations, How India and EU Finally Clinched a Trade Deal This Time (IE) -2

1. Manufacturing Woes- on Non-Fossil Fuel Capacity and PLI Schemes (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Sub Topic- Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Infrastructure (Energy).

The Crisis in India's Clean Tech Manufacturing (PLI Schemes)

Introduction

India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was designed to transform the nation into a global manufacturing hub. However, as of early 2026, the push for solar and battery manufacturing is facing a "structural mismatch." While simple assembly is growing, the high-tech "brains" of these industries remain stagnant, threatening India's 500 GW renewable energy target.

1. The PLI Framework- Intent vs. Reality

The Model- Incentives are paid based on actual sales, not upfront costs. No targets met = no payment.

Goal- To slash import dependence and build global competitiveness.

The Gap- While the intent is solid, the execution is stumbling in high-tech segments.

2. Performance Disparity (Solar & Batteries)

Segment	Status (Mid-2025/Late-2025)	Why?
Solar Modules (Downstream)	56% of target achieved	Low tech-intensity; simple assembly.
Polysilicon/Wafers (Upstream)	10–14% of target achieved	High capital and extreme tech complexity.
Advanced Battery Cells	2.8% of target achieved	Only 1.4 GWh of 50 GWh commissioned.

3. Core Challenges & Bottlenecks

Structural Imbalance- It is much easier to assemble parts (downstream) than to create the raw materials (upstream).

The Knowledge Gap- Polysilicon and battery cells require decades of R&D and a specialized workforce that India currently lacks.

Strict Local Content Rules- "Domestic Value Addition" (DVA) norms (25% to 60%) are raising costs and causing delays for firms that aren't ready.

Geopolitical Friction- Visa restrictions on Chinese technicians (who lead the world in this tech) have slowed down the setup of Indian factories.

Gigafactory Hurdles- These massive plants require stable mineral supply chains and precision environments that take years—not months—to build.

4. Policy Design Flaws

Money over Merit- The government prioritized companies with strong balance sheets (large conglomerates) rather than firms with proven technical expertise.

Capital vs. Capability- The policy assumed capital subsidies alone would trigger growth, underestimating the time needed to learn complex chemical and physical processes.

Fiscal Stress- Many firms are now facing heavy financial penalties for missing PLI deadlines.

5. The Way Forward (Course Correction)

To avoid becoming a mere "assembler" of foreign parts, India must-

1. Prioritize Tech Know-how- Give more weight to R&D and technical experience in selection.
2. Flexible Norms- Relax local-content rules temporarily during the early learning phase.
3. Invest in People- Focus on long-term skill development and industrial ecosystems rather than just financial incentives.
4. Strategic Collaboration- Facilitate smoother technology transfer, even if it requires navigating sensitive geopolitical ties.

Conclusion

The PLI scheme has provided the initial spark, but "manufacturing capability cannot be bought overnight." Without addressing the upstream bottlenecks, India's green energy dreams remain vulnerable to global supply shocks.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/manufacturing-woes-on-non-fossil-fuel-capacity-and-pli-schemes/article70557957.ece

2. India-EU FTA- After Two Decades of Negotiations, How India and EU Finally Clinched a Trade Deal This Time (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topics- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The EU's Regulatory Regime- A New Trade Frontier

Introduction

Following the conclusion of the India-EU FTA in January 2026, the focus has shifted from "tariffs" to "regulations." While the agreement removes 99% of duties, the EU is increasingly using its regulatory power (The Brussels Effect) to shape global trade through environmental and social standards, creating a "non-tariff wall" for Indian exporters.

1. The "Brussels Effect" & Regulatory Strategy

Standard over Tariff- Unlike the US (which uses direct tariffs), the EU uses high standards in environment, labor, and safety to control market access.

Global Influence- Because the EU is a massive consumer market, Indian firms often must adopt these standards for *all* their production to maintain efficiency, effectively "outsourcing" India's regulation to Brussels.

Trade Deterrence- Complex documentation and traceability requirements act as a barrier, particularly for Indian MSMEs who lack the capital to comply.

2. Key Regulatory Pillars & Impact on India

Regulation	Objective	Specific Impact on India
CBAM (Carbon Border Tax)	Taxing carbon-intensive imports (Steel, Al, Cement).	Steel/Al exports likely to drop; price cuts of 15–22% needed to stay competitive.
EUDR (Deforestation)	Ban on products linked to forest loss (Coffee, Rubber).	Hits $1.3 billion in exports; difficult for small farmers to provide GPS-traceability.
CSDD (Due Diligence)	Monitoring human rights/environment in value chains.	Indian firms must share sensitive supplier data, raising privacy and cost concerns.

3. The Asymmetry Challenge

Marginal Gains- 80% of India's exports already faced <1% duty; thus, the FTA's tariff cuts offer limited "new" benefits compared to the high cost of new regulations.

Unbalanced Concessions- India is opening its market to high-value EU cars and machinery, while Indian goods face increasingly strict "process-based" scrutiny rather than just "quality-based" checks.

Input Costs- The EU's restrictions on steel scrap exports (recycling policy) make it harder for Indian mills to produce the "Green Steel" the EU demands.

4. Strategic & Geoeconomic Context

China De-risking- Both India and the EU seek to reduce reliance on Chinese supply chains, making the FTA a strategic necessity despite regulatory friction.

Labor-Intensive Boost- Immediate zero-duty access for Textiles, Footwear, and Marine products remains a major win for Indian employment.

Services Integration- The deal opens 144 EU service sub-sectors, aiding India's IT and professional services.

5. Way Forward- Toward Inclusive Cooperation

To ensure the FTA doesn't become "disguised protectionism," the following are essential-

1. Mutual Recognition- India must negotiate for the EU to recognize Indian domestic standards and certifications.
2. Standard Convergence- Developing "EU-ready" domestic reporting frameworks to reduce the burden on SMEs.
3. Technical Assistance- Securing EU funding (like the proposed €500mn mitigation fund) to help Indian industries decarbonize.
4. Data Security- Establishing clear protocols for data sharing under CSDD to protect commercial confidentiality.

Conclusion

The India-EU partnership can only thrive if trade liberalization is matched by regulatory fairness. Without addressing these "green barriers," the FTA risks becoming a lopsided agreement where tariffs go down, but the cost of entry goes up.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/how-india-eu-clinched-trade-deal-10496781/lite/

Editorial of the Day – 29.01.2026

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1. Mature and pragmatic - On India-EU FTA – (TH) -1
2. Can the right environment make animals 'smarter'? Expert Explains the larger lessons from a brush-wielding bovine – (IE) -2

1. Mature and pragmatic - On India-EU FTA – (TH)

General Studies 2 - International Relation **Topic -** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) 2026

Introduction

The conclusion of the India-EU FTA in January 2026 marks a historic shift from defensive trade protectionism to "interest-based bargaining." Covering a combined market of 2 billion people and nearly 25% of global GDP, this "mother of all deals" reflects India's maturity in negotiating as an equal with the world's most powerful rules-based economic bloc.

1. Key Trade Concessions & Liberalization

Asymmetric Advantage - EU Offer - Immediate tariff elimination on 99.5% of Indian exports.
India Offer - Tariff concessions on 97.5% of EU exports, preserving policy space for domestic industry.
Immediate Gains for India - Zero-duty access for labour-intensive sectors like textiles (down from 12%), leather, footwear, gems & jewellery, and marine products.
Industrial Inputs - Drastic cuts in Indian duties on EU machinery (up to 44% to 0%), chemicals, and pharmaceuticals will lower production costs for Indian manufacturers.

2. Sectoral Breakthroughs - Quota-Based Solutions

Instead of blanket cuts, the deal uses innovative Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) to balance market access with domestic protection -
Automobiles - Tariffs on EU luxury cars slashed from 110% to 10% for a quota of 250,000 units. Protects Indian mass-market producers while allowing high-tech European competition.
Wines & Spirits - Premium wine duties reduced from 150% to 20-30%. Spirits cut to 40% and Beer to 50%, shielding low-priced domestic segments.

3. Strategic Safeguards

Agriculture & Dairy - India successfully excluded sensitive sectors (dairy, cereals, poultry) to protect **farmer livelihoods** and rural food security.
EU Protections - The EU maintained protections on sensitive agri-lines like beef, sugar, and rice.
Intellectual Property - Balances strong protection for EU trademarks with India's right to produce **generic medicines** (safeguarding against patent evergreening).

4. Geoeconomic & Strategic Significance

Beyond Trade - Accompanied by parallel pacts on Mobility, Defence, and Technology, signaling a shift toward strategic interdependence.
Global Positioning - Positions India as a reliable alternative to China-centric supply chains amid rising global protectionism.
Industrial Upgrading - Exposure to strict EU standards (SPS/TBT) acts as a "push" for Indian firms to upgrade quality and technology.
Professional Mobility - Eased visa norms for Indian professionals (IT, business services) and students, addressing the EU's shrinking workforce.

5. Key Challenges & The Way Forward

The CBAM Hurdle - The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) remains a challenge as it was kept outside the FTA's direct scope. However, any future concessions given by the EU to third countries will automatically apply to India.

Regulatory Compliance - Indian MSMEs must rapidly adopt EU environmental and labour standards to avoid non-tariff barriers.

Ratification Speed - With the threat of U.S. trade volatility, both sides must fast-track domestic approvals (27 EU nations) to ensure implementation within 2026.

Conclusion

The India-EU FTA is a mature and pragmatic roadmap that delivers deep market access without compromising core national interests. It transforms India from a passive recipient of global trade rules into a proactive architect of them.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mature-and-pragmatic-on-india-eu-fta/article70562156.ece#google_vignette

2. Can the right environment make animals 'smarter'? Expert Explains the larger lessons from a brush-wielding bovine – (IE)

General Studies 2 - International Relation **Topics -** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Ecological Intelligence - The Silent Workforce of Nature

Introduction

The ongoing crisis in the Aravalli Range highlights a fundamental flaw in modern development - the failure to recognize "Ecological Intelligence." This concept views nature not as a resource to be extracted, but as an integrated system of "silent workers"—from ancient mountains to tiny ants—that sustain human civilization.

1. The Aravalli Range - India's Ecological Shield

Geological Sentinel - One of the world's oldest fold mountain systems, predating the Himalayas.

Desertification Barrier - Acts as a physical wall preventing the expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Water Reservoir - Critical for groundwater recharge in water-stressed regions like Delhi-NCR, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

Biodiversity Hub - Serves as a vital corridor for wildlife (e.g., leopards) and native flora.

Current Threats - Rampant mining, urban encroachment, and the dilution of environmental protection norms.

2. Nature's Invisible Workforce

The stability of our environment depends on the uncompensated "labor" of non-human species -

Trees as "Ecological Republics" - Functions as a micro-ecosystem supporting fungi, insects, and birds. Regulates local climate (Carbon sequestration) and enhances rainfall infiltration.

Ants as "Ecosystem Engineers" - Aerate the soil and recycle nutrients. Crucial for seed dispersal and maintaining soil fertility.

Birds as "Ecological Indicators" - Provide pest control and pollination. Their presence or absence is a primary signal of the health of an ecosystem.

3. Interconnectedness - Science Meets Philosophy

Modern Ecology - Validates the "Food Web" and "Nutrient Cycle" as empirical proof that no species exists in isolation.

Ancient Wisdom - Aligns with Indian philosophies like Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist "Interbeing," which reject the divide between humans and nature.

Habitat Fragmentation - Infrastructure projects (roads/mines) break these connections, leading to a collapse of ecological resilience.

4. The Human Cost of Alienation

Ecological Amnesia - Modern urban life creates a "manufactured disconnection" from the land, leading us to ignore the ecological memory stored in aquifers and soil.
Reactive Governance - Nature is often only valued *after* a disaster (floods/droughts) occurs, rather than being protected as a custodian of life.
GDP vs. Ecology - Formal economics fails to account for ecosystem services, treating environmental extraction as "growth" and replenishment as "cost."

5. The Way Forward

To transition from an exploitative model to one of Ecological Stewardship, India must -
Strengthen Legal Frameworks - Grant stricter protection to "Eco-Sensitive Zones" like the Aravallis.
Value Ecosystem Services - Integrate "Green Accounting" into national economic planning.
Restore Landscapes - Focus on native reforestation and the protection of wildlife corridors.
Listen to Nature - Move toward a development model that respects ecological limits and traditional wisdom.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis is not just a technical problem but a spiritual and cognitive one. Sustainable survival depends on recognizing that humans are part of a larger ecological network. Protecting the Aravallis is not just about saving rocks and trees; it is about securing the "infrastructure of life" itself.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/can-the-right-environment-make-animals-smarter-10495842/

Editorial of the Day – 30.01.2026

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1. **Is India prepared for the end of globalisation? (TH)** - 01
2. **US-China Commission to hold first 2026 hearing on India's Indo-Pacific role- All you need to know (IE)** - 02

1. Is India prepared for the end of globalisation? (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy **Topic-** Effects of Liberalisation on the economy; Changes in Industrial Policy.
Sub Topic- Globalisation and its impact on Indian society and economy; Bilateral & Global Groupings.

Globalisation as a Fractured Political System

1. Introduction

Globalisation was not merely an economic phenomenon but a political framework governing international relations.

Institutional Collapse- Multilateral institutions like the WTO are weakening, leaving global markets without a shared institutional anchor.

Shift to Mercantilism- Trade is increasingly viewed through the lens of power. Surpluses are seen as strength, while deficits are interpreted as strategic vulnerabilities.

Erosion of Liberal Values- The consensus on open markets and democratic norms is being replaced by transactional, power-centric bilateralism.

2. Historical Context & The Post-War Order

The current order relied on specific assumptions that are now being abandoned by the very powers that created them.

Assumed Restraint- The system relied on self-restraint by powerful states; today, unilateral actions (tariffs, sanctions) are the new norm.

Unequal Growth- Globalisation historically favoured the industrialised North through resource extraction. Post-WWII multilateralism provided a brief window of legitimacy that is now closing.

Restricted Mobility- While capital moved freely, the movement of people remained restricted, creating social tensions that eventually fuelled nationalist politics.

3. Major Shocks- China's Rise & Domestic Inequality

Two structural shifts accelerated the decline of the liberal order-

China's Disruptive Model- China integrated into the global market while maintaining state control over capital and information. Its excess capacity and trade surpluses weakened industrial prospects in developing nations like India.

Rising Inequality- Returns to capital grew faster than wages, leading to deindustrialisation in the West and growing public resentment against global integration.

4. India's Preparedness & Structural Paradox

India occupies a unique but uneasy position in this emerging order.

The Size vs. Power Gap- India is too large to be ignored but currently lacks the institutional and economic depth to decisively lead global outcomes.

Missed Demographic Window- Over the last 15 years, India has struggled to convert its demographic **dividend** into large-scale productive capacity, with a sharply stratified social pyramid.

Strategic Buffers- On the positive side, the Economic Survey 2025-26 highlights India's high forex reserves (covering 11 months of imports) and a diversified trade strategy (FTAs with UAE, EU, and Oman) as cushions against external shocks.

5. Way Forward- Strengthening the Internal Engine

To survive the end of globalisation, India must shift focus from external dependence to internal capability.

Enhance State Capacity- Drastic improvement is needed in health, education, and social investment to build a resilient workforce.

Strategic Domains- Focus on niches where India has a competitive edge- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), renewable energy, and services.

New Social Contract- Growth must be shared more equitably to ensure social cohesion, which is a prerequisite for national power in a mercantilist world.

Diversified Partnerships- Pursue "multi-alignment" (e.g., the India-EU FTA) to reduce over-reliance on any single coercive partner.

Conclusion

In a world where economic strength is increasingly tied to national capability, rhetoric cannot substitute for reform. For India to transition from an "Oasis of Stability" to a global leader, it must move beyond short-term macro-management and invest deeply in its institutions and people.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/is-india-prepared-for-the-end-of-globalisation/article70566036.ece

2. US-China Commission to hold first 2026 hearing on India's Indo-Pacific role- All you need to know (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation **Topics-** India and its Neighbourhood- Relations; Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Strategic Context- Shifting Global Power Structure

1. Introduction

Weakening Unipolarity- The post-Cold War era of U.S. dominance is fading, giving way to an Asian-centric world where India and China are projected to be the top two economies by 2050.

U.S. Executive Unilateralism- Frequent use of executive orders, tariffs, and sanctions has destabilized multilateral institutions like the WTO and increased global economic uncertainty.

Dollar Weaponisation- The U.S. uses its control over the SWIFT system to enforce financial coercion (e.g., against Russia and Iran), compelling nations like India and China to explore non-dollar trade settlements.

Threat to Strategic Autonomy- Sachs argues that India must resist being used in "U.S. games" (like the Quad for containment) to preserve its sovereign interests.

2. Economic Interdependence and De-risking

Record Trade Volumes- Despite political friction, bilateral trade hit a record USD 155.62 billion in 2025.

Structural Trade Deficit- India's trade deficit with China reached an all-time high of USD 116.12 billion in 2025, driven by critical imports in electronics, pharmaceuticals (APIs), and solar components.

Coexistence over Isolation- While India pursues "China+1" for manufacturing, total decoupling is deemed unfeasible. The strategy is moving toward De-risking—reducing critical dependencies while maintaining selective economic ties.

3. The Security Dimension- Border and Beyond

The LAC Impasse- The undefined Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains the primary friction point (e.g., Galwan 2020).

Colonial Legacy- Sachs describes the border dispute as a solvable "imperial legacy" (McMahon Line) that should not hold the future of two civilisational states hostage.

Crisis Management- Continued military talks (Corps Commander-level) and disengagement efforts are vital to prevent border incidents from escalating into regional instability.

4. Geopolitics and the "Divide and Rule" Strategy

Third-Party Manipulation- A stable India–China relationship is seen as a safeguard against external powers using divide and rule strategies to maintain hegemony in Asia.
Pakistan Factor- Sachs challenges the narrative of the China-Pakistan axis by noting that historical U.S. engagement with Pakistan often emboldened its military more than Chinese aid.
Strategic Balancing- India must balance its partnership with the West (for technology and security) while engaging in BRICS and SCO to influence a multipolar order.

5. Technological Sovereignty and Digital Power

Military-Industrial-Digital Complex- Modern power is increasingly defined by the fusion of AI firms, surveillance systems, and the military apparatus (e.g., SpaceX, Palantir).
Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)- India's success in DPI is a model for self-reliance, helping it maintains digital sovereignty against global data monopolies.
Space and AI Warfare- Cooperation or managed competition in AI and space is necessary to set global norms for autonomous weapons and data privacy.

Way Forward

Institutionalise Strategic Dialogue- Revive high-level political mechanisms (like the Special Representatives dialogue) to ensure predictability.
Border Stability as Priority- Pursue complete disengagement and restoration of peace along the LAC as a prerequisite for broader cooperation.
Strategic Autonomy in Finance- Diversify payment mechanisms and support non-dollar trade settlements through BRICS to hedge against financial sanctions.
Global South Leadership- Collaborate on climate finance, UNSC reforms, and WTO rules to amplify the voice of developing nations.

Conclusion

The future of the "Asian Century" depends on India and China moving from reactive rivalry to managed coexistence. As emerging superpowers, both nations must act as system stabilizers. By resolving bilateral irritants and resisting external manipulation, they can shape a multipolar, rules-based world order that reflects the realities of the 21st century.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/world/us-china-commission-to-hold-first-2026-hearing-on-indias-indo-pacific-role-all-you-need-to-know-10503288/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 31.01.2026

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1. A job well done - On the Economic Survey 2025-26 -1

2. India's cheapest power needs new buyers -2

1. A job well done - On the Economic Survey 2025-26 – (TH)

General Studies 3 - Economy **Topic -** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

SUB TOPIC - Government Budgeting (Economic Survey context).

Introduction

The Economic Survey 2025–26, presented by Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran, is distinguished by its data-driven, non-sensational, and balanced approach. Moving beyond rhetoric, it serves as a credible "early-warning policy document" that prioritizes realism over populism. The document outlines a medium-term governance framework, advocating for an "entrepreneurial state" that is agile and risk-taking to navigate a volatile global landscape while consolidating domestic stability.

1. Key Themes & Policy Thrust

The "Entrepreneurial State"

Concept - The Survey introduces the paradigm of an "entrepreneurial state" that moves away from risk-aversion.

Characteristics - It calls for a state that is agile, experimental, and willing to take calculated risks.

Policy Shift - It advocates for a culture where failure is accepted as a part of the learning process, arguing that this shift is essential for accelerating growth now that the COVID-19 shock is past.

Data-Driven Realism

Approach - The assessment is grounded in hard data rather than optimistic speculation.

Objective - To provide clear-eyed analysis that informs future-oriented policymaking during a period of relative domestic stability but high global uncertainty.

2. Global Outlook & Crisis Warnings

Global Economic Crisis Probability

Risk Assessment - The Survey flags a significant 10–20% probability of a severe global economic crisis in 2026.

Severity - It warns that this potential crisis could be worse than the 2008 financial crisis.

Best-Case Scenario - Even the most optimistic global scenario envisages a deterioration in economic conditions compared to 2025.

Domestic Resilience

Contrast - Despite global gloom, the Indian economy is portrayed as fundamentally strong.

Basis - This confidence is supported by robust domestic data, though the Survey candidly acknowledges emerging vulnerabilities that need addressing.

3. Macroeconomic Analysis

Currency Dynamics (Rupee Depreciation)

Root Cause - Depreciation is attributed to global capital flows shifting towards -

1. AI-driven economies.
2. Safe-haven assets.

Fundamental Strength - The Survey asserts that currency volatility does not reflect weak Indian fundamentals.

Trade-off - While a weaker rupee benefits exporters, it increases import costs (due to India's high import dependence), creating inflationary pressure.

Global Supply Chain Position

Current Status - Data reveals that India is not yet strategically indispensable in global merchandise supply chains.

Strategic Goal - The Survey pushes for "Strategic Resilience" as a stepping stone to achieving "Strategic Indispensability" in the long run.

4. Fiscal Dynamics - Centre vs. States

Centre's Performance

Fiscal Consolidation - The Central Government has significantly improved its finances, more than halving its fiscal deficit ratio over the last five years.

Goal - This creates fiscal space/flexibility to manage potential geopolitical or geoeconomic shocks.

State-Level Concerns

Revenue Deficits - Several States have slipped into revenue deficits, contrasting with the Centre's consolidation.

Populism Warning - The Survey explicitly warns against fiscal populism by States, specifically targeting unconditional cash transfers.

Political Context - This warning is particularly significant given that 2026 is a politically sensitive election year for multiple major States.

5. Emerging Non-Traditional Challenges

The Survey highlights several specific, often overlooked risks -

Food vs. Fuel - It flags risks to food security arising from aggressive Ethanol production targets.

Green Transition Costs - It questions the true economic costs of the transition to renewable energy, suggesting they may be higher than currently accounted for.

Livestock Crisis - It notes inadequate fodder availability, which is negatively impacting both agriculture and the livestock sector.

Digital Wellbeing - It raises concerns about the social and productivity impacts of "compulsive scrolling" and excessive smartphone usage.

6. The Way Forward

Bold Policy Stance - Move towards a risk-aware governance model that embraces experimentation with accountability.

Strategic Depth - Focus on building depth in manufacturing and supply chains to enhance India's global relevance and indispensability.

Fiscal Coordination - Strengthen Centre–State fiscal coordination, with a strong discouragement of short-term populist measures that threaten long-term stability.

Evidence-Based Interventions - Address the flagged non-traditional risks (digital behavior, food-energy trade-offs) using data-backed policies.

Living Document - Use the Survey not just as a one-time report but as a living guide that is continuously updated with real-time data feedback.

Conclusion

The Economic Survey 2025–26 is a credible, forward-looking roadmap rather than a political manifesto. Its core strength lies in its honest diagnosis, analytical restraint, and policy pragmatism. By balancing optimism about India's fundamentals with caution about global headwinds, it equips policymakers to navigate uncertainty while pursuing sustainable growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-job-well-done-on-the-economic-survey-2025-26/article70570585.ece

2. India's cheapest power needs new buyers – (IE)

General Studies 3 - Economy & Environment **Topics -** Infrastructure - Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. /

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

SUB TOPIC - Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests. / Climate Change Mitigation (Decarbonization, CBAM).

Introduction

India's power sector is witnessing a paradigm shift from historical scarcity to a surplus of low-cost renewable energy. With annual capacity additions of approximately 40 GW—among the fastest globally—the critical bottleneck has moved from generation to demand creation and market absorption. Nearly 42 GW of auctioned renewable projects await buyer utilities, highlighting the urgent need to expand the consumer pool beyond traditional DISCOMs to sustain the clean energy transition.

1. Structural Shift in India's Power Sector

From Scarcity to Surplus

Historical Context - Historically plagued by shortages, high tariffs, and financially stressed DISCOMs despite the Electricity Act, 2003.

Current Boom - India now installs ~40 GW of renewable capacity annually, driven by supportive policy, competitive auctions, and falling technology costs.

Cost Leadership - Indian solar and wind power costs are among the lowest globally, undercutting fossil fuel generation in many nations.

Falling Prices & Price Stability

Reverse Auctions - Competitive bidding has driven solar tariffs down to ~₹3 per unit, even for projects paired with energy storage.

Long-term Certainty - 12–25 year contracts shield consumers from price volatility.

Grid Reliability - Storage-backed projects now offer near round-the-clock (RTC) supply, overcoming intermittency issues

2. Institutional Reforms & Market Expansion

Expanding Beyond DISCOMs

New Bottleneck - The primary challenge is no longer generation, but finding buyers for awarded projects.

Open Access Framework - Allows large consumers to bypass local monopolies and buy power directly from generators by paying network charges.

Captive Procurement - Industries are increasingly investing in dedicated renewable plants for self-consumption.

Current Impact - Approximately 25% of new renewable capacity is now driven by open access and captive consumers.

Role of Utilities

DISCOM Evolution - Transitioning from mere bulk buyers to grid managers and reliability service providers, facilitating a more flexible market.

3. New Demand Sources for Clean Electricity

Industrial & Commercial Demand

Data Centers & Manufacturing - High energy-consuming, export-oriented sectors benefit from cost certainty and carbon competitiveness.

CBAM Compliance - Access to clean energy is crucial for exports to withstand the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

Electrification of Industrial Heat

Current State - ~50% of industrial energy demand is for process heat, currently reliant on imported fossil fuels.

Solution - Deployment of electric heat pumps and thermal batteries to shift this demand to clean electricity.

4. Sectoral Transformation

Fertilizers - Green ammonia (via renewable electricity) is becoming cost-competitive, reducing reliance on imported natural gas.

Steel Sector - Green steel using clean power is emerging as a viable alternative to coking coal, aided by falling costs.

Transport - Electric buses and freight corridors offer flexible demand that aligns well with daytime solar generation peaks.

Distributed Solar - Rooftop solar adoption by MSMEs and households lowers electricity bills, reduces peak demand, and cuts subsidy burdens.

5. Financing & Supply Chain Resilience

Financial Innovation

Aggregated Contracts - Bundling long-term contracts for securitization through dedicated finance platforms.

Fintech Integration - Leveraging India Stack and digital platforms to lower transaction costs for smaller consumers.

Manufacturing Ecosystem

Solar Success - Policy certainty and scale have significantly reduced dependence on imported solar panels.

Battery Challenge - While currently import-dependent, a similar scaling approach supported by critical mineral partnerships is feasible for the battery ecosystem.

Conclusion

India's energy transition has evolved from a capacity-building phase to a market-deepening phase. The path forward relies less on adding generation and more on building institutions and end-use demand. By expanding clean electricity adoption across industries, transport, and households, India can absorb surplus capacity, enhance energy security, and leverage its robust domestic demand to power the journey towards a Viksit Bharat.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-cheapest-power-needs-new-buyers-10504337/

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EDITORIALS

FEBRUARY – 2026

Editorial of the Day – 02.02.2026

Index

1. Credible and creditable- On Union Budget 2026-27 (TH) - 01
2. Corridor to future- High-speed rail, freight, one for rare earths (IE) - 03

1. Credible and creditable- On Union Budget 2026-27 (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topic- Government Budgeting and Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub Topic- Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026 represents a distinct shift in strategy, moving away from "Big Bang" tax-centric reforms towards a credible, diffused, and multi-sectoral approach. Amidst significant geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainty, the budget prioritizes stability and execution over disruptive policy shocks. It focuses on targeted interventions in manufacturing, MSME support, and a sustained capital expenditure push to bolster medium-term growth while maintaining fiscal prudence.

Overall Approach- Stability Over Disruption

Shift from Previous Trends- Unlike Budget 2025, which focused heavily on income-tax slab and rate cuts, Budget 2026 avoids headline-grabbing "Big Bang" announcements.
Strategic Rationale- It adopts a diffused, multi-sectoral strategy designed to sustain growth in a volatile global environment.
Risk Mitigation- The approach is tailored to avoid disruptive shocks, ensuring policy continuity and stability during uncertain times.

Manufacturing & Strategic Sectors

Seven Strategic Areas- The budget targets support for seven key manufacturing pillars- Biopharma, Semiconductors, Electronics, Rare Earths, Chemicals, Capital Goods, and Textiles.
Semiconductors & Electronics-

1. India Semiconductor Mission 2.0- Launched to build on previous successes.
2. Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme- Received higher allocation to enhance global competitiveness.

Biopharma Push- Biopharma SHAKTI Scheme- Allocated ₹10,000 crore over five years to position India as a global biopharma manufacturing hub.
Labour-Intensive Sectors- Specific focus on sectors like Textiles and Leather to generate employment.

Support for MSMEs and Exports

Champion MSMEs- A push to create "Champion MSMEs" through a combination of equity, liquidity, and professional support.
Economic Significance- MSMEs are critical, contributing 48.6% of India's exports.
Trade Resilience- Domestic support is prioritized because potential Free Trade Agreements (e.g., EU FTA) may not immediately offset losses from rising global protectionism (e.g., U.S. tariffs).
Tariff Considerations-

1. Pharma Exemption- Indian pharmaceuticals notably remain exempt from U.S. 50% tariffs.
2. Urgency- Sectors vulnerable to tariffs need faster policy support.
3. Execution Lesson- The budget stresses time-bound execution for textile initiatives, citing past delays in the National Export Promotion Mission.

Services Sector & Employment

Education-Employment Linkage- A proposal for a high-powered 'education to employment and enterprise' standing committee to bridge the skills gap.

Healthcare & Tourism- Emphasis on healthcare and medical tourism, capitalizing on India's emerging strengths in these areas.

Capital Expenditure & Infrastructure

Capex-Led Growth- The government continues its heavy lifting on investment due to persistently weak private investment sentiment.

Record Allocation- Capital expenditure is raised to ₹12.2 lakh crore, approximately 4.4% of GDP—the highest in a decade.

Key Projects- Includes funding for Dedicated Freight Corridors, new Skill Training Institutes, and a Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme.

Regional & Election-Specific Measures

Targeted Announcements- The budget opts for smaller, region-specific projects rather than large, unconditional packages.

Key Initiatives-

1. **Rare Earth Corridors-** Planned for **Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu**.
2. **Kerala-** A dedicated **Coconut Promotion Scheme**.
3. **West Bengal-** Development of an **East Coast Industrial Corridor**.
4. **Odisha-** Announcement of a **New National Waterway**.

Fiscal Management & Tax Policy

Fiscal Deficit- Targeted at 4.3% of GDP for 2026–27, a slight improvement from 2025–26, signalling fiscal consolidation.

Direct Taxes-

1. Status Quo- No major direct tax cuts for individuals or corporates to preserve fiscal stability.
2. Simplification- Focus remains on procedural simplification rather than rate cuts.

Indirect Taxes- Relaxations provided to boost marine, leather, and textile exports and support the energy transition.

Revenue Projections-

1. Corporate Tax- Projected to grow nearly 14%.
2. Income Tax- Modest growth of 1.9%, reflecting the impact of earlier rate cuts.
3. GST- Gross GST revenue projected to fall 13.5%, due to rate rationalization and the end of the Compensation Cess.

Conclusion

Budget 2026 is characterized as a credible and creditable exercise in pragmatism. While it may disappoint those seeking populist tax reliefs, it offers a balanced roadmap that prioritizes stability, execution, and resilience. By combining a record capex push with targeted support for manufacturing and MSMEs, it seeks to navigate global uncertainties while laying the groundwork for sustained medium-term growth.

Way Forward-

1. Execution- Ensure time-bound implementation of sectoral schemes (especially Textiles & MSMEs).
2. Flexibility- Maintain fiscal flexibility to respond if global uncertainties intensify.
3. Reforms- Accelerate services sector reforms, particularly in education-employment linkages.
4. Diversification- Strengthen export diversification to mitigate external tariff shocks.
5. Monitoring- Improve execution capacity to prevent delays seen in previous missions.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/credible-and-creditable-on-union-budget-2026-27/article70578790.ece**

2. Corridor to future- High-speed rail, freight, one for rare earths (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy & Environment

Topics- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Sub Topic- Railways (High-Speed Rail, Dedicated Freight Corridors).

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026 has unveiled a transformative infrastructure agenda anchored by three critical corridor types- seven High-Speed Rail (HSR) lines, a new East–West Dedicated Freight Corridor, and strategic Rare Earth Corridors. These initiatives are designed as "growth connectors" to integrate major economic hubs, enhance logistics efficiency, and secure India's strategic mineral independence. By linking transport modernization with industrial resource development, the government aims to catalyse sustainable growth and regional balance.

High-Speed Rail (HSR) Corridors- The Growth Connectors

Definition & Scope-

1. High-Speed Rail- Refers to passenger trains operating at speeds above 250 km/h, mirroring the efficiency seen in the *Shinkansen* (Japan) and China's HSR network.
2. Objective- To significantly reduce travel time between key metropolises and foster regional economic integration.

Seven Proposed Corridors- The network focuses on the high-density economic zones of Western, Southern, and Northern India-

1. Mumbai – Pune
2. Pune – Hyderabad
3. Hyderabad – Bengaluru
4. Hyderabad – Chennai
5. Chennai – Bengaluru
6. Delhi – Varanasi
7. Varanasi – Siliguri

Economic Impact-

1. Multiplier Effect- Accelerates urbanization, boosts real estate and tourism, and facilitates service-sector expansion.
2. Cluster Development- Transforms connected cities into integrated mega-economic clusters.
3. Institutional Learning- Leverages technological and project management insights from the ongoing Mumbai–Ahmedabad Bullet Train project (slated for full completion by 2029).

Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC)- Enhancing Logistics

Strategic Need- India's logistics cost stands at 13–14% of GDP, significantly higher than global benchmarks (8–10%). Reducing this cost is crucial for making Indian exports competitive.

New East–West Corridor-

1. Route- Connects Dankuni (West Bengal) to Surat (Gujarat).
2. Function- Links the mineral-rich eastern regions with the industrial and export hubs of the west, streamlining the movement of raw materials and finished goods.

Operational Benefits-

1. Decongestion- Separates heavy freight traffic from passenger lines, enhancing safety and punctuality for passenger trains.
2. Multimodal Integration- Complements PM Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy by enabling seamless connectivity between road, rail, and ports.

Rare Earth Corridors- Strategic Mineral Security

Strategic Importance- Rare earth elements (REEs) are the backbone of modern technology, essential for electronics, EVs, renewable energy, defense systems, and semiconductors.

Geopolitics- Reducing import dependence (especially from China) is vital for Strategic Autonomy.

The "Corridor" Concept-

1. **Locations-** Focused on mineral-rich states- Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.
2. **Goal-** To move beyond mere extraction to a complete value chain development—including processing, research, and manufacturing.
3. **Alignment-** Directly supports Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat by securing critical raw materials for domestic high-tech industries.

Waterways & Multimodal Connectivity

New National Waterways- Announcement of 20 new national waterways to better connect mineral belts with industrial centres and ports.

Economic & Environmental Logic-

1. Cost Efficiency- Inland water transport is significantly cheaper than rail or road for bulk cargo (coal, minerals, cement).
2. Sustainability- It is more energy-efficient and has a lower carbon footprint.

Last-Mile Synergy- Integration with rail and road networks ensures a seamless supply chain, removing bottlenecks at transfer points.

Sustainable & Balanced Regional Development

Regional Equity- The focus on Eastern (Odisha, WB) and Southern India helps bridge regional development disparities. Linking "lagging regions" with established "growth centres" promotes inclusive growth.

Green Mobility- Shifting traffic to HSR and waterways reduces overall carbon emissions, aligning with India's climate change commitments (Panchamrit).

Urban Planning- Encourages Smart Growth and planned urbanization along corridors, helping to decongest existing mega-cities.

Employment- Generates massive employment opportunities during the construction phase and sustains long-term jobs through industrial expansion.

Conclusion

The proposed corridors represent a strategic shift towards integrated, future-ready infrastructure. They are not just transport lines but economic arteries designed to support India's ambition of becoming a $5 trillion economy. However, realizing this vision will hinge on coordinated planning, effective land acquisition reforms, and robust private sector participation.

Way Forward-

1. Execution- Fast-track land acquisition and environmental clearances.
2. Funding- innovative financing models (e.g., asset monetization, green bonds) to fund these capital-intensive projects.
3. Technology- Ensure technology transfer for HSR and rare earth processing to build long-term domestic capabilities.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/business/union-budget-2026-27-corridor-to-future-high-speed-rail-freight-one-for-rare-earths-10508120/lite/**

Editorial of the Day – 03.02.2026

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1. A full stop- On the top court, the right to menstrual health and hygiene (TH) - 01
2. 'Would like infra projects to come up in all sectors, involve more private finance' MoF Expenditure Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam (IE) -02

1. A full stop- On the top court, the right to menstrual health and hygiene (TH)

General Studies 2- Polity
Topic- Fundamental Rights
Sub Topic- Significant provisions (Article 21), Rights issues.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgment, has expanded the ambit of Article 21 (Right to Life) to include Menstrual Health and Hygiene, terming it an integral part of human dignity and bodily autonomy. This ruling marks a paradigm shift from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based governance model, directly addressing "menstrual poverty" and its adverse impact on girls' education. The Court has issued stringent directives to States and Union Territories to ensure school sanitation and hold authorities accountable for non-compliance.

Key Constitutional Interpretations (The Judgment)

Expansion of Article 21- The Court declared that the Right to Life and Personal Liberty inherently includes the right to menstrual health and hygiene. Menstruation is recognized not just as a biological process but as a matter of dignity, autonomy, and equality.
Rights-Based Approach- The judgment moves beyond viewing menstrual aid as "charity" or "welfare."
Bodily Autonomy- The Court ruled that true autonomy cannot be exercised without access to-

1. Functional and private toilets.
2. Clean water.
3. Affordable menstrual products.
4. Hygienic disposal systems.

Defining "Menstrual Poverty"- The Court explicitly used the term "Menstrual Poverty" to describe the lack of access to these basic facilities.

1. **Impact on Education-** It noted that this poverty restricts girls' Right to Education and violates their Right to Equality (Article 14) compared to male students and economically privileged peers.
2. **State Responsibility-** The State is legally bound to eliminate the stigma, stereotyping, and humiliation often faced by menstruating girls.

Directives Issued to States & UTs

Mandatory Infrastructure- All States and Union Territories must ensure functional, gender-segregated toilets in *every* school (Government and Private). Facilities must include water, sanitation, and disposal mechanisms.
Strict Accountability & Punitive Measures-

1. **Government Schools-** The State Government will be held directly accountable for any lapses or failures in providing these facilities.
2. **Private Schools-** Non-compliance can lead to severe penalties, including derecognition of the school.

Ground Reality & Structural Gaps

Data Insights (NFHS-5)- While there is improvement (77.3% of women aged 15–24 use hygienic methods), nearly one-fourth (25%) still lack access. This highlights a deep gendered inequity in health infrastructure.

Policy Gaps

1. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan-** While guidelines exist, implementation has been uneven and episodic.
2. **Role of NGOs-** non-governmental organizations have filled critical gaps, but their efforts are **fragmented** and insufficient to tackle the scale of the problem or dismantle entrenched social stigma.

Way Forward (Systemic Action)

Institutionalization- Move from project-based interventions to making menstrual hygiene a core public health and education priority.

Budgetary Support- Ensure dedicated funds for-

1. Free/Affordable Menstrual products.
2. Sanitation infrastructure maintenance.
3. Waste management systems.

Curriculum Integration- Integrate menstrual health education into school curricula to normalize conversations and reduce stigma for both boys and girls.

Inter-Ministerial Coordination- Foster collaboration between the Ministries of Health, Education, Jal Shakti (Sanitation), and Women & Child Development.

Monitoring Mechanism- Strengthen monitoring systems to ensure continuous compliance by both public and private schools.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's judgment is a historic intervention that transforms menstrual health from a "women's issue" to a fundamental human rights issue. By mandating state accountability and linking menstruation to the constitutional guarantees of dignity and education, the verdict aims to ensure that "a period can end a sentence, not a girl's education."

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-full-stop-on-the-right-to-menstrual-health-and-hygiene/article70583236.ece#google_vignette**

2. 'Would like infra projects to come up in all sectors, involve more private finance'- MoF Expenditure Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy & Environment

Topics- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. & Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Sub Topic- Ports & Shipping (Shipbuilding Mission, Maritime Development Fund).

Introduction

In a strategic move to diversify India's infrastructure portfolio beyond roads and railways, the Government of India has unveiled a massive ₹69,000 crore Shipbuilding Mission and Maritime Development Fund. Announced in the backdrop of the Union Budget 2026, this initiative aims to reduce India's heavy reliance on foreign shipping, cut logistics costs, and catalyze private sector participation through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). The strategy reflects a shift from pure budgetary funding to a "partnership-driven development" model, emphasizing logistics efficiency and self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

Strategic Shift in Infrastructure Spending

Diversification Goal- While roads and railways have historically dominated capital expenditure (Capex), the government is now pivoting towards shipping, coastal logistics, power, and rail station redevelopment.

Financing Model Transformation- Moving away from pure budgetary support to private finance and PPP models. Shift from traditional EPC (Engineering, Procurement, Construction) contracts to risk-sharing models like HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) and BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer).
Rationale- PPP models incentivize long-term maintenance and better construction quality, preventing premature asset deterioration.

Shipbuilding Mission & Maritime Development Fund

Core Issue- Currently, only 5% of India's EXIM (Export-Import) cargo is carried by Indian-owned ships, leading to massive foreign exchange outflows in freight and leasing costs.

₹69,000 Crore Mission

Objective- To bolster domestic shipbuilding capacity for large vessels, coastal ships, and auxiliary maritime assets.
Strategic Impact- Reduces dependence on foreign fleets and strengthens national maritime security.

Maritime Development Fund (MDF)

1. **Function-** Designed to provide long-term finance and risk mitigation for private players entering the capital-intensive maritime sector.
2. **Goal-** To create a conducive financial ecosystem that encourages private investment in shipping.

Logistics Efficiency- expanding domestic shipping is projected to substantially lower India's logistics cost, which currently stands at 13–14% of GDP.

Coastal Shipping & Multimodal Logistics

Cost & Green Efficiency- Coastal shipping is identified as a fuel-efficient and low-cost alternative to road and rail for transporting bulk goods.
Environmental Impact- Supports India's climate commitments by offering a lower carbon footprint compared to land transport.
Integration- Pilot projects are underway to link rail–road–port connectivity, enhancing last-mile efficiency and multimodal integration.
'Make in India' Boost- Indigenous shipbuilding will generate skilled employment and foster technological capabilities, complementing the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision.

Infrastructure Capex- Current Profile & Private Role

Roads & Railways Dominance- These sectors receive the bulk of Capex due to mature project pipelines and the capacity to absorb funds (e.g., constructing ~10,000 km of highways annually).

PPP Success Stories

1. **Highways-** The Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) has effectively mobilized private capital, with renewed interest in BOT projects.
2. **Railways-** Redevelopment of stations (e.g., Bhopal Railway Station) showcases how private participation can enhance service quality and asset monetization.

Land Monetisation- Railways plan to unlock value by redeveloping prime land near major stations (e.g., New Delhi) to ensure financial viability.

Power Sector Dynamics

Reduced Budgetary Reliance- The power sector no longer features in the top five Capex recipients because CPSUs (Central Public Sector Undertakings) now fund projects through internal resources.
Autonomy- Maharatna and Navratna CPSUs utilize their delegated financial powers to invest without direct budget support.
Strategic Exceptions- The government continues to fund specific strategic projects, such as large hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh.

High-Speed Rail & Future Financing

Cost Challenges- Projects like the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail are capital-intensive due to elevated corridors and advanced technology.

Indigenization Path- Costs are expected to fall with the development of indigenous coaches (up to 280 kmph) and signaling systems.
Future Funding- Future corridors will rely on innovative financing packages, including multilateral funding and PPP elements, justified by long-term gains in urbanization and productivity.

Fiscal Federalism (16th Finance Commission)

Vertical Devolution- The Commission has retained the 41% tax devolution share to states, ensuring fiscal stability.
Horizontal Reforms-

1. **New Criterion-** Inclusion of "GDP contribution" as a metric to reward state efficiency and economic performance.
2. **Balancing Act-** Aims to balance redistributive justice (equity) with incentives for growth (efficiency).

Resource Pool- States are encouraged to view these recommendations not as zero-sum losses but as expanding opportunities within a growing national revenue pool.

Conclusion

The announcement of the Shipbuilding Mission marks a pivotal evolution in India's infrastructure strategy—from state-led expansion to partnership-driven development. By activating the Maritime Development Fund and leveraging PPP frameworks, the government aims to solve the twin challenges of high logistics costs and external dependency. This diversified approach, supported by fiscal federalism and indigenous manufacturing, sets the stage for a resilient, $5 trillion economy.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/business/vumlunmang-vualnam-expenditure-secretary-ministry-finance-projects-sectors-involve-private-finance-10510176/

Editorial of the Day – 04.02.2026

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1. AI's next investment cycle belongs to applications (TH) - 01
2. Delhi HC issues notice to govt- What rules govern frozen embryo donation, why they have been challenged (IE) - 02

1. AI's next investment cycle belongs to applications (TH)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology
Topic- Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life (Artificial Intelligence).
Sub Topic- AI Commercialization & Startups.

Introduction

The AI industry is undergoing a pivotal shift from an initial phase of "infrastructure hype" (building massive models and hardware) to a mature phase of application-led profitability. Similar to the internet era, where value shifted from bandwidth to websites/apps, the next investment cycle in AI is focused on real revenues, enterprise adoption, and sustainable business models. The core narrative has moved from "experimental performance" to "measurable financial returns."

The Strategic Shift- Infrastructure to Applications

The Profitability Challenge-

Performance vs. Profit- The industry's challenge has shifted from proving AI works to proving it can be profitable.

Infrastructure Saturation- Massive spending on GPUs and data centres ($320 billion in 2025) has not guaranteed sustainable returns.

Foundation Model Economics- Companies building foundation models face thin margins due to high inference costs and fierce competition.

Example- Despite $13 billion in annualized revenue, OpenAI recorded a $5 billion loss in 2024, highlighting the unsustainability of a model reliant on venture capital.

Rise of Applications-

1. Spending Shift- AI applications now account for the majority of generative AI spending, reaching $19 billion in 2025.
2. Market Penetration- Within three years of ChatGPT's launch, AI apps captured over 6% of the global software market.

Where Real Value Is Emerging

Departmental AI & Coding Tools-

1. Coding Dominance- AI coding tools contributed $4 billion to the $7.3 billion departmental AI market in 2025.
2. Adoption Rates- ~50% of developers use these tools daily, rising to 65% in top-performing firms.
3. Value Proposition- Investors now Favor "task-oriented AI" (doing specific jobs) over generic "conversational AI."

Vertical-Specific Solutions-

1. The strongest long-term potential lies in specialized solutions for healthcare, law, finance, and manufacturing.
2. Success comes from being deeply embedded in workflows rather than acting as standalone interfaces.

Investment Signals & Market Trends

M&A Activity

1. Meta's Acquisition- The $2 billion acquisition of Manus (which reached $125 million revenue in 9 months) underscores the demand for proven, revenue-generating applications.
2. Private Equity Surge- PE deals in AI apps grew by 65% (Q3 2025), with strategic M&A deal values rising 242% year-on-year.

Revenue Concentration

"Winner Takes Most"- Over 10 AI products now earn >$1 billion in Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR), and ~50 products generate >$100 million.

Metrics Matter- Investors have returned to core metrics- revenue, retention, growth, and profitability, moving away from speculative tech bets.

Market Dynamics- Applications Driving Infrastructure

Demand Pull- Applications are now the primary drivers of demand for models and infrastructure.

Shifting Leadership- Anthropic has captured 40% of enterprise LLM spending, largely due to its dominance in coding applications (54% market share). OpenAI's enterprise share has declined despite its early lead.

Margin Improvement- Generative AI reached a 34% contribution margin in 2025 (its first profitable year). Margins are projected to rise to 67% by 2028 as efficiency improves, with profits flowing to end-to-end solution providers.

Policy and Regulatory Challenges

Competition Concerns- Governments must monitor vertically integrated giants (model providers building their own apps) to prevent them from squeezing out smaller developers. "Acqui-hires" pose a risk to innovation and workforce stability.

Legal Frameworks-

1. Copyright & Data- Disputes over training data and intellectual property are central legal concerns.
2. Privacy- Frameworks must adapt to "AI Agents" that handle sensitive data autonomously.

Regulatory Balance- Over-regulation at the application layer could stifle the very innovation that is driving the industry's economic value.

Conclusion

The AI industry is entering a decisive "monetization phase." The era of funding "raw capacity" is ending; the future belongs to scalable, practical applications that solve real-world problems and generate external revenue. Just as the internet was monetized through applications like e-commerce and social media rather than fibre-optic cables, AI's long-term value lies in useful, workflow-embedded software.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ais-next-investment-cycle-belongs-to-applications/article70588552.ece**

2. Delhi HC issues notice to govt- What rules govern frozen embryo donation, why they have been challenged (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topics- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Sub Topic- Reproductive Rights, Health Policy, Judicial Activism, Bio-ethical concerns in medical technology.

Introduction

The Delhi High Court has recently brought the spotlight onto India's reproductive laws by issuing a notice on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). This PIL challenges specific provisions of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, which currently prohibits the donation of surplus frozen embryos for reproductive use. The petitioners argue that mandating the destruction of viable embryos, even when both the donor and recipient couples consent to donation, is arbitrary and unconstitutional. This case opens a critical debate on the intersection of bioethics, reproductive autonomy, and state regulation.

Key Details of the PIL & Issue

The Challenge- The PIL questions the statutory mandate that requires the destruction of surplus frozen embryos instead of allowing them to be donated to other infertile couples.

Legal Conflict- While the ART Act, 2021 explicitly permits sperm and oocyte (egg) donation, it inexplicably bars the donation of embryos for reproductive purposes.

Public Health Scale- With infertility affecting an estimated 27–30 million couples in India, access to Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is a significant public health necessity.

Constitutional Basis- The plea invokes Articles 14 (Right to Equality) and 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), alleging that the prohibition is arbitrary and violates the "decisional autonomy" of couples.

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)- Concept & Context

Definition- ART encompasses medical procedures used to address infertility, including IVF (In-Vitro Fertilization), ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection), and gamete donation.

India's Growth Story- India has become a global hub for ART due to-

1. Rising infertility rates.
2. Delayed marriages and lifestyle diseases.
3. Growth of medical tourism (affordable, high-quality care).

Regulatory Vacuum- Historically, the absence of laws led to the exploitation of surrogates/donors and the mushrooming of unregulated clinics, necessitating the 2021 Act.

Global Best Practices- Countries like the UK, Australia, and parts of the European Union allow embryo donation, governed by strict ethical frameworks that prioritize informed consent.

The ART Act, 2021- Restrictive Provisions

Clinic Regulation- Mandates the registration of all ART clinics and gamete banks to ensure standardization, accountability, and safety.

Permitted Donations- The Act allows altruistic donation of sperm and oocytes. It even permits "double donor IVF," where a child is conceived using both a donor sperm and a donor egg (meaning neither intending parent has a genetic link).

Storage Rules- Surplus embryos can be cryopreserved (frozen) for a maximum of 10 years.

The Prohibition- After the 10-year period (or if the couple no longer needs them), the embryos must be destroyed or donated for research. Transferring these frozen embryos to another infertile couple for reproductive use is strictly banned, even with consent.

The Medical Perspective- Frozen Embryos

Surplus Generation- To maximize success rates, IVF cycles typically generate multiple embryos. Since only one or two are implanted, "surplus" embryos remain.

Biological Viability- Frozen embryos, upon thawing, are considered biologically equivalent to fresh embryos and are successfully used in pregnancies worldwide.

Cost & Access- Full IVF cycles are expensive and physically demanding. Embryo Donation offers a significantly cheaper and less invasive alternative for infertile couples who cannot produce their own gametes.

The Disconnect- Current Indian law treats these biologically viable embryos as "non-transferable" waste, contradicting their medical potential.

Constitutional Challenges (The Legal Argument)

Article 14 (Right to Equality)-

1. Arbitrary Classification- The plea argues that allowing "fresh" donor embryos (created via separate sperm and egg donation) while banning "frozen" embryo donation creates an unreasonable classification.
2. Double Standard- If genetic non-linearity (raising a child not genetically yours) is legal in "double donor IVF," why is it illegal when using a frozen embryo?

Article 21 (Personal Liberty)

Decisional Autonomy- The right to make reproductive choices—including how to dispose of one's biological material (embryos) or how to become a parent—is part of the fundamental right to privacy and dignity.

Judicial Review- The Court is tasked with determining if this differentiation by the State is "constitutionally reasonable" or merely a relic of conservative policymaking.

Ethical & Social Dimensions

Destruction vs. Life Potential- Mandating the destruction of viable embryos raises ethical questions about wasting potential life that could help another family.

Infertility & Equity-

1. **Widening Options-** Donation could provide a lifeline for women unable to produce viable eggs or couples with severe male factor infertility.
2. **Class Divide-** Wealthier couples can bypass these laws by seeking treatment abroad, while poorer couples are left without options, deepening social inequality.

Consent Framework- The petitioners emphasize that the process should be based on voluntary, altruistic, and informed consent from both the donor and recipient, mitigating fears of commercialization.

7. State Regulation vs. Individual Autonomy

State's Rationale- The ban likely stems from a desire to prevent-

1. Commercialization- Buying and selling of embryos (though the plea argues for *donation*, not sale).
2. Legal Complications- Disputes over parentage or future claims by biological parents.

Paternalism Concerns- Critics argue that the State is being "over-paternalistic," restricting personal freedom and dignity under the guise of protection.

The Balancing Act- The judiciary must balance the State's interest in preventing unethical practices with the individual's liberty to make reproductive decisions.

Role of Courts- As seen historically, courts often step in to update laws when statutory frameworks lag behind technological advancements and changing social realities.

Conclusion

The debate over frozen embryo donation illustrates the tension between technological possibility and regulatory caution. The current blanket ban appears to be legally inconsistent and ethically wasteful. A nuanced policy shift—moving from prohibition to a strictly regulated, consent-based donation framework—could uphold reproductive rights while maintaining ethical safeguards. As the Delhi High Court examines the matter, the outcome could redefine the boundaries of reproductive autonomy and medical law in India.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/delhi-hc-notice-rules-frozen-embryo-donation-10510446/**

Editorial of the Day – 05.02.2026

Index

1. Has the 16th Finance Commission sidelined the States and prioritised the Centre's needs? (TH) - 01
2. For India-Pakistan, peace is not weakness, dialogue is not defeat - 03

1. Has the 16th Finance Commission sidelined the States and prioritised the Centre's needs? (TH)

General Studies 2- Polity
TOPIC- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
SUB TOPIC- Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure (Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels).

Introduction

The Sixteenth Finance Commission (2024–29) has been constituted by the President of India to define the fiscal architecture of the nation for the next five years. It is tasked with recommending the sharing of central taxes, determining grants-in-aid, and suggesting measures to enhance the financial stability of States. This commission is particularly significant as it operates in the context of emerging global and domestic challenges such as climate change, shifting population dynamics, and the need for long-term fiscal sustainability.

Constitutional Framework & Nature

Constitutional Mandate- Established under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution.
Authority- It is a Quasi-Judicial and Constitutional body.
Appointing Authority- Constituted by the President of India.
Frequency- Appointed every five years (or earlier if considered necessary by the President).
Nature of Recommendations- Advisory in nature (not binding). However, due to their constitutional sanctity, they are generally accepted by the Union Government.
Primary Goal- To ensure the equitable distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States, acting as a key pillar of Fiscal Federalism.

Composition and Appointment

The Commission is a multi-member body appointed by the President, consisting of-
Chairperson- Head of the Commission.
Four Members- Selected based on expertise in specific fields-

1. Public Finance
2. Economics
3. Law
4. Public Administration

Tenure- Normally five years, as specified in the presidential order.

Core Functions & Mandate

The Commission acts as the balancing wheel of the Indian fiscal system through four distinct functions-
Vertical Devolution- Recommending the distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Centre and the States.
Horizontal Devolution- Determining the principles for distributing the share of taxes among the respective States.
Grants-in-Aid- Governing the principles for grants-in-aid to States out of the Consolidated Fund of India (**Article 275**).

Local Government Support- Suggesting measures to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of Panchayats and Municipalities based on State Finance Commission recommendations.

Devolution Criteria (The Formula)

The Commission employs specific criteria to ensure fairness in **Horizontal Devolution**-

Income Distance

1. Purpose- To address regional inequalities.
2. Logic- States with lower per capita income compared to the state with the highest income receive a higher share.

Population

1. Purpose- To reflect the expenditure needs of the state.
2. Logic- Higher population implies higher demand for public services.

Area

1. Purpose- Accounts for administrative costs.
2. Logic- Larger states have higher costs of delivering services across vast territories.

Forest and Ecology-

1. Purpose- Compensates States for ecological conservation.
2. Logic- Recognizes the opportunity cost of maintaining forest cover (which restricts development) for the national good.

Demographic Performance-

1. Purpose- Rewards population control measures.
2. Logic- Incentivizes states that have successfully lowered fertility rates.

Fiscal Discipline-

1. Purpose- Incentivizes responsible financial management.
2. Logic- Rewards states that manage their deficits and revenue generation efficiently

Grants-in-Aid Mechanisms

Beyond tax sharing, the Commission recommends specific grants to cover gaps-

Revenue Deficit Grants- Targeted at states that still face a deficit in their revenue account even after-tax devolution.

Local Body Grants- Directed towards strengthening the third tier of government (Panchayats and Municipalities).

Sector-Specific Grants- Funds tied to critical sectors to ensure minimum standards of service-

1. Health
2. Education
3. Disaster Management
4. Infrastructure

Emerging Trends & Focus Areas

The 16th Finance Commission is evolving to address modern realities-

Performance-Based Incentives- A shift from entitlement-based transfers to outcome-based rewards.

Climate Change & Environment- Explicit focus on sustainable development and climate resilience in funding criteria.

Demographic Transition- Balancing the needs of states with growing populations against those with aging populations.

Defence & Security- Increasing consideration for non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security modernization.

Fiscal Sustainability- Emphasis on debt consolidation and adhering to fiscal deficit targets.

Significance

Regional Balance- It promotes balanced regional development by transferring resources from richer to poorer regions.

Macroeconomic Stability- Ensures that the division of resources does not compromise the fiscal health of the Centre or States.

Conflict Resolution- Acts as a stabilizing force in Centre-State relations by providing an objective formula for resource sharing.

Way Forward- Strengthening Fiscal Federalism

To remain effective, the 16th Finance Commission must adopt the following strategies-

Enhance Predictability- Ensure stability in tax devolution to allow States to plan long-term projects. Reduce reliance on ad-hoc transfers.

Update Devolution Criteria- Regularly revise criteria (like using the latest Census data appropriately) to reflect changing socio-economic realities while balancing equity with efficiency.

Build State Capacity- Support States in improving their own Tax Effort and Public Financial Management (PFM). Encourage the adoption of Outcome-Based Budgeting.

Empower Local Governments- Ensure direct and timely transfers to Panchayats and Municipalities. Link these grants to visible service delivery outcomes.

Address Emerging Challenges- Mainstream concerns like urbanization, aging populations, and climate change into the core fiscal transfer formula.

Consultative Approach- Promote wider and more transparent consultation with States before finalizing recommendations to uphold the spirit of Cooperative Federalism.

Conclusion

The Finance Commission remains the cornerstone of India's fiscal architecture, tasked with the delicate balancing act of aligning national priorities with State autonomy. As India progresses towards a $5 trillion economy, the 16th Finance Commission's ability to adapt its framework to emerging challenges—specifically climate change and demographic shifts—will be crucial for sustaining inclusive growth and maintaining federal harmony.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/data/has-the-16th-finance-commission-sidelined-the-states-and-prioritised-the-centres-needs/article70592338.ece

2. For India-Pakistan, peace is not weakness, dialogue is not defeat

General Studies 2- Polity

TOPICS- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

SUB TOPIC- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Introduction

The trajectory of India-Pakistan relations has recently resurfaced in diplomatic discourse, centering on a critical debate- Can calibrated dialogue coexist with firm security measures to break the cycle of perpetual hostility? While relations remain largely frozen due to the "trust deficit" and cross-border terrorism, there is a growing realization that complete disengagement in a nuclearized region carries high risks of miscalculation. The current discourse advocates for a shift from high-stakes summit diplomacy to an incremental, issue-based engagement strategy.

Historical Trajectory- A Legacy of Mistrust

The relationship has been defined by a cycle of hope followed by betrayal, creating deep-seated strategic mistrust.

Post-Independence Rivalry- Since the traumatic Partition of 1947, relations have been punctuated by four major wars (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999) and the enduring Kashmir dispute.

Pattern of Disruption- Historical peace initiatives have consistently been derailed by terror events-

1. The Lahore Declaration (1999) was followed immediately by the Kargil Conflict.
2. The Agra Summit (2001) and subsequent composite dialogues were undermined by the 2001 Parliament attack and the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The Core Obstacle- India maintains a rigid stance that terrorism is the central issue, and dialogue is futile without credible, verifiable action against Pakistan-based terror groups.

Security Concerns & India's Strategic Position

India's policy has evolved from "diplomatic protest" to "active deterrence," driven by a Doctrine of Accountability.

Security Assurances Precede Talks- Terror attacks on strategic installations like Pathankot (2016) and Pulwama (2019) solidified the view that security guarantees are a prerequisite for engagement.

Legitimacy Concerns- India fears that unconditional dialogue without accountability risks legitimizing hostile actions by the Pakistani deep state.

Shift to Deterrence- Operations like the Surgical Strikes (2016) and Balakot Airstrikes (2019) signalled a paradigm shift- India is willing to use punitive force short of full-scale war.

Limits of Hard Power- While deterrence is essential for security, military posturing alone cannot resolve long-term instability or prevent accidental escalation in a volatile environment

The Risks of "No Dialogue" in a Nuclearized Region

While silence is often seen as a diplomatic tool, total disengagement creates its own set of dangerous vulnerabilities.

Communication Vacuum- The absence of formal diplomatic channels increases the risk of misinterpreting moves, potentially leading to unintended military escalation.

Hyper-Nationalism & Rhetoric- In the absence of official dialogue, social media-driven rhetoric and domestic political pressures can hijack the narrative, escalating tensions rapidly.

Regional Volatility- South Asia lacks robust crisis-management mechanisms. Without a hotline or backchannel, even limited border incidents can spiral out of control.

Strategic Stasis- Silence is not neutrality; it is stagnation. It allows positions to harden and hostilities to fester rather than resolve.

The Case for Incremental & Layered Engagement

The emerging consensus suggests moving away from "Summit-Centric" diplomacy (which is high-profile and fragile) to "Layered Engagement" (which is low-profile and resilient).

People-to-People Contacts- Encouraging cultural exchanges, sports, academic collaboration, and medical visas helps humanize the "other" and counter state-sponsored stereotypes.

Low-Risk Engagement

1. Religious Tourism- Facilitating pilgrimages (e.g., Kartarpur Corridor).
2. Student/Artistic Exchanges- These pose minimal security risks but build immense social capital.

Expanding the Peace Constituency- Such engagement strengthens the hands of moderate voices within Pakistan who favour stability over the military-mullah complex's hostility.

Framework for Conditional & Calibrated Dialogue

The way forward is not "unconditional friendship" but a "conditional working relationship."

Engagement $\neq$ Endorsement- Talking to Pakistan does not imply approval of its policies; it is a strategic investment in conflict prevention.

Clear Benchmarks- India can set measurable conditions for progress, such as-

1. Verifiable action against proscribed terror groups (e.g., LeT, JeM).
2. Curbing anti-India hate rhetoric.

Reciprocity- The approach should be transactional. Limited Pakistani compliance should be met with proportional Indian responses (e.g., starting Track-II talks or limited sporting ties).

Flexible Diplomacy- Moving from a binary "All or Nothing" approach allows for flexibility without compromising on core principles of territorial integrity and security.

Role of Regional & Issue-Based Multilateralism

Given the bilateral deadlock, alternative platforms offer a "neutral ground" for engagement.

SAARC Limitations- Bilateral hostility has effectively paralyzed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), rendering it ineffective.

Humanitarian & Technical Cooperation- Engagement can restart in non-political, shared vulnerability areas-

1. Climate Change & Disaster Relief- Both nations face similar climate threats.
2. Pandemic Response- Health cooperation.
3. Indus Waters Treaty- Utilizing existing mechanisms for water-sharing discussions.

Logic- Cooperation in these functional areas builds trust without touching the "third rail" of political disputes.

Conclusion

India's diplomatic challenge lies in balancing uncompromising security concerns with pragmatic engagement. Permanent Disengagement risks conflict escalation through miscalculation. Unconditional Dialogue risks moral hazard by rewarding bad behaviour.

The Middle Path- A calibrated approach—firm on terrorism, flexible on people-to-people contact, and incremental in confidence-building—offers the most realistic path forward. Dialogue, when structured carefully, is not a concession of defeat but a strategic necessity for regional stability.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/for-india-pakistan-peace-is-not-weakness-dialogue-is-not-defeat-10514220/

Editorial of the Day – 06.02.2026

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1. More, and less- On Budget 2026 and health-care spending (TH) - 01
2. In India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification guidelines, teeth hold the key (IE) - 02

1. More, and less- On Budget 2026 and health-care spending (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance & Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Sub Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026–27 presents a mixed bag for India's health sector. While it introduces forward-looking initiatives like Biopharma SHAKTI to boost R&D and manufacturing, the overall allocation remains modest. Despite a nominal increase in absolute numbers, the budget draws criticism for missing the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 target of increasing public health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP by 2025. The focus has shifted towards tertiary care, research, and workforce development, even as concerns persist regarding the declining central share in primary health missions.

Overall Financial Allocation & Trends

Total Allocation- ₹1.05 lakh crore allocated for the health sector.
Year-on-Year Growth- This represents a 10% increase over the Revised Estimates (RE) of the previous year.
Share of Total Budget- Health spending accounts for only 1.9% of total government expenditure.
Share of GDP- The allocation stands at approximately 0.26% of GDP, significantly lower than the global average and domestic targets.

Key Initiatives & Schemes

Biopharma SHAKTI (Strategic Investment)

Launch- A flagship scheme launched with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over five years.
Objective- To position India as a global hub for biologics and biosimilars manufacturing.
R&D Focus- Aims to address long-standing gaps in health research and development capacity, moving beyond generic drug manufacturing.
Clinical Trials- Plans to establish 1,000 accredited clinical trial sites nationwide to accelerate drug discovery and testing.

Institutional Expansion & Modernization

NIPERs- Three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPERs) will be set up, and seven existing units will be modernized.
Mental Health Infrastructure- A second campus for NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) is planned in North India. Upgradation of two existing institutions into national mental health institutes.

Human Resources for Health (Capacity Building)

The budget acknowledges the demographic shift and the need for specialized care-
Allied Health Professionals- A target to train 1 lakh allied health professionals over the next five years to support doctors and nurses.
Elderly Care- Training for 1.5 lakh elderly care workers announced.
Significance- This is a timely intervention as India transitions towards a "grey nation" (aging population) due to falling fertility rates, requiring robust geriatric care.

Affordability & Relief Measures

Specific fiscal measures were introduced to reduce the out-of-pocket expenditure burden on patients-

Customs Duty Exemptions- 17 cancer drugs and specific treatments for rare diseases have been exempted from customs duties.

Tax Relief on Remittances- The Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on remittances for medical treatment and education abroad has been reduced from 5% to 2%.

Impact- These measures are expected to significantly lower the cost of life-saving treatments for critical illnesses.

Critical Analysis & Concerns

Despite the positive steps in R&D, structural issues remain unaddressed-

Missed NHP Target- The government has failed to meet the National Health Policy 2017 commitment to raise public health spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2025. Current spending is roughly one-tenth of this target.

National Health Mission (NHM) Cuts- Reduced allocation for the NHM is a major concern, as it serves as the backbone of primary healthcare in rural India.

Contradiction- Funding was cut despite strong utilization rates by states in the previous fiscal.

Declining Central Role- There is a trend of declining Central share in health spending, shifting the burden to States. These risks creating uneven health outcomes, where richer states have better healthcare than poorer states.

Equity Issues- The focus on high-end biopharma and tertiary institutions may overshadow the urgent need for strengthening primary healthcare centres (PHCs) and sub-centres.

Conclusion

The Budget 2026–27 signals a strategic pivot towards health security, research, and specialized workforce creation, aligning with India's pharmaceutical ambitions. However, the foundational goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) faces risks due to inadequate aggregate spending. Without a substantial increase in public investment to bridge the gap towards the 2.5% GDP target, the twin goals of affordability and equity for the common citizen may remain elusive. The path forward requires balancing high-tech R&D with robust funding for primary care missions.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/more-and-less-on-budget-2026-and-health-care-spending/article70596060.ece#google_vignette

2. In India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification guidelines, teeth hold the key (IE)

General Studies 3- Disaster Management

Topics- Disaster and Disaster Management.

Sub Topic- Institutional Framework, Preparedness, and Response Mechanisms.

Introduction

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has released India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This landmark development aims to standardize the scientific identification and dignified handover of victims in mass fatality incidents. By adopting global best practices, India seeks to move beyond ad-hoc identification methods to a systematic, forensic-driven approach, ensuring legal certainty and psychological closure for grieving families.

Key Details & Significance

First National Framework- These are the first official guidelines establishing a uniform protocol for DVI across India.

Global Standards- The guidelines adopt Interpol's DVI standards, recognizing Dental records, DNA, and Fingerprints as the primary scientific identifiers.

New Integrations- For the first time, Forensic Odontology (teeth analysis) and Forensic Archaeology are formally integrated into India's disaster response mechanism.

Strategic Proposal- A recommendation has been made for a National Dental Data Registry to expedite future identifications.

Understanding Disaster Victim Identification (DVI)

Definition- The scientific process of identifying human remains following mass fatality incidents (e.g., earthquakes, floods, air crashes, industrial disasters).

Importance-

Humanitarian- Ensures the dignity of the deceased and provides closure to families.

Legal- Resolves issues related to inheritance, insurance claims, and criminal liability.

Administrative- Prevents misidentification and legal disputes.

The Four-Stage DVI Process (NDMA Guidelines)

The guidelines outline a systematic four-step workflow to ensure accuracy and chain of custody-

Stage 1- Recovery of Remains- Systematic retrieval at the disaster site. Tagging, documentation, and preservation to prevent the "commingling" (mixing) of body parts.

Stage 2- Post-Mortem Data Collection (PM)- Detailed examination of the remains. Collection of fingerprints, dental profiling, DNA sampling, and recording physical marks (scars, tattoos).

Stage 3- Ante-Mortem Data Collection (AM)- Collection of "before death" data from families and authorities. Includes medical/dental history, photographs, personal belongings, and DNA samples from relatives.

Stage 4- Reconciliation & Handover- Matching AM and PM data scientifically. Formal confirmation of identity by a board of experts. Dignified release of remains to the next of kin.

Role of Forensic Odontology (Why Teeth Matter)

High Survivability- Teeth are the hardest substance in the human body; they can withstand extreme heat, trauma, and decomposition where fingerprints and facial features are destroyed.

Unique Identifier- Dental patterns are unique to individuals.

Proven Success- Used extensively in the 2004 Tsunami, 9/11 attacks, and various aviation disasters.

Case Study- In the Air India Crash (Ahmedabad), forensic odontology was crucial in identifying over 250 victims from charred remains.

Strategic Proposals & Emerging Tools

National Dental Data Registry

Purpose- To create a centralized database of dental records.

Benefit- Allows for instant matching of ante-mortem records during mass disasters, significantly reducing identification time.

Challenges- Requires addressing data privacy concerns and standardizing dental reporting formats across clinics.

Forensic Archaeology

Definition- Application of archaeological methods to locate, exhume, and analyse buried or scattered remains.

Utility- Critical for landslides, earthquakes, and forest recoveries where remains are hidden or buried.

Current Application- Already being used in North East India (Arunachal, Manipur, Tripura) to recover WWII soldier remains.

Gaps & Challenges in Current Framework

Institutional Coordination- Lack of a dedicated DVI Incident Commander often leads to chaotic and fragmented responses at ground zero.

Skilled Workforce Shortage- Severe scarcity of trained Forensic Anthropologists, Odontologists, and DNA experts. Existing labs are often overburdened.

Operational Flaws- Inconsistent tagging of bodies. Weak Chain of Custody (tracking evidence handling). Poor documentation leading to misidentification.

Climate Change Factor- Increasing frequency of extreme weather events (floods, heatwaves) accelerates decomposition, making identification harder and time-sensitive.

Alignment with Disaster Governance

Sendai Framework- The guidelines align with the global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, emphasizing "Build Back Better" and institutional resilience.

Dignity-Centric Approach- Shifts the paradigm from just "rescue and relief" to the "ethical handling" of the dead.

Technology Integration- Encourages the use of Virtual Autopsy (non-invasive), GIS Mapping for body location, and Biometric Tools.

Conclusion

The release of India's first DVI guidelines is a critical step towards humane, scientific, and accountable disaster management. It addresses a long-standing gap in India's disaster response architecture. However, the roadmap to success lies in-

1. Infrastructure Investment- Upgrading forensic labs and storage facilities.
2. Capacity Building- Training specialized personnel in forensic odontology and anthropology.
3. Data Integration- establishing the National Dental Data Registry.

As climate-induced disasters become more frequent, robust DVI capabilities are not just a technical necessity but a moral imperative to uphold human dignity and public trust.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/india-first-disaster-victim-identification-guidelines-10515916/

Editorial of the Day – 07.02.2026

Index

1. Cycles of revolt- On Pakistan and the Baloch rebels (TH) - 01
2. Oil and beyond- With Russia, India has to balance old ties, new realities (IE) - 03

1. Cycles of revolt- On Pakistan and the Baloch rebels (TH)

General Studies 3- Internal Security
Topic- Security challenges and their management in border areas.
Sub Topic- Linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

Introduction

Baluchistan, Pakistan's largest and most resource-rich province, is currently witnessing a severe intensification of its long-standing insurgency. The region has grabbed international headlines due to a series of coordinated militant attacks by separatist groups and heavy-handed military reprisals by the Pakistani state. This "Cycle of Revolt" is driven by a complex mix of historical grievances, economic exclusion from multi-billion-dollar projects like the CPEC, and allegations of severe human rights violations, posing a significant challenge to regional stability and strategic projects like the Gwadar port.

Geographic and Strategic Profile

Baluchistan is the strategic pivot of Pakistan's geography, offering connectivity to the Middle East and Central Asia.

Geography

Size- Largest province, covering ~44% of Pakistan's land area (~347,190 sq km).
Borders- Shares critical borders with Iran (West) and Afghanistan (Northwest), and has a long coastline along the Arabian Sea (South).
Topography- Diverse landscape featuring the Sulaiman and Kirthar mountains, Chagai hills (site of nuclear tests), and the arid Kharan Desert.
Climate- Arid to semi-arid with extreme temperature variations (hot summers, cold highland winters).
Resources- Rich in natural capital including Coal, Copper, Gold (Reko Diq mine), Chromite, and Natural Gas.

Strategic Assets

a. Gwadar Port- A deep-sea port that is the crown jewel of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
b. Rivers- Dasht, Hingol, and Zhob (mostly seasonal).

The Current Crisis- Escalation of Violence

The province has seen a shift from low-level insurgency to high-intensity, coordinated warfare.
Recent Attacks (Jan 31)- The Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched coordinated strikes, resulting in the deaths of over 30 civilians and 18 security personnel.
Military Reprisal- The Pakistani military responded with large-scale operations, reportedly killing 150 Baloch fighters. However, these reactive measures have historically failed to secure long-term peace.

Tactical Shift

a. Consolidation- Rebel groups, including the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), have formed an umbrella organization called Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS) to execute unified operations.
b. Persistence- Despite operations following incidents like the Jaffar Express hijacking (March 2025), the insurgency remains resilient.

Drivers of the Insurgency

The unrest is fuelled by a combination of internal suppression and regional instability.

State Coercion- The Pakistani state's prolonged reliance on brute force rather than political engagement has hardened resistance.
The 'Taliban' Effect- The security situation along the tribal borderlands deteriorated significantly after the Taliban takeover in Kabul.
Operational Void- Baloch rebels and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are exploiting the chaotic security environment to launch hit-and-retreat attacks.

Economic Grievances & Strategic Context

A sense of "relative deprivation" is central to the conflict; locals feel they are owners of a rich land but live in poverty.
The CPEC Dilemma- Baluchistan hosts the flagship $60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Locals perceive CPEC as an exploitative project where jobs and resources go to outsiders (primarily from Punjab or China) while they face checkpoints and displacement.
Resource Exploitation- Disputes exist over the extraction of minerals (Gold, Copper) and proposed deals with foreign firms (including American companies). Lack of Transparency- There is a severe lack of transparency in how revenues from these projects are shared with the local population.

Human Rights & State Response

The state's counter-insurgency strategy has drawn international criticism.
"Kill and Dump" Policy- Crackdowns have led to widespread allegations of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detentions of activists and students.
External Blame Game- Islamabad frequently blames India for fomenting unrest to deflect from its own governance failures, often without providing verifiable evidence.
Accountability Deficit- There is a near-total lack of internal accountability for military excesses in the province.

Historical Patterns

Recurring Conflict- Since accession in 1948, Baluchistan has witnessed five major rebellions.
Failed Strategy- The state's response has consistently been military-centric, which achieves only temporary lulls in violence before the next, more intense cycle of revolt begins.

Way Forward- The Path to Peace

To break the cycle, a paradigm shifts from "Security-centric" to "People-centric" is required.
Political Reconciliation- Prioritize dialogue with Baloch nationalist groups over military elimination.
Economic Inclusion- Ensure transparent development where local communities are primary beneficiaries of CPEC and mineral projects. Address the feeling of economic exclusion by guaranteeing a fair share of royalties.
Rule of Law- End the practice of enforced disappearances. Monitor and audit security operations to prevent human rights abuses.
Democratic Engagement- Encourage local participation in decision-making to reduce political alienation.

Conclusion

The turmoil in Baluchistan is a stark reminder that military action alone cannot extinguish an insurgency rooted in genuine political and economic grievances. Sustainable peace requires Pakistan to dismantle its coercive apparatus and adopt a strategy of inclusion, transparency, and accountability. Without a political solution that respects the rights of the Baloch people, the province risks remaining a zone of perpetual conflict, threatening the stability of the entire region.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cycles-of-revolt-on-pakistan-and-the-baloch-rebels/article70600138.ece

2. Oil and beyond- With Russia, India has to balance old ties, new realities (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topics- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
Sub Topic- India's Foreign Policy – Strategic Autonomy and Balancing Power Blocs.

Introduction

The delicate balance between India's Energy Security and Global Geopolitics has come into sharp focus following recent US claims linking tariff reductions to a potential halt in India's Russian oil imports. While India has significantly benefited from discounted Russian crude since the Ukraine conflict, evolving geopolitical pressures and sanctions are reshaping its energy basket. The Indian government maintains that its policy is guided by "energy security and diversification" rather than political pressure, highlighting its commitment to Strategic Autonomy.

The Shift in India's Energy Basket

Pre-Conflict Status- Before the Ukraine war, Russian oil accounted for less than 2% of India's total crude imports due to high logistics costs.
Peak Dependence (2025)- Driven by deep discounts, Russia's share surged to 35–40% of India's oil imports at its peak.
Current Status (Jan 2026)- Russia remains the largest supplier, accounting for ~22% of imports, though volumes are declining.
Economic Buffer- Cheap Russian oil played a crucial role in-

a. Managing domestic inflation.
b. Reducing the fiscal deficit.
c. Keeping fuel prices stable during global volatility.

Recent Decline- Sanctions & Market Trends

The decline in imports is driven more by operational constraints than a shift in policy.
Sanctions Impact- US sanctions on major Russian entities like Rosneft and Lukoil have complicated payments and shipping, causing imports to drop from 2.09 million barrels per day (bpd) in June 2025 to ~1.16 million bpd in January 2026.
Locked-in Contracts- Despite pressure, immediate cessation is impossible as Indian refiners have booked cargoes through March–April 2026.
Future Projections- Analysts predict a "calibrated reduction" rather than a total halt, with imports likely stabilizing around 500,000 bpd (approx. 10% of total imports).
Structural Dependence- Nayara Energy, which processes 400,000 bpd and is partly owned by Rosneft, remains structurally dependent on Russian crude.

Challenges in Replacing Russian Oil

Replacing Russian crude is not just a geopolitical decision but a technical and economic challenge.
Crude Compatibility- Russian/West Asian Oil- Mostly Medium-Sour crude, which Indian refineries are designed to process. US Oil- Mostly Light-Sweet crude, which yields different by-products and may not optimize Indian refinery margins.
Logistical Costs- Shipping oil from the US to India takes much longer and costs double compared to routes from the Persian Gulf or Russia.
Supply Constraints

a. Venezuela- While its crude is suitable, production is capped at ~1 million bpd with high US domestic demand.
b. West Asia- Reliance on traditional suppliers (Iraq, Saudi Arabia) risks concentration risk and reduced bargaining power.

Strategic Autonomy & Geopolitical Balancing

India's stance is a textbook example of Realpolitik.

Sovereign Decision Making- India resists external coercion, maintaining that energy purchases are sovereign economic choices essential for a country importing 85% of its oil needs.

Balancing Act

a. With the US- India manages relations to avoid secondary sanctions while negotiating on tariffs.
b. With Russia- Maintaining energy ties preserves a long-standing defence partnership and prevents Russia from drifting entirely into China's orbit.

MEA's Stance- The Ministry of External Affairs emphasizes "Diversification without Dependence," rejecting alignment-driven exclusion of any specific country.

Way Forward- A Multi-Pronged Strategy

Calibrated Reduction- India is likely to pursue a gradual, market-driven reduction in Russian imports rather than an abrupt political halt.

Diversification- Expanding long-term contracts with diverse suppliers (e.g., Brazil, Guyana, Africa) to mitigate supply shocks.

Infrastructure Upgrade- Increasing Refinery Flexibility to process a wider range of crude types (including US light sweet).

Strategic Reserves- enhancing Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to buffer against geopolitical volatility.

Green Transition- Accelerating the shift to Renewable Energy to reduce long-term dependence on fossil fuel imports.

Conclusion

India's energy strategy is a pragmatic exercise in survival and sovereignty. While geopolitical currents are forcing a reduction in Russian oil imports, India's approach ensures this transition is market-driven rather than politically coerced. By prioritizing affordability and reliability, India continues to uphold its strategic autonomy, proving that in a multipolar world, national interest supersedes alliance politics.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/oil-and-beyond-with-russia-india-has-to-balance-old-ties-new-realities-10516168/

Editorial of the Day – 09.02.2026

Index

1. Messaging power- on a healthy digital marketplace (TH) - 01
2. Does banning access to social media for minors under 16 really protect them? (IE) - 03

1. Messaging power- on a healthy digital marketplace (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
Sub Topic- Important aspects of governance, transparency, and accountability; E-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has recently intensified its scrutiny of Meta Platforms LLC and WhatsApp regarding their controversial 2021 privacy policy update. This update mandated data sharing between WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta (Facebook/Instagram), presenting users with a "take-it-or-leave-it" ultimatum. The case, arising from an appeal against a ₹213.14 crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), highlights critical issues regarding market dominance, network effects, and the urgent need for a dedicated Digital Competition Law in India.

Key Details

Judicial Scrutiny- The Supreme Court questioned the fairness of the 2021 policy that forced users to share data with Meta platforms to continue using the service.
The Penalty- The core of the dispute is the ₹213.14 crore fine levied by the CCI for abuse of dominant position, which Meta is currently appealing.
Market Reality- The Court acknowledged WhatsApp's near-universal presence in India, noting that the app has become indispensable for personal, social, and business communications.
Core Conflict- The tension lies between a private corporation's right to monetize its platform and the users' right to privacy and informed choice within a monopolistic market.

Supreme Court's Observations

The Court made several critical observations regarding WhatsApp's leverage over Indian consumers-
Inescapable Utility- It noted that functioning in modern India—whether for coordinating groups, running small businesses, or maintaining social ties—is "nearly impossible" without WhatsApp.
Network Effects- The platform's power is derived from its strong network effect; the service is valuable primarily because "everyone else is on it," creating a barrier to exit for users.
Coercive Consent- The Court questioned the validity of consent when the alternative is effectively social and economic exclusion.

Background of the Legal Dispute

2021 Policy Update- WhatsApp introduced a policy update that allowed cross-sharing of user metadata (location, device info, etc.) with Facebook and Instagram to facilitate advertising and business messaging.
The Ultimatum- Unlike previous updates, users were not given an option to opt-out. They had to accept the terms or stop using the app.
Regulatory Backlash- This aggressive stance triggered opposition from civil society, the Indian government, and the CCI, leading to the antitrust penalty for abusing dominant market position.

WhatsApp's Role & Contributions

Despite the controversy, the analysis acknowledges WhatsApp's transformative role in India-

Democratization of Communication- Backed by Meta's infrastructure, WhatsApp provided free messaging and calling, replacing the expensive SMS and voice call models of telecom operators (pre-2016).

Accessibility- It lowered entry barriers, requiring only an internet connection and a phone number.

a. Privacy Expectations- The adoption of end-to-end encryption was a significant step for user privacy, especially in a country with a history of extensive state surveillance.
b. Right to Revenue- The analysis clarifies that there is no dispute over WhatsApp's fundamental right to earn revenue; the dispute is over the *method* (forced data harvesting).

Concerns over Monetization & Data Use

Deep Integration- WhatsApp is deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of India. Any shift to an aggressive advertising-driven data model warrants strict regulatory scrutiny.

Lack of Viable Substitutes- While competitors like Signal, Telegram, and Arattai exist, they lack the "universal user base" of WhatsApp. The utility of a messaging app depends on who else uses it, making migration difficult for individuals.

Global Precedence- Competition regulators worldwide have increasingly opposed platforms that impose non-negotiable data-sharing terms on locked-in users.

Limitations of Remedial Measures

Inadequacy of "Opt-Out"- Simply allowing users to "opt-out" of data sharing is viewed as insufficient at WhatsApp's scale.

Default Option Bias- Behavioural economics suggests that most users will stick to default settings due to inertia or lack of technical understanding. Therefore, "consent" obtained through default opt-ins is often illusory.

Structural Power- Individual remedies fail to address the structural power imbalance between a global tech giant and an individual user.

Need for Stronger Digital Competition Law

The case serves as a grim reminder of the legislative gap in India's digital governance-

Legislative Lag- A Draft Digital Competition Law was released in 2024, but there has been little progress in enacting it.

Current Necessity- With India approaching one billion internet users, relying on outdated competition laws is insufficient.

Ex-Ante Regulation- Unlike traditional laws that punish after the harm is done (ex-post), digital markets often require ex-ante regulations (rules set beforehand) to prevent gatekeepers from abusing their dominance.

Conclusion

WhatsApp's unparalleled network effect has granted it immense influence over India's digital communication landscape, rendering the concept of user consent largely illusory. While the platform has legitimate rights to monetization, it cannot come at the expense of consumer privacy and fair competition. The Supreme Court's intervention underscores the urgent necessity for the Digital Competition Law to transition from a draft to a statute, ensuring a digital ecosystem that balances corporate innovation with public accountability.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/messaging-power-on-a-healthy-digital-marketplace/article70607729.ece#google_vignette

2. Does banning access to social media for minors under 16 really protect them? (IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society
Topics- Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.
Sub Topic- Effects of Globalization on Indian society (Impact of technology on youth and children).

A social media ban will not save our children

Introduction

The debate on regulating children's access to social media has gained momentum globally and in India, triggered by growing evidence of a mental health crisis among adolescents and Australia's landmark decision to ban social media for those under 16. With incidents like the tragic case in Ghaziabad highlighting the extreme psychological risks of online addiction, India faces an urgent policy imperative to balance digital access with the safety and mental well-being of its demographic dividend.

Key Details & Context

Trigger Event- A distressing incident in Ghaziabad involving minors underscored the severe psychological risks associated with excessive online gaming and social media usage.
Global Precedent- Australia has become the first nation to enact a ban on social media for children under 16, shifting the legal responsibility of age verification onto tech companies rather than parents.
The Core Problem- Research indicates that social media algorithms are designed for addictive engagement, directly contributing to rising anxiety, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies in children.
India's urgency- With rapidly increasing smartphone penetration among adolescents, India stands at a critical policy juncture.

Children's Mental Health and Digital Exposure

Rising Psychological Distress- Global studies link the mass adoption of smartphones over the last decade to a sharp spike in adolescent anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.
The "Loneliness Paradox"- Despite being "hyper-connected" digitally, young people report higher levels of loneliness. Virtual interactions are displacing critical real-world friendships and family engagement.
Indian Scenario- Surveys reveal a surge in stress and behavioural disorders among Indian adolescents, particularly in urban centres. This is directly correlated with excessive screen time and online dependence.
Severe Consequences- Unresolved conflicts over digital addiction can escalate into severe crises, as seen in recent tragic news reports.

Neuroscience of Adolescence- Why Are They Vulnerable?

Developing Brain Structure- Adolescence is a critical window for brain development, especially the prefrontal cortex (responsible for impulse control and decision-making). This immaturity makes children biologically less capable of resisting addictive stimuli.
Reward Pathway Activation- Social media engagement triggers dopamine-driven reward circuits. The neurological response is similar to that triggered by substances like alcohol, tobacco, and gambling, fostering compulsive behaviour.
Peer Comparison Effect- Adolescents are biologically wired to seek peer approval. Algorithm-driven metrics (likes, shares) and curated "perfect" images weaponize this trait, damaging self-esteem and body image.
Scientific Consensus- Just as societies impose age limits on driving or drinking due to maturity levels, neurological vulnerability justifies age limits on algorithmic social media.

The Role of Social Media Algorithms

Profit Over Protection- Platforms utilize algorithms specifically engineered to maximize user engagement (time on device) to drive ad revenue, often disregarding user well-being.

Amplification of Harm- Algorithms frequently push extreme, sensational, or appearance-focused content to keep users hooked. This intensifies social comparison, anxiety, and dissatisfaction among young users.

Corporate Knowledge- Internal documents and investigations suggest tech giants are aware of these harms but continue their practices to sustain profits.

Tobacco Industry Parallels- Tech firms are using the "Tobacco Playbook"- questioning scientific evidence of harm and shifting the blame onto users and parents ("individual responsibility").

Global Policy Responses

Australia's Model

a. Ban for under-16s- Strict prohibition with mandates for platforms to verify age.
b. Corporate Liability- Parents can sue firms for violations, shifting the burden from the family to the corporation.

International Momentum- Nations like the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea are debating or implementing stricter regulations citing worsening youth mental health.

Failure of Self-Regulation- Current age limits (usually 13+) are "weakly enforced." Estimates suggest nearly 40% of children aged 8–12 is already on social media, proving that voluntary compliance by tech firms has failed.

India's Case for Early Action

Demographic Advantage- According to ASER 2024, only about one-third of rural adolescents (below 16) currently own smartphones. This offers a unique window for preventive regulation before addiction becomes ubiquitous.

Protecting the Youth Dividend- India's economic future relies on a healthy, productive workforce. Widespread digital addiction threatens to compromise the potential of this demographic dividend.

Constitutional Obligations

a. **Article 15(3)-** Allows the State to make special provisions for women and children.
b. **Article 39(f)-** Directs the State to ensure children are given opportunities to develop in a healthy manner and protected against exploitation.
c. **Article 21-** The Right to Life includes the right to mental and physical health.

Conclusion

India must transition from passive observation to active intervention by adopting a child-centric digital safety framework. This should include age-based restrictions, mandatory age verification mechanisms, algorithmic accountability, and robust digital literacy programs for parents and schools. Protecting children from the predatory nature of social media algorithms is not a violation of their rights but a fulfilment of the State's constitutional duty to safeguard their dignity, mental health, and future potential. Immediate action is essential to ensure technology serves as an enabler, not a disruptor, of India's future generation.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-social-media-ban-will-not-save-our-children/article70608158.ece

Editorial of the Day – 10.02.2026

Index

1. Stifling ideas- On Ghooskhor Pandat and FIR (TH) - 01
2. Kashmir defies nature- Tulips bloom in December for first time, months ahead of spring (IE) - 02

1. Stifling ideas- On Ghooskhor Pandat and FIR (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Indian Constitution—Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.
SUB TOPIC- Fundamental Rights (Article 19), Separation of Powers, and Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the federal structure (Executive vs. Judiciary in regulating speech).

Introduction

The recent directive by the Uttar Pradesh government to file an FIR against the makers of the film Ghooskhor Pandat has reignited the debate on the fragility of artistic freedom in India. This incident highlights the growing conflict between executive power and the constitutional protection of free speech, raising concerns about the "heckler's veto" where the threat of law and order is used to silence creative expression without judicial scrutiny.

Key Details of the Controversy

Executive Action- Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered the filing of an FIR against the film's makers specifically over its title, Ghooskhor Pandat.
Rationale for Action- The state alleged that the title was derogatory, likely to hurt religious or caste sentiments, and could disrupt social harmony.
Immediate Consequence- Following the threat of criminal action, the producer withdrew promotional material, demonstrating how executive pressure can force compliance before any legal verdict.
Shift in Narrative- A matter that fundamentally belongs to the realm of artistic expression was swiftly converted into a law-and-order issue by the state machinery.

Constitutional Provisions & Legal Standards

Protection under Article 19(1)(a)- The Constitution protects freedom of speech and expression, extending this right even to speech that may be unpopular, offensive, or unwelcome to powerful groups.
Limits under Article 19(2)- Restrictions on this right must be reasonable, specific, and proportionate. They cannot be arbitrary executive decisions.
Judicial Distinction- Indian courts have consistently distinguished between speech that is merely "offensive" and speech that actually incites violence or public disorder. Only the latter typically justifies criminal sanction.

From Expression to Policing- The chilling Effect

Bypassing Judicial Scrutiny- The executive threat of using criminal law (FIR) effectively bypasses the judicial process, signalling intolerance toward dissenting or controversial expression.
Coercive Warning- The FIR serves less as a legal remedy and more as a coercive warning to other artists, creating a "chilling effect" where creators self-censor to avoid harassment.
Loss of Democratic Response- When art is silenced by the state, society loses the opportunity for democratic responses such as debate, satire, or boycott, weakening the "marketplace of ideas."

Pattern of State Restrictions on Art

Recurring Censorship- The visual arts sector has increasingly faced executive censorship often without prior judicial findings.
Notable Examples

1. The Kerala Story (2023) - faced bans in certain states.

2. India- The Modi Question - faced removal/blocking.
3. Other films like Kaum De Heere, India's Daughter, and Padmaavat have historically faced similar executive hurdles.

Subjectivity of "Hurt Sentiments"- In a diverse society like India, claims of "hurt sentiments" are subjective and limitless. Relying on them as a basis for criminal prosecution makes the law arbitrary.

Proper Constitutional Approach & Role of the State

Burden of Proof- The state bears the burden to examine speech carefully. If unlawfulness is alleged, the remedy should be judicial review, not executive fiat.

Least Restrictive Measure- Authorities must adopt the least restrictive measure available to address concerns, recording reasons for their actions rather than issuing blanket bans or threats.

Balancing Duty- It is the duty of the Chief Minister and the state to maintain public order *while* protecting free expression. Curtailing speech simply to preserve order (or to appease those threatening disorder) undermines the constitutional balance between authority and liberty.

Conclusion

The Ghooskhor Pandat episode underscores a worrying trend of criminalising dissenting expression. By invoking executive coercion instead of seeking judicial remedy, the state undermines the protective umbrella of Article 19(1)(a). Upholding constitutional proportionality and allowing courts to be the arbiter of speech standards is essential to preserve the democratic fabric of the nation.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/stifling-ideas-on-ghooskhor-pandat-and-fir/article70611331.ece

2. Kashmir defies nature- Tulips bloom in December for first time, months ahead of spring (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topics- Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Sub Topic- Horticulture and Floriculture (Sunrise Sectors), Agricultural Marketing, Supply Chain Management, and Application of Biotechnology/Science in Agriculture.

Introduction

In a significant scientific breakthrough, researchers at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) have successfully achieved the winter blooming of tulips in Kashmir. By inducing flowering in December—nearly four months ahead of the natural season—this innovation promises to revolutionize the region's floriculture economy. It represents a strategic alignment of agricultural science with market demand and tourism, potentially transforming Kashmir into a year-round floral hub.

Scientific Innovation- The Technology Behind the Bloom

Technique Used- The breakthrough was achieved through "Bulb Programming" and "Forcing Techniques."

Bulb Programming- This involves precise control of temperature, light exposure, and planting schedules to regulate the plant's internal biological clock and growth stages.

Forcing Method- This manipulates environmental and chemical factors to induce flowering outside the natural seasonal cycle, a standard practice in advanced floriculture nations like the Netherlands but a first for Kashmir's specific agro-climatic conditions.

Success Rate- In experimental trials, approximately 3,000 out of 4,000 bulbs bloomed successfully in December.

Market Timing- This technology allows growers to target high-demand global holidays such as Christmas, New Year, and Valentine's Day, which fall during Kashmir's traditional non-flowering winter months.

Floriculture as a Sunrise Sector

High-Value Agriculture- Floriculture is identified as a high-income, export-oriented segment of horticulture. Moving away from cereal-centric farming to high-value ornamentals aligns with the national goal of Doubling Farmers' Income.

Employment Generation- The sector offers potential for year-round employment, particularly benefiting women and small marginal farmers who can cultivate high-value crops on small landholdings.

Inclusive Development- By integrating agriculture with the service sector (tourism), it fosters inclusive rural development and diversifies the regional economic base.

Strategic Boost to Floral Tourism

Extending the Tourist Season- traditionally, Kashmir's tulip season is restricted to a brief window in late March to April. Winter blooms can extend the tourism calendar into the lean winter months, reducing the seasonal concentration of tourist footfall.

Economic Multiplier- Last year, Srinagar's Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden recorded nearly 8 lakh visitors, demonstrating the massive economic potential of floral tourism. Off-season flowering stabilizes incomes for local businesses (hotels, transport, handicrafts) that usually suffer during the winter slump.

Replicable Success- This follows earlier successes with autumn chrysanthemum blooms, proving that scientific interventions can successfully diversify floral attractions year-round.

Addressing Import Dependence & Bulb Propagation

Current Challenge- Kashmir currently relies heavily on importing tulip bulbs from the Netherlands. This dependence increases input costs for farmers and leads to a significant outflow of foreign exchange.

Import Substitution (Atmanirbhar Bharat)

1. Centre of Excellence- SKUAST has established a dedicated Centre of Excellence for tulips at Sagam (South Kashmir) with technical support from the Dutch Embassy.
2. Propagation Success- Domestic bulb propagation has seen early success, with bulb numbers increasing from 1 lakh to 3–4 lakh within a single year.

Strategic Goal- Achieving self-reliance in bulb production will lower costs for local farmers and eventually position India as a bulb exporter rather than an importer.

Role of Institutions and Way Forward

Lab-to-Land Transfer- The SKUAST initiative highlights the critical role of agricultural universities in driving applied innovation. The next step is effective extension services to transfer this technology from the "experimental garden" to the "farmer's field."

Commercialization- Large-scale adoption requires the entry of agri-entrepreneurs and startups to commercialize the technology and set up controlled-environment infrastructure (polyhouses/greenhouses).

Skill Development- Training farmers in the nuances of "forcing techniques" and climate-controlled agriculture is crucial for widespread impact.

Model for Hill States- This model of integrating high-tech floriculture with tourism can be replicated in other hill states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to create similar horti-tourism clusters.

Conclusion

The winter blooming of tulips in Kashmir is more than just a botanical achievement; it is a successful convergence of science, commerce, and tourism. By scaling up domestic bulb propagation and encouraging private investment in agri-tech, Kashmir can reduce its import dependence and secure its position as a global leader in floral tourism. This initiative serves as a blueprint for how climate-smart, market-aligned agriculture can revitalize regional economies.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/kashmir-tulip-winter-bloom-skuast-floral-tourism-10523369/#-~-text=A%20breakthrough%20in%20tulip%20production,push%20to%20Kashmir's%20floral%20tourism.

Editorial of the Day – 11.02.2026

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1. Speaker to stay away from Lok Sabha proceedings till Opposition's petition against him is disposed of (TH) - 01
2. SC seeks Centre's report on action taken on its SC/ST sub-classification verdict (IE) - 03

1. Speaker to stay away from Lok Sabha proceedings till Opposition's petition against him is disposed of (TH)

General Studies 2- Polity
Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.
Sub Topic- Constitutional Authorities; Separation of Powers; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha- Role, Powers, and Constitutional Significance

Introduction

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha is one of the highest constitutional offices in India's parliamentary democracy, often described as the "conscience keeper" of the House. Recently, Om Birla has been in the news for setting a high ethical precedent by deciding to stay away from presiding over Lok Sabha proceedings until a removal notice moved by the Opposition against him is disposed of. This move highlights the deep moral and constitutional obligations attached to the chair.

Key Context & Constitutional Authority

Moral High Ground- Om Birla's decision to recuse himself during the pendency of a removal notice underscores the principle that justice must not only be done but must also be *seen* to be done. It reinforces the ethical requirement of the Speaker to be above suspicion.

Constitutional Mandate (Articles 93–110)- The Speaker is not merely a presiding officer but a Constitutional Authority mandated to ensure the smooth functioning of the House.

a. Article 93- Establishes the office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
b. Conduct of Business- The Speaker is the ultimate interpreter of the rules within the House.

Pivotal Powers- The Speaker holds significant powers that influence the federal balance, including-

a. Certification of Money Bills- Deciding whether a Bill is a Money Bill (Article 110), which limits the Rajya Sabha's role.
b. Anti-Defection Law- Acting as the tribunal under the Tenth Schedule to decide on disqualification cases.

Constitutional Linkages & Institutional Role

Bridge Between Constitution and Practice- The Speaker operationalizes the Constitution on a daily basis, ensuring that the theoretical framework of Articles 93–110 is applied meaningfully to parliamentary debates and procedures.

Legislature-Executive Interface- The Speaker acts as a buffer, regulating government business to ensure the Executive does not overwhelm the Legislature. Crucially, while the Speaker facilitates government business, they do not formally belong to the Executive, maintaining the Separation of Powers.

Legislature-Judiciary Interface

Tension Areas- The Speaker's decisions on Money Bills and Anti-Defection cases are frequent flashpoints for judicial review.

Issue- These decisions test the balance between Parliamentary Sovereignty (the right of the House to regulate its own procedure) and Constitutional Supremacy (judicial review of unconstitutional acts).
Judicial Deference- Generally, Courts respect the Speaker's authority to maintain legislative autonomy. However, arbitrary decisions invite judicial scrutiny, reinforcing that the Speaker is subject to the Constitution.

Centre-State and Federal Implications

Impact on Federal Balance- The Speaker's power to certify a bill as a Money Bill is critical. A Money Bill bypasses the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), which represents the states' interests.
Significance- Incorrect certification can undermine the federal structure by denying the states a voice in crucial legislation.
Guardian of States' Voice- By ensuring impartiality, a strong Speaker protects the voices of Opposition and regional parties, thereby indirectly safeguarding the interests of the States they represent.

Party System and Democratic Norms

The Paradox of the Office- The Speaker is elected on a party ticket but is expected to function as a non-partisan umpire.
Ideal- Rising above party politics to link political ethics with institutional trust.
Opposition Rights- Impartial conduct is vital for the survival of democracy. It ensures the Opposition has a fair chance to hold the government accountable. Partisan bias, conversely, erodes democratic legitimacy and weakens the House.

Governance and Accountability

Enhancing Policy Quality- The Speaker has the power to refer Bills to Parliamentary Standing **Committees**.
Impact- This connects law-making with expert scrutiny, ensuring bills are not rushed through without due diligence.
Check on Executive Dominance- By empowering committees and allowing ample time for debate, the Speaker limits the dominance of the Executive, ensuring the government remains accountable to the people's representatives.

Public Trust and Stability

Symbol of Neutrality- The Speaker's neutrality is directly linked to citizen confidence. If the public perceives the Speaker as biased, faith in the parliamentary process diminishes.
Arena of Democracy- An impartial Speaker ensures Parliament remains a vibrant "Arena of Democracy" where diverse views are debated, rather than becoming a mere rubber stamp for the government.

Conclusion

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha serves as the linchpin of India's parliamentary democracy. By stepping aside on moral grounds, Speaker Om Birla has reinforced the sanctity of the Chair. The office demands a delicate balance of impartiality, constitutional adherence, and ethical conduct. Upholding these norms is not just a procedural necessity but a prerequisite for maintaining public trust and the credibility of the Indian legislative framework.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/national/speaker-to-stay-away-from-lok-sabha-proceedings-till-oppositions-petition-against-him-is-disposed-of/article70616168.ece#google_vignette

2. SC seeks Centre's report on action taken on its SC/ST sub-classification verdict (IE)

General Studies 2- Indian Constitution

Topics- Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions, and basic structure.

Sub Topic- Reservation Policy; Role of Judiciary (Judicial Review/Activism); Centre-State Relations (Federalism regarding Reservation lists); Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services.

SC/ST Sub-Classification & Creamy Layer- Judicial Evolution and Implementation

Introduction

The Supreme Court has recently directed the Union Government to submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) regarding the implementation of its landmark August 1, 2024 Constitution Bench judgment. This historic verdict permitted the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and extended the "creamy layer" principle to SCs and STs, marking a significant shift in India's affirmative action jurisprudence.

Key Details of the Development

Judicial Intervention- A 7-judge Constitution Bench delivered the verdict on August 1, 2024.

Core Decision- The Court allowed states to sub-classify SCs to prioritize the most backward among them.

Overruling Precedent- The judgment explicitly overruled the 2004 E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh verdict, which treated SCs as a homogenous class.

Creamy Layer Extension- The Court supported the application of the "creamy layer" exclusion to SCs and STs to ensure substantive equality, a concept previously restricted to OBCs.

Current Status- The Court is now monitoring compliance by seeking an ATR from the Centre.

Constitutional Framework of SC/ST Reservation

Enabling Provisions (Articles 15(4) & 16(4))- Empower the State to create special provisions/reservation in education and public employment for socially and educationally backward classes and SC/STs.

Identification (Articles 341 & 342)

a. The President notifies the list of Scheduled Castes/Tribes.
b. Only Parliament can modify (include/exclude) entries in this list.
c. Significance- This ensures uniform identification across the nation.

Substantive Equality (Article 14)- Reservation is interpreted not just as formal equality, but as a tool to correct historical injustice and structural discrimination.

Protective Discrimination- Affirmative action is a core feature of the Constitution, rooted in the vision of social justice.

Evolution of Judicial Position

Case Law	Key Ruling
E.V. Chinnaiah (2004)	Held that SCs form a homogeneous group. Ruled that sub-classification by states amounted to tampering with the Presidential List (Article 341) and was unconstitutional.
Davinder Singh Case (2024)	A 7-judge Bench overruled Chinnaiah. Held that sub-classification is constitutionally permissible to ensure equitable distribution of benefits.
Majority View (6-1)	Observed that empirical evidence proves inequality *within* SC communities. Treating them as a single block defeats the goal of equality.
Dissent (Justice Bela Trivedi)	Maintained that SCs are a homogeneous class and sub-classification violates the sanctity of Article 341.

Concept of Sub-Classification within SCs

Rationale- Data indicates that certain sub-castes within the SC category have "cornered" a disproportionate share of reservation benefits, leaving the most marginalized behind.
Equitable Distribution- The aim is to ensure that the "weakest of the weak" receive fair access to opportunities.
Federal Autonomy- The judgment empowers States to design targeted welfare policies based on local empirical evidence, strengthening federalism.
Constitutional Validity- The Court clarified that sub-classification is not tampering with the Presidential List; it is merely reorganizing the distribution of benefits *among* those already on the list.

Extension of Creamy Layer Principle to SC/ST

Origin- The concept originated in the Indra Sawhney (1992) judgment, applicable only to Other Backward Classes (OBCs).
2024 Judicial Endorsement- Justice B.R. Gavai (concurring opinion) emphasized evolving a policy to identify the creamy layer among SCs/STs.
Objective- To prevent affluent/advanced members of the community from monopolizing benefits meant for the upliftment of the backward.
The Debate- This is sensitive because SC/ST reservations were historically linked to untouchability and social discrimination, not economic status. Introducing economic criteria (creamy layer) changes this fundamental premise.

Contemporary Significance

Implementation Challenge- The SC seeking an ATR indicates active judicial monitoring to ensuring the verdict translates into policy.
Political Implications- Sub-classification is likely to reshape caste-based political mobilization, creating new dynamics between dominant and marginalized SC sub-groups.
Data-Driven Governance- The judgment mandates that any sub-classification must be based on empirical evidence, aligning policy with constitutional morality rather than political whim.
Balancing Act- The ruling attempts to harmonize the broad goal of social justice with the specific need for fairness within beneficiary groups.

Way Forward

Socio-Economic Data- The Centre and States must undertake rigorous, caste-wise socio-economic studies to objectively identify intra-group disparities.
Legislative Framework- Parliament or States need to frame transparent guidelines to operationalize sub-classification to avoid future litigation or constitutional ambiguity.
Balanced Criteria- For the creamy layer, criteria must account for social backwardness (stigma) alongside economic indicators, ensuring the core rationale of SC/ST reservation isn't undermined.
Coordination- Timely submission of ATRs and coordination between the Judiciary and Executive is vital for compliance.
Social Harmony- The government must engage in public communication to prevent social tensions and misinterpretation of the policy changes.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's 2024 verdict represents a paradigm shift in India's approach to social justice. By acknowledging heterogeneity within Scheduled Castes and endorsing the creamy layer principle, the Court has prioritized "substantive equality" over "formal equality." However, the success of this reform depends on careful implementation that balances constitutional mandates with social cohesion, ensuring the promise of equality reaches the most marginalized within the marginalized.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/sc-seeks-centres-report-on-action-taken-on-its-sc-st-sub-classification-verdict-10525491/

Editorial of the Day – 12.02.2026

Index

1. The CPI base revision exercise measures a slice of life (TH) - 01
2. SpaceX to prioritise building self-growing city on moon, Musk says (IE) - 02

1. The CPI base revision exercise measures a slice of life (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Sub Topic- Inflation and Monetary Policy; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Introduction

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has initiated the revision of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year from 2012 to 2024. This exercise is designed to transition from an outdated consumption basket to one that reflects the contemporary spending habits of a digital, urbanizing, and service-oriented India. As the primary tool for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy, an accurate CPI is vital for maintaining price stability and protecting the purchasing power of citizens.

The Core Purpose of CPI

Definition- CPI tracks the change in prices of a specific "basket" of goods and services consumed by households.
Real-World Impact- It measures the actual cost of living, covering essentials like food, fuel, rent, and clothing.
Policy Anchor- It serves as the nominal anchor for the RBI's inflation-targeting framework (4% ± 2%), directly influencing repo rate decisions.
Socio-Economic Linkage- CPI data is used to calculate Dearness Allowance (DA) for government employees and adjust social security benefits, ensuring incomes keep pace with inflation.

Drivers for the 2024 Base Revision

The 12-year gap since the last revision (2012) created a "representation gap." The 2024 revision addresses
Rapid Urbanization- A larger share of the population now lives in cities with different spending priorities compared to rural areas.
The Digital Shift- The explosion of e-commerce, digital payments, and app-based services (gig economy) was non-existent or minimal in 2012.
Rise of the Services Sector- Increased spending on telecommunications, internet, healthcare, and private education.
Consumption Diversification- As incomes rise (Engel's Law), the proportion of income spent on basic food decreases while spending on "lifestyle" or discretionary items increases.

Key Methodological Upgrades

Updated Consumption Basket & Weights

Data Source- The revision is grounded in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023–24.
Weightage Realignment

1. Higher Weight- Assigned to services, electronics, and modern amenities.
2. Lower Weight- Assigned to traditional goods that now occupy a smaller share of the average household budget.

Lifestyle Focus- Inclusion of modern lifestyle expenditures to reflect rising aspirations.

Modernized Data Collection

Digital Integration- For the first time, CPI will systematically track online prices for sectors like air travel and telecommunications.

Technology-Driven- Transitioning to computer-assisted price collection to eliminate manual errors and allow for real-time data verification.

Administrative Data- Leveraging official records for regulated prices like rail fares, postal charges, and the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Institutional Rigor and Global Alignment

International Standards- The new series aligns with global statistical best practices, making India's inflation data comparable with G20 peers.

Expert Oversight- MoSPI has collaborated with economists, domain experts, and field offices to ensure the transition is methodologically sound.

Transparency- The process involves wide-ranging consultations to ensure the data is perceived as credible by both domestic markets and international investors.

Significance of the Exercise

Responsive Policy- Accurate inflation data allows the RBI to avoid "policy errors" (e.g., raising rates based on outdated food weights when the actual inflationary pressure lies elsewhere).

Poverty Measurement- Updated consumption data helps in more accurately defining poverty lines and identifying beneficiaries for social schemes.

Economic Stability- By capturing "a slice of life" as it is lived today, the government can better manage the macro-economy while protecting the micro-interests of the common man.

Conclusion

The shift to the 2024 base year is more than a technical update; it is a structural necessity. By integrating digital spending, service-sector growth, and modernized collection tools, India is ensuring that its economic "thermometer" remains sensitive to the actual heat felt by its billion-plus consumers.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-cpi-base-revision-exercise-measures-a-slice-of-life/article70620362.ece

2. SpaceX to prioritise building self-growing city on moon, Musk says (IE)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology

Topics- Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, AI; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology.

Sub Topic- Commercialization of space; Space governance (Outer Space Treaty); Environmental impact of data centres; Geopolitics of the "New Space Race.

The Vision- Lunar AI Factory & Mass Driver

The Proposal- An integrated facility on the Moon to manufacture satellites specialized for AI computing.

The Mass Driver- An electromagnetic catapult designed to fling payloads into orbit without traditional chemical rockets, exploiting the Moon's low gravity (1.62 m/s^2) and lack of atmosphere to reduce launch costs to near-zero.

xAI-SpaceX Merger- A strategic vertical integration combining launch capability (SpaceX) with advanced large language models (xAI) to create "orbital data centers."

Drivers of Space-Based AI Infrastructure

The Energy Crisis- Terrestrial AI data centers consume roughly 1.5% of global electricity. Training next-gen models (like GPT-6 or Grok-3) requires multi-gigawatt power, straining Earth's grids.

Thermodynamic Advantage- In space, satellites can harness uninterrupted solar energy (100% duty cycle in certain orbits) and utilize the vacuum of space for passive cooling, eliminating the massive water and power footprint of Earth-bound cooling systems.

Scaling Compute- Moving "compute-heavy" tasks to space allows for scaling toward a Kardashev Type II civilization (harnessing the total energy output of a star).

Shift in the Global Space Economy

Privatization- Exploration has shifted from state-led (ISRO, NASA) to private-dominant (SpaceX, Blue Origin), where profit-driven innovation accelerates deployment.
The $1 Trillion Frontier- The space economy is projected to cross $1 trillion by 2040, moving from simple communication (Starlink) to off-world manufacturing and edge computing.
Reusable Rockets- Tech like the Falcon 9 and Starship has already reduced the cost of reaching Low Earth Orbit (LEO), making lunar logistics economically viable.

India's Strategic Position

Regulatory Evolution- The Indian Space Policy 2023 and the creation of IN-SPACe have opened the doors for Indian startups (e.g., Skyroot, Agnikul) to mirror the private-led model.
Cost-Effective Heritage- ISRO's success with Chandrayaan-3 proves India's capability in lunar precision. However, India must pivot from "exploration" to "industrialization" to remain competitive.
Sovereign AI- To avoid dependence on foreign private constellations, India may need its own space-based "Sovereign AI" infrastructure.

Legal, Ethical, and Geopolitical Challenges

The Treaty Gap- The Outer Space Treaty (1967) prohibits "national appropriation" but is silent on private ownership of lunar resources. This creates a "gray area" for lunar factories.
The Artemis Accords- While promoting resource utilization, they lack universal consensus (notably contested by China and Russia), leading to a bifurcated lunar legal regime.
Orbital Congestion- Launching "millions of tons" of AI satellites annually increases the risk of Kessler Syndrome (cascading satellite collisions) and space debris.
Digital Inequality- A "Moon-based AI" could create a massive technological divide, where a few corporations control the world's primary "intelligence" resources.

Way Forward

Global Governance- Updating the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) frameworks to regulate private lunar manufacturing and space-based data sovereignty.
Sustainable Space Practices- Developing international norms for "De-orbiting" AI satellites and managing the environmental impact of massive lunar excavations.
Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)- Governments should act as "anchor customers" for private space-AI firms while maintaining strict security and ethical oversight.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/spacex-to-prioritise-building-self-growing-city-on-moon-musk-says-10521680/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 13.02.2026

Index

1. Why has J&K shelved the Dal Lake restoration plan? (TH) - 01

2. The empty chair crisis- Why no-confidence motion against Om Birla exposes deeper constitutional and political issues (IE) - 02

1. Why has J&K shelved the Dal Lake restoration plan? (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Sub Topic- Sustainable Development and Community-based Conservation Models.

Introduction

The Jammu and Kashmir government recently announced the shelving of the 2009 relocation-based Dal Lake restoration plan (initially valued at ₹416.72 crore). In its place, the administration has adopted an in-situ conservation approach. This pivot recognizes the lake dwellers not as encroachers, but as an integral part of the lake's socio-ecological fabric, marking a departure from nearly two decades of failed relocation attempts.

The Failure of the 2009 Relocation Plan

The original plan, approved under the Manmohan Singh government, focused heavily on "clearing" the lake to save it.

Targets vs. Achievement- Aimed to relocate 9,000 families; however, 17 years later, only 1,808 families (roughly 20%) were rehabilitated.

The "Rakh-e-Arth" Issue- Dwellers were moved to a colony in Bemina which was low-lying and flood-prone.

Financial Drain- Huge portions of the budget were consumed by land filling at the relocation site rather than actual lake conservation.

Outcome- The government admitted the plan failed to produce "tangible outcomes," achieving only 27% of its conservation goals.

Ecological Threats to Dal Lake

As per a 2022 SKUAST survey, the "Jewel in the Crown" of Kashmir faces a multi-pronged ecological crisis-

Anthropogenic Pressure- Uncontrolled effluent discharge and population density.

Water Quality- Sharp decline due to untreated sewage from point (pipes) and non-point (runoff) sources.

Physical Changes- Shrinking Lake area, encroachment, and land-use changes in the catchment.

Biological Stress- Nutrient enrichment (Eutrophication) leading to excessive weed growth and altered biodiversity.

Hydrological Blockage- Blocked internal channels and reduced inflows have stagnated water circulation.

The New Paradigm- In-Situ Conservation

The High-Level Committee (2022) proposed a "stay-and-protect" model. The J&K Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA) is now drafting a policy based on these pillars-

Human-Centric Ecology

Recognizes residents as stakeholders and a permanent part of the ecosystem. Focuses on upgrading the living conditions of 58 identified hamlets within the lake rather than uprooting them.

Technical Interventions (IIT Roorkee DPR)

A new Detailed Project Report (DPR) costing ₹212.38 crore over five years focuses on-

Sewerage Management- Installing modular Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in internal hamlets.

Hydrological Revival- Dredging interior channels and reviving water circulation to prevent stagnation.

Catchment Treatment- Addressing the root cause by treating inflows before they reach the lake.

Comparison of Approaches

Feature	2009 Plan (Old)	2026 Plan (New)
Philosophy	Relocation-based (Exclusionary)	In-situ (Inclusionary)
Primary Goal	Shifting 9,000 families	Treating sewage & water circulation
Resident Status	Encroachers to be moved	Integral part of the ecosystem
Key Agency	Central/State Govt (2009)	LCMA & IIT Roorkee (Technical Lead)
Financial Focus	Land filling & Compensation	STPs, Dredging & Integrated Management

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/national/jammu-and-kashmir/why-has-jk-shelved-the-dal-lake-restoration-plan-explained/article70623948.ece

2. The empty chair crisis- Why no-confidence motion against Om Birla exposes deeper constitutional and political issues (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance & Constitution

Topics- Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.

Sub Topic- Role of the Speaker, Constitutional Accountability, and the Decline of Parliamentary Productivity.

Introduction

The Indian Parliament is currently witnessing a "Crisis of Trust," highlighted by a notice of no-confidence against the Speaker signed by 118 Opposition MPs. This breakdown of consensus over the Motion of Thanks and the use of unpublished materials indicates a departure from the "deliberative democracy" envisioned by the Constituent Assembly, moving toward a state of chronic institutional paralysis.

Constitutional Foundations of Parliamentary Democracy

The legitimacy of the Indian State rests on the functional health of its legislature-

Legislative Supremacy (Articles 79–122)- Parliament is the ultimate representative body for law-making and public will.

Executive Accountability (Article 75)- The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. This accountability is hollow without robust debate and questioning.

Institutional Opposition- While the Constitution doesn't explicitly name "The Opposition," the Leader of Opposition Act (1977) recognizes it as a vital check on executive overreach.

Deliberation vs. Majoritarianism- The founders intended Parliament to be a forum for reasoned discussion, where dissent is not just tolerated but seen as essential for policy refinement.

Manifestations of the Modern Trust Breakdown

The crisis is visible through several unprecedented developments

Targeting the Chair- A no-confidence motion against the Speaker is a rare and serious move, as the Speaker is the "linchpin" of the House's neutrality.

Tactical Disruptions- Frequent adjournments and protests in the "Well of the House" have replaced substantive debate, drastically reducing legislative productivity.
Politicization of Proceedings- Contentious debates on security concerns and conduct within the House have turned into personal allegations rather than policy critiques.
Rhetorical Escalation- Shifting from "Opponents" to "Enemies," where the political other is viewed as an existential threat to the nation or the Constitution.

The Office of the Speaker- Neutrality vs. Perception

Under Article 93, the Speaker must embody impartial authority-
Dual Role- The Speaker is a party member but must act as the Guardian of Privileges and an unbiased adjudicator of the Tenth Schedule (Anti-defection).
The "Moral Authority" Gap- Historically, Speakers used informal "behind-the-scenes" consultations to break deadlocks. A perceived bias erodes this moral capital, making house management impossible.
Transparency- The legitimacy of the House depends on the Speaker being *seen* to be fair to both the Treasury and Opposition benches.

Historical Context- Disruptions Then and Now

Disruptions are not a 21st-century invention, but their nature has changed
Coalition Era (1989–2014)- Disruptions were common due to thin majorities and regional pressures.
The 2011 Lokpal Episode- A low point where a Bill was torn in the Rajya Sabha, yet dialogue eventually resumed.
Presidential Warnings- In 2016, President Pranab Mukherjee famously urged MPs- *"For God's sake, do* your job," highlighting a long-standing decline in standards.
The Difference- Current disruptions are characterized by a total collapse of communication channels between the government and the opposition.

The "Opponent, Not Enemy" Philosophy

The essence of the Westminster system is an "Adversarial but Cooperative" model
Sushma Swaraj's Legacy- Her 2014 farewell speech serves as a reminder that political actors are rivals in ideas, not enemies in a war.
Constructive Dissent- The Opposition's role is to critique to improve, not to obstruct to destroy.
Civility- The personalization of politics risks turning the temple of democracy into a theatre of antagonism.

Consequences of Parliamentary Dysfunction

A "silent" or "shouting" Parliament has real-world costs-
Reduced Scrutiny- Laws passed in din lack the "filter" of debate, leading to legal flaws and public protests.
Bypassing Committees- Parliamentary Committees—once "mini-parliaments" for bipartisan consensus—are increasingly sidelined by polarization.
Institutional Erosion- Normalizing disruption as a political tool sets a dangerous precedent for future generations.
Public Disillusionment- If Parliament ceases to solve problems, citizens lose faith in representative democracy itself.

Conclusion

Restoring trust requires a multi-pronged approach- reviving informal dialogue, ensuring the Speaker's visible neutrality, and strengthening the Committee system. As articulated by leaders like Sushma Swaraj, the dignity of the House can only be preserved if both sides agree that while their paths differ, their destination—the national interest—is the same.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-empty-chair-crisis-why-no-confidence-motion-against-om-birla-exposes-deeper-constitutional-and-political-issuess-10527202/

Editorial of the Day – 14.02.2026

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1. The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker (TH) - 01
2. India preferred BNP in Bangladesh, and it won. What's next now? (ET) - 04

1. The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Labour Relations

The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker. There will be an expansion of worker benefits, his financial inclusion, and an enhancement of his long-term social security.

The implementation of India's labour codes marks a decisive shift towards greater financial inclusion of the workforce by embedding social security, income protection, and long-term financial safeguards into the employment relationship.

Key Features of India's New Labour Codes

Uniform Definition of Wages- A standardised definition of 'wage' ensures that basic pay constitutes at least 50% of total remuneration. It impacts higher contributions to Provident Fund (PF), pension, and gratuity, leading to stronger long-term financial security.

Universal Minimum Wage- Introduction of a national floor wage, below which no state can fix minimum wages. It aims to reduce wage disparities and protect low-income workers.

Timely Payment & Limited Deductions- Mandates timely payment of wages and restricts arbitrary deductions, and enhances income stability and prevents exploitation.

Simplified Dispute Resolution- Creates faster mechanisms for resolving industrial disputes through tribunals and conciliation.

Recognition of Trade Unions- Provides criteria for recognition of negotiating unions in establishments.

Fixed-Term Employment Formalisation- Legally recognises fixed-term employment, ensuring equal benefits (including gratuity after one year) at par with permanent workers.

Layoff & Retrenchment Threshold Changes- Increases the employee threshold for prior government approval for layoffs and retrenchments (from 100 to 300 workers).

Expanded Social Security Coverage- For the first time, gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers are formally recognised.

Provident Fund & Pension Expansion- Extends coverage to more establishments and worker categories.

Gratuity for Fixed-Term Workers- Eligibility after one year of service, strengthening income protection.

Benefit Portability- Enables portability of benefits across states and employment, crucial for migrant labour.

Improved Workplace Safety Standards- Consolidates multiple safety laws into one framework applicable across sectors.

Working Hours & Leave Provisions- Standardises working conditions and leave entitlements.

Protection for Migrant Workers- Mandates better registration systems and access to welfare schemes.

Structural Features & Macroeconomic Implications

Consolidation of 29 Laws into 4 Codes- Reduces fragmentation and simplifies compliance for employers while improving clarity for workers.

Digital Compliance & Transparency- Encourages online registration, electronic record-keeping, and unified licensing.

Financial Inclusion Focus- By strengthening wage definitions and expanding social security, the codes enhance long-term savings, retirement security, insurance access, and income stability.

Higher Consumption- Workers' income typically circulates within the domestic economy.

Improved Savings Behaviour- Stronger PF and gratuity accumulation builds long-term financial assets.

Greater Financial System Participation- Formal wage structures encourage banking and institutional engagement.

Key Challenges in Implementing India's New Labour Codes

Delayed Implementation & State-Level Readiness- Although Parliament passed the four codes in 2019–2020, they require states to frame rules before full enforcement. Labour is a concurrent subject under India's Constitution, meaning both the Centre and states legislate on it.

Implementation Capacity & Enforcement Gaps- The shift from inspector-based regimes to an 'Inspector-cum-Facilitator' model aims to reduce harassment and promote compliance. Other concerns include limited staffing in labour departments, digital infrastructure gaps, and weak monitoring mechanisms.

Social Security Financing for Gig & Informal Workers- Under the Code on Social Security, 2020, gig and platform workers are formally recognised.

Industry Concerns Over Cost Implications- The revised wage definition under the Code on Wages, 2019 requires basic wages to constitute at least 50% of total remuneration.

Trade Union Opposition & Political Resistance- Under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020-

1. The threshold for prior government approval for layoffs increased.
2. Stricter conditions for strikes introduced.
3. Trade unions argue these provisions dilute collective bargaining power.

Informal Sector Integration Complexity- India's workforce is predominantly informal. Formalising such a vast and diverse labour force poses structural challenges like lack of documentation, migrant mobility, limited financial literacy, and employer resistance in small enterprises.

Awareness & Financial Literacy Gaps- Many workers are unaware of their rights regarding provident Fund (retirement savings scheme), gratuity (exit benefit after service), insurance and welfare schemes. Without targeted awareness campaigns, benefits may remain underutilised.

Risk of Compliance Burden on MSMEs- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) may struggle with digital compliance requirements, record-keeping obligations, and cost of higher social security contributions.

Key Suggestions for Effective Implementation of India's Labour Codes

Ensure Timely and Uniform State Implementation- Since labour is a concurrent subject, states need to frame their rules before the codes become fully operational. Key suggestions include-

1. Set clear timelines for state rule notification;
2. Encourage inter-state coordination for uniformity;
3. Develop model rules to minimise variation;

Strengthen Administrative and Digital Capacity- The shift to digital compliance and the Inspector-cum-Facilitator model requires robust infrastructure. Key suggestions include-

1. Upgrade labour department staffing and training;

2. Invest in unified digital portals for registration and reporting;
3. Use data analytics for risk-based inspections;

Create a Sustainable Financing Framework for Gig Workers- The inclusion of gig and platform workers is transformative, but financing mechanisms must be clear and viable. Key suggestions include-

1. Define transparent contribution formulas for aggregators;
2. Introduce co-contribution models (government, platform and worker together);
3. Establish a central social security fund for gig workers;

Balance Worker Welfare with Industry Competitiveness- The revised wage definition under the Code on Wages, 2019 increases social security contributions. Key suggestions include-

1. Provide transitional compliance periods for MSMEs;
2. Offer tax incentives for higher social security compliance;
3. Encourage phased restructuring of salary components;

Enhance Worker Awareness and Financial Literacy- Legal entitlement does not guarantee effective access. Key suggestions include-

1. Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns;
2. Simplify communication of PF, pension, and gratuity benefits;
3. Integrate labour rights education into skilling programs;

Build Trust Through Social Dialogue- Opposition from trade unions highlights the need for participatory governance. Key suggestions include-

1. Institutionalise tripartite consultations (government, employer and worker);
2. Publish transparent implementation reports;
3. Set up grievance redressal mechanisms;

Focus on Informal Sector Integration- India's workforce is predominantly informal, making formalisation a structural challenge. Key suggestions include-

1. Simplify registration procedures for small enterprises;
2. Use Aadhaar-linked digital identification systems for portability;
3. Provide onboarding incentives for informal businesses;

Monitor and Evaluate Impact Periodically- Reform needs to be evidence-based and adaptive. Key suggestions include-

1. Establish periodic impact assessments;
2. Collect real-time data on wage compliance and social security coverage;
3. Allow mid-course corrections where necessary;

Conclusion

India's labour codes should be understood not merely as regulatory reform, but as a structural intervention aimed at financial inclusion. The codes promote income security, financial dignity, and a more equitable distribution of economic value by reforming wage definitions, extending gratuity to fixed-term workers, expanding social security to gig and informal workers, ensuring minimum wages and timely payments.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-labour-codes-redefine-wages-empower-the-worker/article70629559.ece

2. India preferred BNP in Bangladesh, and it won. What's next now? (ET)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Recent Political Upheaval- From Protests to Elections

Mass Protests and Collapse of Hasina's Government

In 2024, mass protests erupted nationwide, initially over public sector job quota reforms but rapidly expanding into broader anti-government demonstrations against alleged authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and governance failures. These protests led to the resignation and flight of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh on 5 August 2024.

The uprising—often referred to as the July Revolution—marked the end of Hasina's 15-year rule and triggered a constitutional crisis, as Bangladesh's legal framework lacked provisions for the formation of an interim government following the prime minister's departure.

Formation of Interim Government

In the ensuing power vacuum, an interim government was formed on 8 August 2024 under Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and economist proposed by protest leaders and political stakeholders to restore stability, oversee reforms, and prepare for credible elections.

2026 General Elections and BNP Victory

General elections were held on 12 February 2026, the first since the 2024 uprising. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority, marking a historic electoral shift.

In these elections-

1. BNP won a commanding majority of seats.
2. Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as the second-largest party with significant parliamentary presence.
3. The Awami League was barred from contesting, its registration suspended during the interim period.

Swearing-In and Parliamentary Dynamics

Tarique Rahman was sworn in as Prime Minister shortly after the election, leading a cabinet that combined BNP leaders and technocrats. Some allied parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party, boycotted parts of the swearing-in ceremony over procedural disagreements linked to proposed constitutional reforms.

Structural and Policy Implications of the Transition

Transformation of Political Spectrum

The 2026 elections effectively ended the long-standing *"Battle of the Begums"*—the rivalry between BNP's Khaleda Zia and Awami League's Sheikh Hasina—ushering in a new leadership era under Rahman. The rise of Jamaat-e-Islami with substantial seats signals an increased role for conservative and religious political forces in Bangladesh's legislature and policy discourse.

Constitutional and Institutional Reform Pressure

Following the uprising, the "July Charter" (a major political declaration emerging in October 2025 during the interim period) advocated for deep reforms including-

1. Curtailing overarching executive powers to prevent authoritarian concentration.
2. Institutionalising a neutral interim system for elections to ensure credibility.

3. Establishing an upper chamber (second house) to strengthen checks and balances (akin to India's Rajya Sabha).
4. These demands reflect widespread calls for structural change to promote democratic governance and mitigate executive dominance.

Challenges in Implementation

Early post-election dynamics show that the process of constitutional and reform implementation faces logistical and procedural hurdles, such as the inability to fully constitute the proposed Constitutional Reform Council due to procedural complications.

Broader Domestic and Social Challenges

Reconciliation and Political Polarisation

Reintegrating the Awami League and other excluded political actors into mainstream politics remains a critical test for long-term stability. Addressing the grievances of supporters of the previous regime and mending fractures in the political ecosystem are essential to prevent recurring instability.

Restoration of Civil Liberties

Restoring civil liberties, ensuring the release of political prisoners, and protecting freedom of expression and assembly are key benchmarks for democratic credibility moving forward.

Institutional Autonomy

Autonomy of key institutions—such as the army, judiciary, and Election Commission—will be crucial to rebuilding public confidence in state neutrality and fairness.

India–Bangladesh Relations in the New Context

Diplomatic Recalibration

Historically, the BNP has had more cautious relations with India, while the Awami League maintained closer bilateral ties. Despite that history, India was among the first countries to congratulate Tarique Rahman on his election victory and expressed diplomatic goodwill, including high-level interactions following important personal events in Rahman's life.

Strategic Considerations for New Delhi

India's foreign policy calculus in Dhaka faces several imperatives-

1. Avoid overtly aligning with a single party or leader to maintain balanced relations across Bangladesh's political spectrum.
2. Strengthen people-to-people linkages through cultural, educational, trade, and developmental cooperation rather than purely state-to-state engagements.
3. Continue diplomatic engagement with the new government while safeguarding the security and well-being of Indian minorities and diplomatic missions.

Conclusion

Bangladesh's political landscape has undergone a dramatic upheaval since 2024, moving from prolonged one-party dominance under Sheikh Hasina to a paradigm shaped by mass mobilization, constitutional debate, and electoral turnover. The rise of the BNP under Tarique Rahman and the enhanced role of conservative parties highlight shifting political currents.

Key challenges ahead include implementing institutional reforms outlined in the July Charter, nurturing political reconciliation, and consolidating democratic institutions that can withstand polarization. For regional actors like India, navigating this transition demands balanced diplomacy and an emphasis on institution-centric engagement over partisan preferences.

Source- https-//economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/tarique-rahman-bangladesh-election-result-india-impact-new-delhi-backed-bnp-in-bangladesh-and-it-won-whats-next-now/articleshow/128299227.cms?from=mdr

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 16.02.2026

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1. The UAE-India Corridor Is Sparking a Growth Story (TH)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Topic- The UAE-India Corridor Is Driving Growth, Technology, And Strategic Global Expansion

India–UAE Economic Corridor- From CEPA to Strategic Geo-Economic Convergence

The India–UAE relationship has evolved from a traditional energy-trade linkage into a multidimensional strategic partnership integrating trade, investment, technology, energy security, and geopolitics. The signing of the India–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 marked an inflection point, accelerating economic integration and institutionalizing long-term cooperation.

Trade Expansion- Scale, Diversification, and Structural Shift

Early Achievement of $100 Billion Target

1. Bilateral trade crossed $100 billion five years ahead of the 2030 target, demonstrating the catalytic role of CEPA.
2. Both nations have now revised their ambition upward to $200 billion by 2032, signalling confidence in sustained trade momentum.
3. The achievement reflects a transition from hydrocarbons-led trade to a diversified and value-added trade basket.

Rise of Non-Oil Trade

Non-oil trade increased by approximately 20% year-on-year, reaching $65 billion.

Key sectors driving growth-

1. Agriculture and processed food
2. Gems and jewellery
3. Textiles and apparel
4. Engineering goods and machinery
5. Chemicals and pharmaceuticals

This diversification reduces vulnerability to oil price volatility and enhances supply chain resilience.

CEPA's Tariff Architecture

1. Eliminated or reduced tariffs on nearly 90% of tariff lines.
2. Facilitated preferential market access for Indian MSMEs and labour-intensive sectors.
3. Strengthened customs cooperation and regulatory harmonization.

Diaspora and Connectivity- The Human and Logistical Backbone

Indian Diaspora as Strategic Asset

Approximately 5 million Indians reside in the UAE, constituting its largest expatriate community. The diaspora acts as-

1. A bridge for trade and investment
2. A source of remittances
3. A facilitator of cultural diplomacy

Remittance inflows contribute significantly to India's external stability and consumption base.

Air and Physical Connectivity

Around 1,200 weekly flights, making the India–UAE corridor one of the busiest globally.

High-frequency connectivity supports-

1. Business travel
2. Tourism
3. High-value cargo trade
4. Financial sector integration

The "Two-Way Street" of Investment- Capital Interdependence

Investment Flows Overview

1. UAE investments in India since 2000- $22+ billion.
2. Indian investments in UAE- $16+ billion.
3. This reciprocity reflects mutual economic trust and strategic convergence.

A. Indian Investments in the UAE

Energy and Low-Carbon Transition- Reliance Industries- $2 billion investment in Abu Dhabi for low-carbon chemicals expansion. Demonstrates integration of India's industrial champions into Gulf energy transition ecosystems.

Electric Mobility- Ashok Leyland shifted electric bus manufacturing to Dubai, leveraging logistics efficiency and regulatory support. Indicates UAE's positioning as a global EV export hub.

Renewable Energy Infrastructure- Larsen & Toubro (L&T) constructing large-scale solar-plus-storage projects in Abu Dhabi. Supports UAE's net-zero ambitions while expanding India's EPC footprint.

B. UAE Investments in India

Ports and Logistics- DP World committed $5 billion toward ports and logistics parks. Enhances India's maritime infrastructure and global value chain integration.

Banking and Financial Sector- Emirates NBD acquired a majority stake in RBL Bank. Strengthens financial sector capitalisation and cross-border banking integration.

Energy Security- ADNOC signed long-term LPG supply agreements with Indian PSUs like Indian Oil and HPCL. Reinforces India's energy security while ensuring stable demand for UAE hydrocarbons.

Sovereign Wealth Funds- ADIA established operations in GIFT City, deepening financial market integration. Mubadala invested $4 billion in healthcare and renewable energy sectors. Reflects strategic long-term capital placement rather than short-term portfolio flows.

Strategic Policy Architecture- Institutional Foundations

CEPA (2022)

1. Trade facilitation, tariff reduction, services liberalization.
2. Anchors economic cooperation beyond hydrocarbons.

Bilateral Investment Treaty (2024)

1. Strengthens investor protection.
2. Enhances dispute resolution mechanisms.
3. Improves predictability for long-term capital deployment.

Strategic Defence Partnership

1. Expands cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, and defense production.
2. Ensures geopolitical stability for sustained economic engagement.

Emerging Frontiers- AI, Technology, and Global Market Access

Bharat Mart Initiative

A wholesale distribution hub in the UAE to serve as a gateway for Indian exports to-

1. Africa
2. West Asia
3. Eurasia

Enhances India's re-export competitiveness and reduces logistical barriers.

Artificial Intelligence Collaboration

1. AI emerging as the next growth frontier in the corridor.
2. India hosting the AI Impact Summit (February 16–20, 2026), the first global AI summit in the Global South.
3. UAE, having appointed the world's first Minister of State for AI in 2017, brings advanced AI governance and infrastructure capabilities.
4. Potential areas of collaboration
    a. AI in logistics and ports
    b. Smart cities
    c. FinTech and digital banking
    d. Energy optimization and carbon management

Geo-Economic and Strategic Implications

Shift from Energy Dependence to Strategic Partnership

1. Earlier phase- Oil-driven transactional engagement.
2. Current phase- Institutionalized, diversified, capital-intensive strategic partnership.

Integration into Global Value Chains

1. Logistics, ports, and financial integration strengthen India's export competitiveness.
2. UAE serves as a gateway economy linking India to Africa and Europe.

Support for Viksit Bharat 2047

1. Capital inflows enhance infrastructure and manufacturing capacity.
2. Technology transfer accelerates digital and green transitions.
3. Supply chain diversification strengthens economic resilience.

Broader Delhi Declaration Vision

Expands India–Arab cooperation across-

1. Energy transition
2. Technology
3. Maritime security
4. Investment corridors

Conclusion

The India–UAE Economic Corridor represents a transformation from conventional bilateral trade to a strategic geo-economic architecture. CEPA institutionalized trade liberalization; reciprocal investments created capital interdependence; diaspora and connectivity built human integration; and emerging domains like AI and renewable energy are redefining the partnership.

The corridor is no longer merely about hydrocarbons—it is about value chains, capital flows, technological convergence, and strategic stability. In this sense, the India–UAE partnership is evolving

into a model of South-South economic cooperation aligned with India's long-term developmental objective of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-uae-india-corridor-is-sparking-a-growth-story/article70635903.ece

2. Bridging A Divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service' (TH)

General Studies 2- Science & Development

Topic- A Dedicated Scientific Cadre Is Needed to Strengthen Governance as Science, Technology and Environmental Challenges Become Central

Proposal for an Indian Scientific Service (ISS)- Institutionalising Science in Governance

The proposal to establish a dedicated Indian Scientific Service (ISS) seeks to structurally embed scientific expertise within the higher echelons of public administration. It aims to transition India's governance architecture from a predominantly generalist administrative model toward a hybrid framework combining managerial coordination with domain-specific technical authority.

Historical Context- From Steel Frame to Knowledge State

Post-1947 Administrative Continuity

1. India retained the colonial-era civil services after Independence to preserve unity, continuity, and stability.
2. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel characterised the services as the "steel frame", underscoring their role in nation-building and integration.
3. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) evolved as a versatile, generalist leadership cadre.

Suitability of the Generalist Model

In early decades, governance challenges centred on-

1. Land reforms
2. Institutional consolidation
3. Development planning
4. Public order and welfare administration

Officers rotated across departments, promoting coordination and administrative coherence.

Structural Shift in Governance Complexity

Contemporary governance is characterised by-

1. Climate modelling and carbon markets
2. Artificial Intelligence regulation and algorithmic governance
3. Cybersecurity and digital sovereignty
4. Biotechnology and genomic surveillance
5. Pandemic preparedness and epidemiological forecasting

These domains demand advanced technical literacy, interdisciplinary systems thinking, and long-term risk modelling—competencies not inherently cultivated within traditional generalist training.

The Governance Paradox- Science Without Authority

Institutional Constraint

1. Government scientists in institutions such as DRDO, ISRO, CSIR labs, and regulatory bodies operate under standard civil service rules.
2. Despite subject-matter expertise, they frequently lack policy-level decision-making authority.
3. Technical recommendations may be overridden by administrative hierarchies.

Cultural Mismatch

Bureaucratic systems emphasise-

1. Procedural compliance
2. File-based decision-making
3. Hierarchical deference

Scientific practice prioritises-

1. Hypothesis testing
2. Evidence-based dissent
3. Peer scrutiny
4. Iterative learning

This divergence can suppress innovation and discourage critical evaluation of policy assumptions.

Advisory Marginalisation

1. In many ministries, scientific advisory roles remain consultative rather than determinative.
2. Advice is non-binding and subject to administrative discretion.
3. Risk assessments are often subordinated to short-term political or fiscal considerations.

Reactive Versus Anticipatory Governance

Reactive Deployment of Science

Scientific expertise is frequently mobilised post-crisis, such as-

1. Environmental disasters
2. Air pollution emergencies
3. Public health outbreaks
4. Cyberattacks

This reactive posture increases economic and social costs.

Need for Anticipatory Governance

Embedding scientists at the policy design stage would enable-

1. Early risk identification
2. Long-term modelling of climate and demographic transitions
3. Evidence-informed regulation of emerging technologies
4. Strategic foresight in biosecurity and digital governance

An institutionalised scientific cadre would support preventive, risk-informed policymaking rather than episodic crisis management.

Proposed Indian Scientific Service (ISS)- Structural Design

Creation of a New All-India Service

1. ISS would function alongside IAS, IPS, and IFS.
2. Cadre officers would be deployed across Union ministries, state governments, regulatory agencies, and strategic institutions.

Specialised Recruitment Model

Selection through evaluation of-

1. Peer-reviewed publications
2. Research impact
3. Domain expertise
4. Technological leadership

Recruitment could occur at multiple career stages, including lateral entry. Emphasis on meritocratic scientific credentials rather than generalist competitive examination alone.

Defined Functional Role

ISS officers would provide-

1. Technical feasibility assessments
2. Regulatory impact analysis
3. Long-term risk forecasting
4. Scientific validation of public projects

Administrators would continue handling coordination, finance, and interdepartmental alignment. This creates a complementary governance architecture, not a replacement of the generalist model.

Global Best Practices

Institutionalised Scientific Services

Countries with structured scientific integration include

1. United States – Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), Chief Science Advisors, federal scientific cadres.
2. United Kingdom – Government Office for Science and departmental Chief Scientific Advisers.
3. France, Germany, Japan – Formalised research-policy linkages within ministries.

Scientific Integrity Frameworks

The United States implements Scientific Integrity Policies that-

1. Protect researchers from political interference
2. Mandate transparency in documenting scientific advice
3. Safeguard publication autonomy

These frameworks ensure credibility, independence, and public trust in scientific governance.

Potential Advantages of an ISS

Enhanced Policy Quality- Integration of quantitative modelling, AI tools, and scenario analysis into governance. Reduced reliance on ad hoc committees.

Improved Regulatory Capacity- Stronger oversight of biotechnology, fintech, climate markets, and digital platforms.

Strengthened National Security- Scientific expertise in cybersecurity, quantum technologies, and defence innovation.

Long-Term Strategic Planning

Alignment with India's goals in-

1. Net-zero transition
2. Semiconductor manufacturing
3. Space economy expansion
4. Bioeconomy development

Implementation Challenges

Inter-Service Coordination- Avoiding bureaucratic turf conflicts between generalists and specialists.

Career Progression Structure- Designing promotion pathways comparable in prestige and authority to IAS positions.

Federal Adaptation- Harmonising Union and State-level deployment.

Ensuring Independence- Safeguarding scientific advice from political capture while maintaining democratic accountability.

Strategic Rationale in the Indian Context

As India transitions toward

1. A $5 trillion economy and beyond
2. A digitally integrated governance ecosystem
3. Climate-resilient infrastructure
4. AI-enabled public service delivery

Governance must evolve from administrative command to knowledge-based statecraft.

The ISS proposal aligns with-

1. Atmanirbhar Bharat in high-technology sectors
2. Viksit Bharat 2047 vision
3. Strengthening India's role in global science diplomacy

Conclusion

The establishment of an Indian Scientific Service represents a shift from episodic consultation to institutionalised scientific governance. It acknowledges that 21st-century statecraft is increasingly technical, data-intensive, and risk-sensitive.

Rather than relying solely on generalist administrators supported by ad hoc advisory committees, India requires durable institutional reform that embeds scientific authority within decision-making structures. A well-designed ISS could create a hybrid governance model—where administrative coordination and scientific rigour operate in tandem—ensuring resilient, anticipatory, and evidence-based policymaking in an era of technological transformation.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/bridging-a-divide-with-an-indian-scientific-service/article70635864.ece

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2. India At the Ai Crossroads- Cooperation Vs Technological Sovereignty (ET) - 03

1. India's federalism is in need of a structural reset (TH)

General Studies 2- Indian Polity
Topic- Federalism

There is a need for balanced federalism in the form of autonomous States, an efficient Union, and accountable governance. Recently, a high-level committee on Union–State relations, submitted its first report to the Government of Tamil Nadu that deals with powers and responsibilities shared between the Union and the States.

About India's Federalism

Federalism is a system of government in which power is constitutionally divided between a central authority (Union) and regional governments (States). A federal system gives both levels independent authority within their own spheres, unlike a unitary system (where all power flows from the centre). Neither level is legally subordinate to the other within those assigned domains.

India's Unique Federal Design

Constitutional Design- The Constitution (1950), influenced by the Government of India Act, 1935, created a strong Union List, a residuary power vested in Parliament, Emergency provisions (Articles 352, 356, 360), and a single Constitution and single citizenship. Indian federalism was shaped by Partition, princely state integration, and fears of fragmentation, unlike classical federations (e.g., the US).

1. India is often described as a 'Union of States', a phrase deliberately used in the Constitution to reflect unity with diversity.
2. India's federalism is often called 'quasi-federal' or 'federal with a unitary bias', as the Constitution of India gives the Union stronger authority in certain areas, especially during emergencies.
3. Union law prevails (with limited exceptions) if there is a conflict in Concurrent List subjects. It reflects both-

The need for national unity, and recognition of regional diversity.

Core Foundational Principles of Indian Federalism

Constitutional Supremacy- India does not operate on parliamentary supremacy (like the UK). The Constitution is supreme, i.e. both the Union and States derive their authority from it, and no government, either Union or State, can act beyond constitutional limits.

Division of Legislative, Executive & Financial Powers- Federalism is not just about law-making. It also involves Legislative powers (law making), Executive powers, and financial powers. Revenue sharing is done through the Finance Commission, GST Council, and Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

Cooperative Federalism- India's model is not meant to be competitive or adversarial. The ideal vision is cooperative federalism, meaning-

1. The Union and States work together.
2. Policies are discussed collaboratively.
3. Institutions like the Inter-State Council and GST Council encourage consultation.

More recently, the phrase 'competitive federalism' has emerged, meaning States compete in performance (investment, ease of doing business, governance reforms).

Unity with Diversity- India is linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse. Federalism accommodates different languages, development models, and governance experiments.

For example- Tamil Nadu pioneered the noon meal scheme; Kerala achieved strong public health outcomes; Maharashtra experimented with employment guarantee schemes.

Asymmetrical Federalism- India does not treat all States identically. Some States historically enjoyed special provisions like Sixth Schedule areas for tribal regions in Northeast India.

Judicial Safeguards- Federalism as Basic Structure

S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994)- The Supreme Court held that Federalism is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

1. States are not 'mere appendages' of the Centre, and they are supreme within their constitutional sphere.
2. The term 'Basic Structure' means that even Parliament cannot amend the Constitution in a way that destroys federalism.
3. Article 356 (President's Rule) is subject to judicial review.

Commissions on Centre–State Relations

Rajamannar Committee (1971)- Established by Tamil Nadu, it argued for greater State autonomy and clearer limits on Union encroachment.

Sarkaria Commission (1983–1988)- Recommended cooperative federalism, restraint in using Article 356, and consultation with States.

Punchhi Commission (2007–2010)- Called for redefining the Governor's role and strengthening intergovernmental mechanisms.

Concerns & Issues Around India's Federalism

Centralisation of Legislative Powers- Parliament increasingly legislates on subjects where States also have authority.

1. Provisions such as Articles 249 and 250 allow Parliament to legislate on State subjects under certain conditions, raising concerns about gradual erosion of State spheres.
2. It reduces meaningful State autonomy when uniform national laws override local policy choices.

Misuse and Legacy of Article 356- Article 356 (President's Rule) was frequently invoked for political reasons before S.R. Bommai (1994). The Supreme Court restricted arbitrary use, making proclamations judicially reviewable.

Role of Governors- Major concerns include delays or refusal of assent to State Bills, discretionary powers in government formation, and reporting under Article 356.

Fiscal Federalism Imbalances

Vertical Imbalance- States bear substantial expenditure responsibilities (health, education, agriculture), yet major taxation powers are concentrated at the Union level.

Conditional Transfers- Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) under Article 282 allow the Union to impose policy templates through tied grants.

Finance Commission Dynamics- The broader concern is that fiscal dependence weakens substantive autonomy.

GST and Shared Sovereignty- The introduction of the GST (2017) restructured fiscal federalism. Concerns include loss of independent taxation space for States, GST compensation disputes, voting structure within the GST Council, and increasing central coordination over tax rates. It lies between uniform market integration and fiscal autonomy.

Executive Federalism & Institutional Drift- Intergovernmental bodies such as NITI Aayog, GST Council, and Inter-State Council have reshaped federal practice. The decision-making increasingly occurs through executive forums rather than legislative federalism, reducing transparency and formal accountability.

Asymmetric Federalism Under Strain- India accommodates asymmetry (e.g., special provisions for certain States). However, reorganisation of states, alteration of special status arrangements, and uniform policy drives have raised questions about how asymmetry is protected within a centralising framework.

Political Centralisation- Strong single-party dominance at the Union level, particularly when the same party governs multiple States, can create 'high command' culture, reduced bargaining autonomy, and policy uniformity pressures. Conversely, coalition eras historically strengthened negotiated federalism.

Way Forward- Strengthening India's Federalism

Limit Overreach in the Concurrent List- Parliament should exercise restraint in legislating on Concurrent subjects unless national uniformity is indispensable. Revitalising Article 263 institutions can institutionalise structured dialogue rather than ad hoc negotiation.

Reform the Role of Governors- Establish transparent criteria for appointment; fix timelines for assent to State Bills; and codify discretionary powers more clearly. Commissions (Sarkaria, Punchhi) have recommended insulating the office from partisan influence. Implementing these reforms would reduce recurring Centre – State conflicts.

Revisit Article 282 Practices- Clarify limits on discretionary grants to prevent fiscal centralisation. Need to ensure predictable, transparent, and rule-based devolution criteria.

Recalibrate GST Governance- The improvements are needed for greater deliberative transparency, timely compensation mechanisms, mechanisms for limited State rate flexibility in defined sectors. It would balance market integration with fiscal autonomy.

Institutionalise Cooperative & Competitive Federalism- India's federal future lies in combining Cooperative federalism (shared decision-making), and Competitive federalism (policy innovation and benchmarking). Encouraging States to experiment, while sharing best practices horizontally, strengthens overall governance capacity.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-federalism-is-in-need-of-a-structural-reset/article70639834.ece

2. India At the Ai Crossroads- Cooperation Vs Technological Sovereignty (ET)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology

Topic- AI Summit 2026- Investment signals, policy convergence, and India's expanding AI ambition

As India hosts a major AI Summit in New Delhi, it stands at a strategic inflection point. The central dilemma is whether to position itself primarily as a champion of global AI cooperation or to prioritise technological sovereignty in an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment. This tension mirrors the calibrated balance between collaboration and strategic autonomy pursued by Homi J. Bhabha during India's formative nuclear years.

The AI moment is not merely technological—it is civilisational, economic, military, and geopolitical.

The Paradox of Ai- Universal Public Good Vs Strategic Asset

AI as a Global Public Good – The Normative Narrative

1. Global forums such as the G7, G20, OECD, and UN frame AI as a universal public good requiring cooperative governance.

2. Emphasis is placed on ethical AI, safety standards, algorithmic transparency, and inclusive access.
3. AI is compared to air, water, or climate stability—transnational by nature and requiring shared stewardship.
4. Developing countries argue for equitable access to compute, datasets, and model capabilities to avoid digital colonialism.

Backstage Reality – Strategic Rivalry

Major powers, particularly the US and China, are locked in intense competition over-

1. Advanced semiconductor manufacturing
2. Access to cutting-edge GPUs and compute clusters
3. AI talent and research dominance
4. Foundational model supremacy

Export controls, investment screening, and supply-chain decoupling signal that AI is treated as a strategic commodity, not a shared global utility. The CHIPS and Science Act in the US and China's semiconductor self-reliance push illustrate techno-nationalism.

AI as Strategic Power

AI is dual-use- it drives productivity and economic transformation while also enhancing-

1. Autonomous weapons systems
2. Cyber operations
3. Intelligence and surveillance
4. Military decision-support systems

Control over AI ecosystems determines-

1. Economic competitiveness
2. Defence superiority
3. Narrative dominance in global governance

States are therefore reluctant to share core algorithms, training data, and compute infrastructure.

Rise of Techno-Nationalism

AI has become an instrument of geopolitical leverage.

Technological superiority increasingly translates into-

1. Supply-chain coercive capacity
2. Standards-setting power
3. Economic dependency networks

The global order is shifting from globalisation to securitised interdependence.

Historical Parallel- Lessons from The Nuclear Era (1955 And beyond)

The current AI rivalry resembles the nuclear arms race of the mid-20th century.

Nuclear vs AI Rivalry

1. In 1955, the United States and the Soviet Union dominated nuclear technology.
2. Nuclear capability determined geopolitical hierarchy and strategic autonomy.
3. Today, AI—like nuclear technology then—is a system-defining technology shaping global power structures.

Homi J. Bhabha's Strategic Insight

At the 1955 Geneva Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, Bhabha argued-

1. Developing nations must not remain passive recipients.
2. Access to strategic technology is essential for development and energy security.

He recognised a core principle-

Rule-making authority flows from technological capability.

Without indigenous capability-

1. A country cannot influence governance frameworks.
2. It becomes dependent on technology suppliers.
3. It risks strategic vulnerability.

Power Precedes Influence

Bhabha understood that

1. Moral arguments alone do not secure technological access.
2. Influence in global governance emerges from demonstrated capability.
3. Domestic scientific strength is the foundation of external bargaining power.

This principle is directly applicable to AI governance today.

The "Bridge Builder" Strategy- Partnerships for Capability

External Collaboration with Strategic Intent

Bhabha

1. Engaged scientists from the US, UK, and Canada.
2. Leveraged the "Atoms for Peace" moment.
3. Used partnerships to accelerate indigenous capability rather than create permanent dependence.

This is instructive for AI.

India's Current AI Ecosystem

1. Deep integration with Silicon Valley.
2. Strong R&D clusters in Bengaluru and Hyderabad.
3. A vibrant start-up ecosystem.
4. Leadership in digital public infrastructure (DPI) such as UPI and Aadhaar.

However

1. Compute capacity is limited relative to global leaders.
2. India lacks cutting-edge semiconductor fabrication.
3. Foundational model development remains nascent compared to US and China.

Partnership-Led Internal Growth

India must

1. Secure access to advanced chips through strategic partnerships.
2. Invest in sovereign compute clusters.
3. Build national foundational models tailored to Indian languages and governance contexts.
4. Expand public–private research consortia.

Partnerships should be used to accelerate domestic capacity, not substitute for it.

THE "LOST DECADES" WARNING

Post-1960s Slowdown in Nuclear Momentum

1. After the deaths of Nehru and Bhabha, policy momentum fragmented.
2. International isolation following nuclear tests slowed collaboration.
3. India's early advantage diminished over time.

Competitors Scaling Rapidly

1. China and South Korea, late entrants in nuclear technology, scaled aggressively.
2. They transitioned into exporters and global suppliers.
3. Strategic clarity and sustained investment drove long-term gains.

Risk of Repetition in AI

Emerging economies such as Vietnam and Indonesia are rapidly digitising.

Policy indecision, regulatory overreach, or underinvestment could-

1. Stall AI innovation.
2. Lead to talent flight.
3. Create dependency on foreign platforms.

AI is a first-mover advantage domain. Delays compound exponentially.

Way Forward- A Strategic Framework For India

Build Tangible National Assets

Prioritise

1. Sovereign high-performance computing infrastructure.
2. Semiconductor design and gradual manufacturing capability.
3. National AI research labs.
4. Public datasets governed under secure frameworks.
5. Massive skilling programmes in AI, data science, and chip design.

Capability must be measurable and scalable.

Move from Moralism to Rule-Shaping

1. Participate actively in drafting AI safety norms.
2. Lead Global South coalitions on equitable access.
3. Advocate open standards while protecting core technologies.
4. Influence ISO, ITU, and OECD technical committees.

Norm entrepreneurship must be backed by technological credibility.

Strategic Realism in Partnerships

Deepen cooperation with the US and like-minded democracies.

Leverage US–China rivalry for-

1. Access to advanced compute
2. Joint R&D programmes
3. Semiconductor ecosystem participation

Preserve strategic autonomy by avoiding overdependence on any single bloc.

Capability First, Leadership Later

Aspirations to lead the Global South in AI governance will be credible only if India-

1. Develops world-class foundational models.
2. Demonstrates scalable AI use cases in agriculture, health, education, and governance.

Just as Unified Payments Interface enhanced India's global standing, AI-enabled digital public goods can become exportable models.

Strategic Synthesis- Cooperative Autonomy

India does not face a binary choice between cooperation and sovereignty.

The optimal strategy is calibrated cooperative autonomy

1. Open to partnerships.
2. Protective of core strategic assets.
3. Assertive in governance forums.
4. Relentless in domestic capacity-building.

This mirrors Bhabha's nuclear doctrine-

1. Engage globally.
2. Build internally.
3. Shape rules from a position of strength.

Conclusion

India's AI strategy must transcend rhetorical leadership and focus on structural capability. The AI summit in Delhi symbolises ambition—but ambition without infrastructure risks hollow influence.

The lesson from the nuclear era is clear-

Technological sovereignty and global cooperation are not opposites. They are complementary—provided cooperation is used to build national strength.

In the AI century, credibility will not come from speeches about ethical AI alone. It will come from sovereign compute, indigenous models, skilled human capital, and the strategic discipline to convert partnerships into power.

Source- https-//economictimes.indiatimes.com/ai/ai-insights/ai-summit-2026-investment-signals-policy-convergence-and-indias-expanding-ai-ambition/articleshow/128496462.cms?from=mdr

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1. India's 'Third Way' for AI governance

General Science 3- Science & Technology
Topic- India's 'Third Way' for AI governance

For nations seeking development pathways compatible with their strategic interests and institutional capacities, India's model holds real appeal

As the AI Impact Summit unfolds in New Delhi, global leaders, policymakers, and technology experts are conscious about governing artificial intelligence (AI) for promoting innovation and managing its real and unknown risks. India is positioning itself as offering a 'Third Way', an alternative AI governance model distinct from those of the world's major AI powers.

About AI Governance

AI governance is about balancing innovation with protection, ensuring AI systems improve society without undermining rights, security, or economic stability. It refers to the rules, policies, standards, and institutions that guide how artificial intelligence (AI) is developed, deployed, and monitored to ensure it benefits society while minimizing risks.

Global Governance Divide

Different regions have adopted sharply contrasting AI governance strategies-

European Union- A compliance-heavy, risk-classification regime under the AI Act, emphasizing strict regulatory oversight.

United States- A largely market-driven, innovation-first approach with sectoral guidance rather than centralized AI legislation.

China- A centralized, state-directed governance structure with strong control over data and algorithm deployment.

Each model reflects its own economic structure and political traditions. These frameworks do not easily transfer to the realities of the Global South, where digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, and development priorities differ significantly.

India's Distinct Governance Approach

Governance Framework- India has released its AI governance guidelines that integrates adoption and diffusion of AI, risk mitigation, capacity-building, international diplomacy, and public-private collaboration.

1. It works within existing legal structures such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and related digital rules, instead of creating entirely new regulatory architecture.
2. Priority sectors include healthcare, agriculture, education, and public administration. It aligns with India's broader digital public infrastructure strategy, as seen in platforms like Aadhaar, UPI, and Digi Locker.

First-of-Its-Kind Disclosure Rules- Recently, the government amended the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules to mandate labelling of AI-generated content that harmful content takedown within a three-hour window.

1. It marks one of the first national-level mandates globally requiring explicit AI-generated content disclosure.
2. However, enforcement presents challenges like policing global technology giants, ensuring compliance at scale, balancing regulation with democratic freedoms, and coordinating across jurisdictions.
3. Implementation risks becoming fragmented, without international cooperation.

Key Issues with India in AI Governance

Innovation Without Protection- A framework that accelerates AI adoption without protecting workers displaced by automation, mandating transparency from AI developers, protecting whistleblowers, safeguarding vulnerable communities, and promoting public awareness and digital literacy etc risks replicating the same imbalances already visible among AI superpowers.

Regulatory Gaps and Fragmentation- India has not enacted a standalone AI law. Instead, it relies on the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and amendments to intermediary rules. It creates ambiguity about liability, overlapping enforcement responsibilities, and unclear compliance expectations for companies.

Data Governance & Privacy Concerns- AI systems depend heavily on data. Although India passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, concerns remain about broad government exemptions, weak independent oversight mechanisms, and limited clarity on algorithmic profiling. Without strong privacy enforcement, AI development could increase risks of surveillance or misuse.

Worker Displacement & Social Protection- AI adoption affects IT services, customer support, administrative roles, and gig economy platforms. India lacks a comprehensive AI-linked workforce transition policy. Key gaps reskilling frameworks at national scale, social safety nets for displaced workers, and sector-specific automation impact assessments.

Infrastructure & Compute Dependence- Advanced AI development requires High-performance computing (HPC), semiconductor access, and large-scale data centres. India still relies significantly on foreign cloud providers, imported chips, external foundational models, limiting strategic autonomy and bargaining power in global AI governance.

Bias & Socio-Cultural Complexity- India's diversity creates unique AI risks like language diversity (22+ official languages), caste and social bias, and regional inequalities. AI systems trained on global datasets may not reflect Indian realities, leading to discriminatory outcomes.

Supremacy of Global North- AI investment remains heavily concentrated among a small group of private firms in the Global North. It creates dependency on proprietary systems, limited bargaining power for developing nations, contextual risks poorly understood by external developers, and barriers to local innovation ecosystems.

Limited Global Coordination Mechanisms- India advocates Global South coordination, but no formal multilateral AI safety alliance yet exists among middle powers;

1. AI standards are still largely shaped by US-EU dynamics;
2. Cross-border enforcement remains weak.

Way Forward

India's 'Third Way'- It emphasizes strategic autonomy, localized governance models, public-private partnerships, shared safety evaluation frameworks, and collaborative research networks among emerging economies.

Inclusive AI governance needs to incorporate social protection, labour transition strategies, and accountability mechanisms, not merely innovation scaling. Without these safeguards, the 'Third Way' could become a faster route to instability rather than resilience.

AI Governance Across the Global South- The coming year will determine whether India can successfully integrate innovation, national security, economic development, and human welfare. If successful, the 'Third Way' could become a template for AI governance across the Global South.

Strategic Opportunity- The AI Impact Summit offers India a chance to shape global coordination among middle powers, distribute AI gains more equitably, build shared research and safety infrastructure, and position itself as a hub for agile, collective governance. For countries seeking development pathways aligned with their institutional capacities and strategic interests, India's model holds real appeal.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-third-way-for-ai-governance/article70647367.ece

2. A green light that experts say ignores the evidence (FL)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Topic- A green light that experts say ignores the evidence

Great Nicobar Island Project (GNIP)- Strategic Imperative vs Ecological and Tribal Concerns

The Great Nicobar Island Project (GNIP) is one of India's most ambitious strategic infrastructure initiatives. The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Kolkata Bench, recently upheld the environmental clearance granted to the project, stating that statutory safeguards and impact assessments had been complied with. However, the project continues to generate intense debate over environmental sustainability, tribal rights, and procedural transparency.

Overview of the Project

Objective

1. Transform Great Nicobar Island into a major maritime, logistics, and strategic hub.
2. Strengthen India's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Core Components

International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)

1. Deep-draft port to handle large mother vessels.
2. Aims to reduce dependence on foreign transshipment hubs like Colombo and Singapore.

International Airport

1. Dual-use (civilian + military).
2. Enhances rapid troop mobilization and connectivity.

Planned Township

1. Urban settlement to house workforce and service industries.
2. Supports port-led industrialization.

450 MVA Power Plant

1. Gas and solar-based hybrid facility.
2. Intended to ensure uninterrupted power supply for infrastructure.

Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

Proximity to Strait of Malacca

1. Located near one of the busiest maritime chokepoints globally.
2. Critical for global oil and trade flows.
3. Strategic relevance in the context of Chinese maritime expansion.

Maritime Domain Awareness

1. Enhances surveillance and naval presence in the Eastern Indian Ocean.
2. Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Economic Advantages

1. Boosts port-led development under Sagarmala framework.
2. Potential to generate employment, tourism, and logistics growth.

Environmental Concerns

Large-Scale Deforestation

1. Approximately 130 sq. km. of forest area to be cleared.
2. Nearly 9 lakh trees expected to be felled.
3. Great Nicobar is part of a biodiversity-rich, ecologically sensitive zone.

Impact on Wildlife

1. Habitat of the Leatherback Turtle (largest sea turtle species).
2. Threat to nesting grounds due to port construction.

Coral Reef Damage

1. Dredging activities may destroy coral reefs.
2. Coral ecosystems support marine biodiversity and coastal protection.

Ecological Fragility

1. Island ecosystems are inherently vulnerable.
2. Risk of irreversible biodiversity loss.

"Nauru Warning" Analogy

1. Historical example of ecological devastation due to extractive development.
2. Highlights risk of unsustainable island exploitation.

Human and Tribal Concerns

Indigenous Communities

1. Inhabited by **Shompen (PVTG)** and Nicobarese tribes.
2. Concerns regarding displacement and cultural erosion.

Forest Rights Act (2006)

1. Requires prior informed consent of Gram Sabha for diversion of forest land.
2. Legal obligation for community participation.

Allegations of Coercion- Reports of pressure on tribal representatives to sign consent documents.

Informed Consent Dilemma

1. Shompen tribe lives in relative isolation.
2. Language and communication barriers raise doubts about meaningful consent.

Institutional and Procedural Critiques

Transparency Issues

1. Critics allege heavy reliance on government data.

2. Limited independent environmental scrutiny.

Strategic Exemption Concerns- Some project details reportedly withheld citing national security.

Role of NGT

1. NGT upheld environmental clearances.
2. Critics argue insufficient independent reassessment.

Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

Article 21 – Right to Life- Includes right to clean environment (as per Supreme Court jurisprudence).

Environmental Protection Act, 1986- Mandates environmental impact assessments.

Forest Conservation Act, 1980- Governs diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.

Forest Rights Act, 2006- Protects rights of Scheduled Tribes and forest dwellers.

Development vs Sustainability- The Core Dilemma

Strategic Imperative

1. Strengthening maritime security.
2. Enhancing trade competitiveness.
3. Reducing reliance on foreign ports.

Environmental and Social Costs

1. Irreversible ecological damage.
2. Threat to tribal autonomy.
3. Precedent for development in ecologically sensitive zones.

Way Forward

Independent Scientific Review

1. Third-party ecological assessments.
2. Continuous environmental monitoring.

Strengthen Tribal Safeguards

1. Ensure free, prior, and informed consent.
2. Transparent grievance redressal mechanisms.

Adaptive Environmental Planning

1. Phased development with ecological buffers.
2. Coral relocation and biodiversity offset measures.

Balance Security with Sustainability- Integrate environmental security into national security discourse.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar Island Project represents a strategic leap in India's Indo-Pacific posture, but it simultaneously raises profound environmental and tribal rights concerns. The long-term success of the project will depend not only on infrastructure development but also on maintaining ecological integrity, respecting indigenous rights, and ensuring transparent governance.

Source- https-//frontline.thehindu.com/environment/great-nicobar-project-ngt-clearance-environmental-concerns-india/article70648421.ece

Editorial of the Day – 19.02.2026

Index

1. Kashmir revival- On the path of tourism (TH) - 01
2. As NGT clears Great Nicobar project, a look at its strategic importance and ecological fallout (IE) - 02

1. Kashmir revival- On the path of tourism (TH)

General Studies 3- Internal Security
Topic- Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
Sub Topic- Government budgeting; Tourism as a tool for peacebuilding; Disaster and risk management.

Introduction

The Kashmir Valley is undergoing a strategic "Tourism Revival" following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, which briefly crippled the region's hospitality sector. Through a combination of phased reopening of sites and the Union Budget 2026–27 allocations, the government is shifting toward a model that integrates national security with ecological sustainability and community-led governance.

1. Context- The April 2025 Pahalgam Attack & Aftermath

The attack served as a critical stress test for the region's tourism infrastructure and policy.
Immediate Impact- Total closure of 48 government-approved tourist sites to ensure visitor safety.
Phased Recovery- Recognizing that tourism relies on predictability, authorities initiated a phased reopening. By **February 16, 2026**, 14 key sites were restored to public access.
Core Lesson- Tourism resilience in conflict zones depends on the state's ability to provide a clear, transparent criteria for site closures and reopenings.

2. Tourism and Risk Perception

Security in Kashmir is as much about perception as it is about physical safety.
Visitor Differentiation- Analysis shows that tourists distinguish between "general conflict" and "targeted risks."
Policy Requirements- To maintain high footfalls, the government must ensure-

1. Transparency- Clear communication regarding safety protocols.
2. Reliability- Consistent permit systems and emergency response mechanisms.
3. Governance- Reducing administrative disruptions to incentivize local business growth.

3. Union Budget 2026–27- The Strategic Push

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget introduced a two-pronged strategy for the region-

A. Institutional Capacity Building

1. Strengthening the administrative machinery to manage high-volume tourism.
2. Training local stakeholders in hospitality, digital literacy, and emergency medical support.

B. Sustainable Trail Development

Ecological Focus- Transitioning toward mountain trails to reduce the environmental footprint on fragile Himalayan ecosystems.
Management Systems- Implementing formal ticketing, permit systems, and the deployment of rangers.
Diversification- Moving beyond traditional "hotspots" (like Gulmarg/Pahalgam) to niche heritage and trekking sites to prevent "over-tourism."

4. The "Third Prong"- Shared Environmental Governance

A novel approach proposed to bridge the gap between the militarized nature of the region and civilian life.
Trust Building- Using environmental protection as a neutral ground for cooperation between the state and local communities.

Civilian Participation- Moving away from purely military-led security to a model where locals have a stake in regional stability.

5. Community Participation & Paid Civic Roles

The revival model suggests moving beyond "volunteerism" toward formalized local employment

Paid Roles- Establishing positions for trail maintenance, waste management, fire monitoring, and wildlife conflict mitigation.

Economic Ownership- Drawing from the "Forest Protection Committee" model to give locals a financial incentive to protect tourist assets.

Counter-Insurgency Link- When local families derive direct income from tourism, they are statistically more likely to oppose disruptive elements or terrorism.

6. Long-Term Economic and Social Impacts

National Integration- Tourism reduces the "psychological distance" and isolation between Kashmir and the rest of India.

Social Stability- Provides youth with skilling and employment, steering them away from radicalization.

Infrastructure Spillover- Improvements in roads, electricity, and communication for tourists directly benefit the local quality of life.

Negotiating Power- A thriving civilian-led economy increases the local population's leverage and reduces resentment toward governance structures.

Conclusion

The revival of Kashmir's tourism is not merely an economic goal but a strategic imperative. By balancing security with "Strategic Sustainability," the government aims to create an inclusive model where the local community acts as the primary guardian of peace. The success of the 2026–27 budget initiatives will depend on whether the state can successfully transition from a "security-first" approach to a "community-governance-first" approach.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/kashmir-revival-on-the-path-of-tourism/article70648291.ece

2. As NGT clears Great Nicobar project, a look at its strategic importance and ecological fallout (IE)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topics- Environmental pollution and degradation; Developments in Science and Technology.

Sub Topic- Infrastructure (Ports, Airports), Investment Models, and Security Challenges in Border Areas.

Introduction

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently cleared the ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Integrated Island Development Project. While the project is championed as a cornerstone of India's maritime strategy and economic sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific, it has sparked intense debate over the irreversible ecological costs to one of the world's most pristine biosphere reserves and the survival of isolated indigenous tribes.

1. Project Overview & Core Components

The project is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO). It aims to transform the island into a multi-sectoral hub.

Integrated Township- Spread over ~149 sq. km.

International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)- A 7.66 sq. km port at Galathea Bay.

International Airport- A dual-use (civil and military) facility covering 8.45 sq. km.

Energy Infrastructure- A gas and solar-based power plant to sustain the new population and industries.

Scale- Diversion of 130 sq. km of forest land and the felling of approximately one million trees.

2. Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

The project is driven by "National Security" interests, which the NGT cited as a primary reason for its clearance.

Chokepoint Proximity- Located near the Malacca Strait, a global maritime artery handling ~94,000 ships annually and 30% of global trade.
Logistics Sovereignty- The ICTT aims to capture transshipment traffic currently handled by foreign ports like Colombo, Singapore, and Port Klang, keeping revenue and data within India.
Indo-Pacific "Net Security Provider"- Enhances the Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC)—India's only tri-service command—facilitating better maritime domain awareness and surveillance.
Act East Policy- Serves as a bridge for India's diplomatic and economic outreach to Southeast Asia.

3. Ecological Sensitivity & Biodiversity

Great Nicobar is not a standard landmass; it is a unique oceanic ecosystem within the Sundaland Biodiversity Hotspot.
Biosphere Reserve- Most of the 910 sq. km island is a UNESCO-recognized Biosphere Reserve.
Endemic Species- Home to the Nicobar Megapode (a scrub bird that builds mounds) and the Nicobar Long-tailed Macaque.
Galathea Bay- The primary site for the port is also the most important nesting site in the northern Indian Ocean for the Leatherback Sea Turtle (the world's largest turtle).
Geological Fragility- The island is seismically active (prone to earthquakes and tsunamis) and highly vulnerable to sea-level rise.

4. Major Environmental Concerns

Massive Deforestation- The removal of a million trees threatens the "lungs" of the region and carbon sequestration capacity.
Habitat Disruption- Construction at Galathea Bay may permanently deter Leatherback turtles from nesting.
Marine Ecology Damage- Reclamation of land using 33 million cubic metres of material risks burying **coral reefs** and altering sediment flow, suffocating marine life.
Carrying Capacity- Critics argue the island cannot ecologically sustain the projected population surge (from ~8,500 to 6.5 lakh by 2050).

5. Socio-Cultural Impact on Indigenous Tribes

The project poses an existential threat to two main groups protected under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956
The Shompen Tribe- A **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** of ~250 hunter-gatherers. Their limited contact with the outside world makes them biologically vulnerable to common diseases.
The Nicobarese- Indigenous communities who lost ancestral lands during the 2004 Tsunami and are still navigating rehabilitation; they fear the project will lead to further displacement.
Consent Issues- Allegations exist regarding the lack of "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent" (FPIC) from Tribal Councils, potentially violating the Forest Rights Act (2006).

6. Governance and Regulatory Challenges

Strategic Balancing- The NGT's decision prioritizes "Strategic Importance" over "Ecological Integrity," setting a controversial precedent for future projects in fragile zones.
Denotification of Sanctuaries- The government denotified the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to facilitate the port, which critics view as a dilution of the Wildlife Protection Act.
Compensatory Mitigation- Plans to create "equivalent" sanctuaries on Little Nicobar are questioned by ecologists, as habitats are location-specific and cannot be "moved."
Assessment Gaps- There is a call for a Cumulative Impact Assessment rather than individual sector clearances to understand the total burden on the island.

Conclusion- The Path Forward

The Great Nicobar Project represents a classic "Development vs. Conservation" dilemma. While the strategic necessity in a changing Indo-Pacific is undeniable, the project must adhere to the principle of "Strategic but Sustainable."

Recommendations

Strict Environmental Oversight- Implementing a "Zero Discharge" policy for the port and township.
Tribal Buffer Zones- Ensuring the Shompen's foraging grounds remain strictly off-limits to the 6.5 lakh projected settlers.
Independent Monitoring- Establishing a high-level committee of ecologists and anthropologists to monitor construction in real-time.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/as-ngt-clears-great-nicobar-project-a-look-at-its-strategic-importance-and-ecological-fallout-10539365/

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 20.02.2026

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1. Privacy and transparency- On the RTI Act amendment, petitions (TH) -01

2. ISRO's improved fire-detection algo ready for test in rabi harvest season (IE)-02

1. Privacy and transparency- On the RTI Act amendment, petitions (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Important aspects of governance, transparency, and accountability.

Sub Topic- Right to Information (RTI) – Role of civil society, institutional framework, and challenges.

1. Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 is a landmark "sunshine law" that empowers Indian citizens to request information from public authorities, making the government more transparent and accountable. It transitioned India from a culture of secrecy (under the Official Secrets Act) to a culture of openness.

2. Background and Evolution

Grassroots Roots- The movement began with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan, demanding transparency in village accounts and minimum wages.

Constitutional Basis- The Supreme Court, in State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain (1975), ruled that the "Right to Know" is a fundamental right derived from Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression).

Legislative Path- It replaced the weaker Freedom of Information Act, *2002* and officially came into force on 12 October 2005.

3. Key Objectives

Empowerment- To enable citizens to participate in decision-making processes.

Transparency- To ensure government operations are open to public scrutiny.

Accountability- To curb corruption and arbitrary use of power.

Democracy- To make democracy work for the people in the real sense.

4. Salient Features & Institutional Framework

Scope and Application

Jurisdiction- Applies to all Central, State, and local bodies.

Public Authorities- Includes bodies established by the Constitution, Parliament, State Legislatures, and organizations "substantially financed" by the government (including PSUs).

The Mechanism

Suo Motu Disclosure (Section 4)- Mandates public authorities to proactively publish information so citizens need minimal recourse to the Act.

Timeframes- * Standard requests- 30 days.

Matters of Life and Liberty- 48 hours.

Appellate Structure-

1. **PIO (Public Information Officer)-** First point of contact.
2. **First Appeal-** Internal department officer.
3. **Second Appeal-** Independent Commissions (Central Information Commission or State Information Commission).

Definition of "Information" (Section 2(f))

Includes- Records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, press releases, contracts, reports, and data in electronic form.

Excludes- Seeking personal interpretations or clarifications (questions like "Why was this done?").

5. Exemptions and Penalties

Exemptions (Sections 8 & 9)

Information can be denied if it affects-

National Interests- Sovereignty, integrity, security, and strategic interests of India.

Legal/Commercial- Trade secrets, IP, or information forbidden by a court.

Privileged Info- Cabinet papers (until a decision is made and the matter is complete).

Privacy- Personal info unrelated to public activity, unless the public interest outweighs the harm.

Penalties

The Commission can fine PIOs ₹250 per day (up to a maximum of ₹25,000) for unreasonable delays or denials. The Commission can recommend disciplinary action against erring officials.

6. Critical Legal & Legislative Developments

Landmark Judgments

CBSE v. Aditya Bandopadhyay- Confirmed that students have a right to see their evaluated answer sheets under RTI.

Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. CIC- Clarified that personal details (like income tax returns) are exempt unless a larger public interest is proven.

RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019

Control- Gave the Central Government power to set the tenure, salaries, and service conditions of Information Commissioners (both Central and State).

Criticism- Critics argue this undermines the independence and neutrality of the Commissions, effectively making them subordinate to the Executive.

7. Achievements vs. Current Challenges

Achievements

Scam Exposure- Helped uncover high-profile corruption (e.g., Adarsh Housing, 2G).

Welfare Delivery- Improved the efficiency of the PDS and MNREGA by exposing leakages.

Participation- Bridged the gap between the rural poor and the administrative machinery.

Challenges (The "Current News" Context)

Institutional Vacancies- High number of vacant positions in Information Commissions leads to massive backlogs.

Pendency- Thousands of cases are pending, sometimes for years, defeating the "time-bound" essence.

Safety- Growing instances of threats, harassment, and attacks on RTI activists.

Misuse- Concerns regarding "vexatious" or "frivolous" applications used for blackmail.

8. Conclusion

The RTI Act, 2005 remains the strongest tool for participatory democracy in India. However, to maintain its "sunshine" status, the government must ensure institutional independence, fill vacancies promptly, and protect whistleblowers. Without an effective enforcement mechanism, the "Right to Know" risks becoming a dead letter.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/privacy-and-transparency-on-the-rti-act-amendment-petitions/article70652568.ece

2. ISRO's improved fire-detection algo ready for test in rabi harvest season (IE)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topics- Environmental pollution and degradation; Developments in Science and Technology.

Sub Topic- Air pollution in Delhi-NCR, Satellite technology for environmental monitoring (ISRO), and Crop Residue Management (CRM).

1. Introduction

In a significant technological upgrade, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to pilot a fine-tuned satellite-based fire detection algorithm during the 2026 Rabi harvest. This initiative, prompted by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), aims to rectify existing gaps in monitoring farm fires—a primary contributor to the severe air quality crisis in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

2. The Core Problem- Stubble Burning Dynamics

Scale of Residue- Punjab, Haryana, and UP-NCR generate approximately 28 million tonnes of paddy stubble annually.

The "Window" Constraint- A narrow 10–20-day gap between harvesting paddy and sowing wheat forces farmers to use burning as the quickest field-clearing method.

Economic Barriers- High operational costs of machines like the Happy Seeder or *Super SMS* make them inaccessible for small and marginal farmers.

Contribution to Pollution- During peak periods, stubble burning accounts for up to 40% of Delhi's PM2.5 load.

3. Limitations of Existing Monitoring Systems

Satellite Detection Gaps- Current sensors (MODIS on Terra/Aqua and VIIRS on Suomi-NPP) often miss fires due to cloud cover or small fire sizes.

Fixed Observation Windows- Satellites pass at specific times. Farmers have adapted by shifting burning to around 5-00 PM (post-satellite pass), leading to under-reporting.

Data Mismatch- Ground teams often find burnt areas that were never "counted" by satellites, leading to policy misalignment and reduced enforcement credibility.

4. ISRO's Technological Intervention

ISRO has modified its in-house algorithm to enhance the precision of thermal anomaly detection-

Improved Differentiation- The algorithm can now better distinguish between active fires and residual burnt patches (smoldering).

Year-Round Monitoring- Moving beyond the traditional Kharif (winter) focus to include the Rabi season (March–May) to establish a persistent pollution baseline.

Integrated Verification- Satellite data will now be cross-referenced with farm mapping and field validation by district-level teams for higher accuracy.

5. Environmental and Health Impacts

Particulate Matter- Release of massive loads of PM2.5, CO2, Methane, and Nitrogen Oxides.

Meteorological Factors- Post-monsoon temperature inversion and calm winds trap these pollutants near the ground.

Health Burden- Direct correlation with a spike in respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and reduced life expectancy in North India.

Trans-boundary Nature- North-westerly winds transport smoke across state borders, making it a regional rather than a local issue.

6. Institutional & Policy Framework

CAQM Mandate- The statutory body has shifted toward stricter enforcement and state-specific action plans for 2026.

In-situ Management- Central subsidies for Crop Residue Management (CRM) machinery (e.g., mulchers, Happy Seeders).

Ex-situ Management- Promoting the use of straw for Bio-CNG, biomass power pellets, fodder, and packaging.

Judicial Oversight- The Supreme Court continues to monitor the implementation of these technologies to ensure executive accountability.

7. Structural Challenges & Barriers

Economic Rationality- Burning remains the "cheapest" option for a debt-ridden farmer compared to the logistics of machinery.

Fragmented Landholdings- Small farm sizes make owning expensive CRM equipment unviable.

Market Gaps- Weak supply chains for collecting and transporting stubble to Bio-CNG plants (lack of assured procurement).

Enforcement Limits- Penalties (Environmental Compensation) often face political and social resistance.

8. Conclusion

While ISRO's improved algorithm provides the "data teeth" needed for better monitoring, technology alone is not a silver bullet. A sustainable solution requires a multi-pronged approach

Technological- Accurate, real-time satellite surveillance.

Economic- Incentivizing farmers through "Bhavantar" (price difference) schemes or direct cash transfers for residue management.

Industrial- Creating a robust market for biomass and ex-situ utilization.

Federal- Cooperative action between Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi to align environmental goals with agrarian realities.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/isros-improved-fire-detection-algo-ready-for-test-in-rabi-harvest-season-10541828/

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Editorial of the Day – 21.02.2026

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1. Treatise for federalism- On Tamil Nadu and the Kurian Joseph report (TH) -01

2.India's First Nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship Registry (2026) (IE) -02

1. Treatise for federalism- On Tamil Nadu and the Kurian Joseph report (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Sub Topic- Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Role of the Governor; Constitutional Provisions and Amendments.

1. Introduction

The Government of Tamil Nadu constituted a high-level, three-member committee chaired by Justice Kurian Joseph (Retd. Supreme Court Judge) to evaluate the evolving landscape of Union-State relations in India. Against the backdrop of a shifting political and fiscal climate, the report warns of a "federal erosion" and advocates for a structural reset of Indian federalism, equating the necessity of these reforms to the landmark 1991 economic liberalization.

2. Foundational Context and Methodology

The Committee's findings are rooted in a multi-disciplinary approach-

Historical Analysis- Reviewed Constituent Assembly debates to understand the "centralized federalism" chosen during the post-Partition era and the integration of princely states.

Academic Rigor- Integrated scholarship across law, economics, and political science.

Comparative Study- Analysed previous commissions (like Sarkaria and Punchi) alongside recent governance practices.

Core Thesis- While centralisation was a post-1947 necessity for national integrity, it is no longer justified in a modern, diverse, and mature democracy.

3. Key Findings- The "Crisis" of Centralisation

The report identifies a "clear and continuing" trend of power concentration that threatens the following-

Democratic Balance- The checks and balances between different levels of government are weakening.

State Autonomy- States are increasingly being reduced to administrative arms of the Centre.

Developmental Outcomes- Excessive centralisation is labelled as administratively inefficient and politically risky.

4. Critical Areas of Concern (The "Federal Erosion")

The Committee flags several recent trends that have disrupted the Union-State equilibrium-

A. Institutional & Territorial Integrity

Alteration of Boundaries- The 2019 reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir is cited as a precedent where the Centre exercised significant power over a State's territorial existence.

Ease of Amendments- The report notes that the Constitution can be amended with relative ease, facilitating a self-perpetuating cycle of centralisation.

B. Governance & Political Overreach

Role of Governors- Highlighted as a primary friction point; Governors are increasingly perceived as "agents of the Centre" interfering in State-level governance.

Control over Elections- The Union's significant authority in election conduct is seen as a tilt in the level playing field.
Language Policy- Assertive pushes toward a single national language are viewed as a threat to India's cultural and federal diversity.

C. Fiscal & Sectoral Centralisation

GST Impact- The GST regime has fundamentally reconfigured the fiscal framework, leading to fiscal dependency and reduced autonomy for States.
Encroachment on State Subjects- Sectors traditionally managed by States, such as Health and Education, are increasingly being brought under Central control through schemes and policy mandates.

D. The Delimitation Threat

Representation Gap- The proposed inter-State Lok Sabha delimitation creates anxiety that States which successfully implemented population control (like Tamil Nadu) will lose political weight and representation in Parliament.

5. Recommendations for a "Structural Reset"

The Committee argues that federalism is the only path to sustainable progress and recommends-
Restoration of Autonomy- Decentralising decision-making in key sectors like Health and Education.
Institutional Rebalancing- Strengthening bodies like the Inter-State Council to ensure they are not just consultative but functional.
Fiscal Reform- Re-evaluating the GST framework to provide States with more predictable and independent revenue streams.
National Dialogue- Initiating a country-wide conversation on federal restructuring to safeguard the "Basic Structure" of the Constitution.

6. Conclusion

The Justice Kurian Joseph Committee concludes that excessive centralisation is a threat to national unity. By advocating for a "structural reset," the report emphasizes that a strong Union can only exist if its constituent States are empowered, autonomous, and respected. Restoring this equilibrium is not just a legal necessity but a prerequisite for India's long-term developmental and democratic health.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/treatise-for-federalism-on-the-tamil-nadu-and-the-kurian-joseph-report/article70656419.ece

2.India's First Nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship Registry (2026) (IE)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology
Topics- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub Topic- Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

1. Introduction

India has achieved a landmark in paediatric oncology with the release of its first nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship (C2S) Registry (February 2026). Coordinated by AIIMS New Delhi under the Indian Paediatric Haematology Oncology Group, the registry marks a transition from a "cure-centric" approach to a "care-continuum" model. It highlights an impressive 94.5% five-year survival rate while sounding an alarm on long-term health complications for survivors.

2. The C2S Cohort- Scope and Methodology

Duration & Scale- The study tracked 5,419 survivors across 20 centres nationwide between 2016 and 2024.
Treatment Modalities- Reflected modern multimodal care-

1. Chemotherapy- 94.7%
2. Surgery- ~30%

3. Radiotherapy- 26.3%

Monitoring Protocol- Survivors were monitored every 3 months for the first two years and every 6 months thereafter to ensure longitudinal data integrity.

3. Key Survival Outcomes and Statistical Highlights

Overall Survival (OS)- 94.5% at five years, indicating that nearly 95 out of 100 children survive the critical post-diagnosis window.

Event-Free Survival (EFS)- 89.9%, meaning the vast majority remained free from relapses or major acute complications.

Follow-up Correlation- Survival rates rose to 98.2% for children who received structured monitoring for at least two years.

Global Benchmarking- These figures bring India closer to high-income country standards, signalling a maturation of India's oncology protocols.

4. Burden of Childhood Cancer in India

Annual Incidence- Approximately 50,000 new cases are diagnosed every year.

Common Malignancies- Acute leukaemia, Hodgkin lymphoma, bone tumours, and retinoblastoma are the most prevalent.

Age Vulnerability- 44% of cases occur in the 2–8 age group, necessitating targeted paediatric screening.

The Socio-Economic Gap- High incidence among lower-income families highlights the urgent need for equitable access to early diagnosis and affordable long-term care.

5. The "Hidden Burden"- Late Effects of Treatment

While survival is high, the registry warns of "Late Effects"—complications that emerge months or years after treatment-

Prevalence- International data suggests 33–50% of survivors develop long-term health issues.

Clinical Risks- Includes cardiac problems, endocrine (hormonal) disorders, and cognitive difficulties.

Psychosocial Impact- Survivors face challenges in schooling, emotional well-being, puberty, and general quality of life.

Multi-disciplinary Requirement- Future care must integrate cardiology, endocrinology, and mental health services into oncology follow-ups.

6. Policy and Health System Implications

The C2S Registry serves as a vital evidence base for national planning-

National Frameworks- Aligns with Ayushman Bharat and the NPCDCS (National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke).

Standardized Guidelines- Provides the data needed to design national survivorship guidelines and regional "Survivorship Clinics."

Infrastructure Expansion- Underscores the need for more regional cancer centres and specialized paediatric oncologists to bridge rural-urban disparities.

Global Leadership- India's model provides a blueprint for other Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) to build survival tracking systems.

7. Conclusion

The First Nationwide Survival Registry is a testament to India's growing medical prowess in paediatric oncology. However, the findings emphasize that "surviving" is not the same as "thriving." To secure the future of these 50,000 children diagnosed annually, India must move toward a comprehensive survivorship care model that addresses the physical and psychological scars of cancer long after the final dose of chemotherapy.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/india-childhood-cancer-registry-high-survival-late-effect-risks-10540751/

Editorial of the Day – 23.02.2026

Index

1. Protecting the freedom of speech of MPs (TH) - 01
2. 'Use summons judiciously, expedite probe, conclude long-pending investigations'- ED chief directs officers (IE) - 02

1. Protecting the freedom of speech of MPs (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topic- Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.
Sub Topic- Parliamentary Privileges; Article 105 vs. Article 19; Separation of Powers.

Freedom of Speech in the Houses- Article 105 of the Constitution

1. Introduction

Article 105 of the Indian Constitution serves as the bedrock of parliamentary democracy by ensuring that Members of Parliament (MPs) can perform their duties without fear of legal reprisal. Recently, the Supreme Court has re-emphasized that while the House has the power to regulate its proceedings, procedural rules cannot eclipse the constitutional rights granted to legislators. This clarification addresses the misconception that internal House rules possess the authority to override the express mandate of Article 105.

2. Constitutional Foundation

Article 105(1)- Explicitly guarantees freedom of speech within the walls of Parliament.
Distinct Identity- This is separate from Article 19(1)(a) (general freedom of speech for citizens). While Article 19 is subject to "reasonable restrictions," Article 105 is a Parliamentary Privilege designed to protect the collective independence of the legislature.
Historical Roots- Derived from the British House of Commons traditions, specifically the Bill of Rights 1689, to prevent the Executive or Judiciary from intimidating lawmakers.

3. Scope and Extent of the Freedom

The protection is expansive and covers all forms of legislative participation-
Forums- Applies to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and all Parliamentary Committees.
Actions- Includes oral debates, discussions, formal questions, motions, and the act of voting.
Documentation- Covers both verbal statements and written submissions presented in the House.

4. Absolute Immunity from Legal Proceedings

Under Article 105(2), MPs enjoy a "shield" against the judiciary-
Judicial Immunity- No MP is liable in any court for anything said or any vote given in Parliament.
Civil & Criminal Protection- This protects members from defamation suits (civil) and criminal prosecution related to their speech or conduct within the House.
Authorized Publications- Reports, papers, votes, or proceedings published by or under the authority of either House also enjoy this legal immunity.

5. Limitations and Restrictions

While expansive, this freedom is not absolute and is moderated by-
Constitutional Provisions- Specifically Article 121, which restricts discussion on the conduct of Judges of the Supreme Court or High Courts (except during impeachment).
House Rules- Subject to the Rules of Procedure of the House and the authority of the Presiding Officer (Speaker/Chairman).

Internal Discipline- Members can be asked to withdraw remarks, face suspension for disorderly conduct, or have their statements expunged from the official record if deemed inappropriate.
National Security- Deliberations must adhere to established norms regarding sensitive national interests.

6. Rationale and Significance

Independent Functioning- Protects legislators from external pressure by the Executive, Judiciary, or private interests.
Accountability- Enables fearless questioning of the government, ensuring executive accountability.
Separation of Powers- Maintains the constitutional boundary by preventing the Judiciary from scrutinizing the "internal proceedings" of the House.
Minority Voice- Protects the right of opposition and minority members to raise sensitive issues without fear of political vendetta or litigation.

7. Judicial Interpretation and Supremacy

Constitutional Supremacy- Courts generally respect the "internal autonomy" of Parliament. However, the Supreme Court has ruled that parliamentary privileges are subject to constitutional supremacy and cannot violate the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
Balance of Rights- In cases of conflict, the judiciary acts as the arbiter to ensure that privileges do not become a tool to infringe upon fundamental rights outside the scope of legislative necessity.

8. Conclusion

Freedom of speech under Article 105 is the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy. It ensures that the "Grand Inquest of the Nation" remains fearless. While House rules are essential for maintaining decorum, they must function as a regulatory framework, not a restrictive one. A balanced interpretation preserves the dignity of the House while upholding the constitutional mandate of legislative independence.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/protecting-the-freedom-of-speech-of-mps/article70663727.ece

2. 'Use summons judiciously, expedite probe, conclude long-pending investigations'- ED chief directs officers (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topics- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub Topic- Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

Balancing Enforcement and Rights- The Enforcement Directorate (2026)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, the Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued landmark internal directives to officers to expedite probes and exercise the power of summons judiciously. This shift comes in response to heightened judicial scrutiny regarding "roving enquiries" and the need to reconcile the agency's vast statutory powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) with the fundamental rights of citizens.

2. The Enforcement Directorate- Role and Mandate

Specialized Agency- Functions under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, investigating financial crimes related to money laundering and foreign exchange violations (FEMA).
Statutory Teeth- Powered by the PMLA, 2002, which grants the agency authority to attach properties, conduct arrests, and issue summons.
Economic Security- A pivotal institution for ensuring India's financial integrity, anti-corruption efforts, and compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards.
Growing Workload- A significant surge in cross-border and high-stakes corruption cases has tested the agency's procedural fairness and institutional capacity.

3. Judicial Scrutiny and Constitutional Safeguards

The judiciary has played a corrective role in defining the boundaries of ED's power-

Against "Roving Enquiries"- Courts have warned against "fishing expeditions"—broad, unfocused investigations conducted without specific incriminating material.

Right to Silence- Recent rulings (2024-25) clarified that the ED cannot compel an accused in custody to make self-incriminating statements, upholding the protection against self-incrimination (Article 20(3)).

Proportionality & Due Process- Emphasized that strong laws like PMLA must still adhere to the principle of Article 21 (Right to Life and Liberty).

Non-Bailable Warrants- Courts have ruled that such warrants cannot be issued mechanically, especially when the individual is merely being summoned as a witness.

4. Protection of Lawyer-Client Privilege

A critical recent development involves the independence of the legal profession-

The Controversy- The ED faced backlash for summoning advocates to testify regarding legal advice provided to clients.

Supreme Court Intervention (2025)- The Court established binding directions to protect lawyer-client privilege, viewing it as essential for a fair trial.

Internal Reform- The ED now requires prior approval from the Director before summoning any advocate, marking a significant step toward institutional accountability.

5. Push for Efficiency and Time-Bound Probes

To address the criticism of "never-ending" investigations, the ED has adopted a new framework-

Target Timelines- Aiming to conclude most investigations within 1 to 2 years.

Prosecution Focus- Shifting priority toward filing prosecution complaints rather than prolonged preliminary probes.

Bail Context- Given the stringent "twin conditions" for bail under PMLA, timely investigations are now seen as a constitutional necessity to prevent indefinite incarceration without trial.

Administrative Tech- Implementation of real-time case management and data integrity tools to improve efficiency.

6. Federal and Political Dimensions

Centre–State Frictions- Investigations involving State officials (e.g., District Collectors) have raised questions about the federal balance and the limits of central agency jurisdiction.

Institutional Neutrality- The agency faces the challenge of insulating high-profile investigations from perceptions of political selectivity to maintain public and judicial credibility.

Democratic Accountability- The report stresses that robust enforcement must coexist with the principles of cooperative federalism.

7. Conclusion

The shift toward "rights-sensitive enforcement" acknowledges that the ED's effectiveness is not measured solely by its power to arrest, but by its ability to conduct fair, time-bound, and legally sound investigations. By balancing state power with civil liberties, the agency can strengthen the Rule of Law and ensure that the fight against financial crime does not come at the cost of constitutional values.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/ed-chief-asks-officers-to-expedite-probe-use-summons-judiciously-10546594/

Editorial of the Day – 24.02.2026

Index

1. Stick together- On India and Brazil and their ties (TH) - 01
2. India's new federal compact must be based on principle of non-domination (IE) - 02

1. Stick together- On India and Brazil and their ties (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub Topic- Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate; South-South Cooperation.

IBSA Dialogue Forum- Strengthening Democratic Multilateralism

1. Introduction

In February 2026, the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Dialogue Forum has regained significant geopolitical traction. This resurgence is driven by renewed India–Brazil engagement and the need for a collective response to rising U.S. tariff tensions and global protectionism. As a unique platform of three major democracies from three different continents, IBSA is positioned as the "purest" voice of the Global South, emphasizing a rules-based, equitable international order.

2. Foundational Context

Genesis- Formally established in 2003 via the Brasília Declaration.
Composition- A trilateral grouping of India, Brazil, and South Africa.
Unique Identity- It represents the intersection of three major regional powers and pluralistic democracies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, distinguishing it from the broader (and now expanded) BRICS.

3. Core Objectives and Institutional Structure

Strategic Goals

South–South Cooperation- Moving beyond the "donor-recipient" model to a partnership-based development model.
Global Governance Reform- Advocating for the urgent reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the Bretton Woods institutions.
Multilateral Coordination- Aligning positions within the UN, WTO, and G20 to safeguard the interests of developing nations.
Sustainable Development- Focusing on poverty alleviation, food security, and climate justice.

Organizational Framework

High-Level Summits- Trilateral meetings of Heads of State/Government.
Ministerial Meetings- Regular interactions between Foreign Ministers (Trilateral Commission).
Functional Depth- Operationalized through over 15 sectoral working groups ranging from environment to transport.

4. Key Pillars of Cooperation

The forum operates across diverse functional areas to build collective resilience-
Political & Geopolitical- Coordination on global security, counter-terrorism, and democratic stability.
Trade & Economy- Promoting intra-IBSA trade and supporting SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) and industrial growth.
Defence & Security- The IBSAMAR joint naval exercises serve as a cornerstone for maritime cooperation in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

Energy & Health- Focus on biofuels and renewable energy; ensuring access to affordable medicines and public health equity.
Agriculture- Joint research into food security and rural development models.

5. The IBSA Fund- A Success Story

Known officially as the IBSA Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation, the fund is a globally recognized model-
Purpose- Supports developmental projects in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and post-conflict nations.
Impact- Promotes inclusive growth through localized, sustainable development projects.
Recognition- It has received numerous accolades for its efficiency and for being a pioneer in South-South development assistance.

6. Strategic Importance and Contemporary Relevance

The "Democratic" Advantage

Unlike other groupings, IBSA's common denominator is constitutional democracy, providing a shared language for human rights and the rule of law.

Countering Protectionism (2026 Context)

Amidst rising global protectionism and tariff wars initiated by major economies, IBSA acts as a-
Collective Bargaining Tool- Enhances the negotiating power of emerging markets in the WTO.
Alternative to BRICS- While BRICS has expanded and become more diverse (and complex), IBSA remains a more cohesive, interest-aligned trilateral group.
Global South Leader- Amplifies the voice of developing nations regarding Climate Finance and Digital Sovereignty.

7. Challenges and Obstacles

Institutional Inertia- The need for more consistent summits and a permanent secretariat to maintain momentum.
The "BRICS Overlap"- Frequent questions regarding IBSA's relevance given that all three members are also key players in BRICS.
Domestic Shifts- Divergent political changes within member states can occasionally slow down trilateral initiatives.

8. Conclusion

The IBSA Dialogue Forum remains an indispensable platform for advancing a multipolar world order. By linking three continents through a shared democratic identity, IBSA provides a robust mechanism for South–South cooperation. For India, IBSA is not just a diplomatic forum but a strategic necessity to project leadership in the Global South and ensure that the global governance of the 21st century reflects 21st-century realities.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/stick-together-on-india-and-brazil-and-their-ties/article70667887.ece#google_vignette

2. India's new federal compact must be based on principle of non-domination (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance
Topics- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub Topic- Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

A New Federal Compact- Principle of Non-Domination

1. Introduction

In an era described as the dakshinayan phase—where innovative socio-economic models are emerging from Southern states—the Tamil Nadu government-appointed High-Level Committee, chaired by Justice (retd) Kurian Joseph, has submitted a report advocating for a "structural reset" of Indian

federalism. The report argues that the current trend of centralization is no longer an "inherited reflex" but a troubling pattern that threatens the "compositional" character of the Indian state.

2. The Call for a "Structural Reset"

The report moves beyond merely reiterating old suggestions, offering a plea for a new federal compact based on principled power distribution-

Beyond the Founding Anxieties- While the original Constitution leaned toward centralization due to post-partition anxieties, the report argues that maintaining this stance today is an institutional distortion.

Federalism and Democracy- It posits that a federation that trusts its states and respects subsidiarity does not weaken sovereignty; rather, it deepens democracy.

Negotiated Accommodation- Unity should be sustained by consent and negotiated accommodation rather than command and enforced uniformity.

3. Dimensions of the Proposed Federal Reset

The article highlights specific reform proposals across four major arenas-

A. Constitutional Reset

Territorial Integrity- Reforming the "draconian power" of the Centre to redraw state boundaries (Article 3) without meaningful state consultation.

Amendment Powers- Checking the Centre's primacy in amending the Constitution without involving states.

Office of the Governor- Proposing a constitutional code to curb the "arbitrariness and partisanship" often displayed by Governors.

Anti-Defection- Eliminating loopholes in current anti-defection laws.

Elections- Transferring the responsibility of assembly elections to State Election Commissions.

B. Sectoral & Functional Reset

Education- Recommending that education be restored to the State List.

State Subjects- Checking central encroachment on state-specific subjects like Health and Agriculture.

C. Fiscal & Representation Reset

GST Reform- Detailed examination and multiple options for reworking the GST regime to restore fiscal balance.

Delimitation- Rejecting the "One Nation, One Election" idea and advocating for a permanent freeze on delimitation based on the ground of balance of power rather than just population metrics.

D. Cultural Reset

Linguistic Uniformity- Challenging the misconception that national unity requires a single language.

Language Equality- Resisting the hegemony of Hindi while advocating for a spirit where all Indian languages are placed on an equal footing.

4. Civilizational and Philosophical Context

The article provides a unique philosophical justification for these reforms-

"Compositional" Character- Unlike the "coming together" federation of the US, India is a "holding together" federation where unity is constituted *through* its regional units.

Salad Bowl vs. Melting Pot- India is described as a "salad bowl" where each piece retains its distinct identity, rather than a "melting pot" that erases diversity.

Deshachar- Rooted in the Indian tradition of respecting local customs (deshachar), proving that the only way to rule the subcontinent is to respect its inherent diversity.

5. The Way Forward- Principles of a New Compact

A frank discussion on the balance of power between Hindi and non-Hindi states is proposed-

Guarantee for Non-Hindi States- A guarantee of non-imposition of Hindi and a freeze on their political representation as it stood in 1971.

Commitment from Southern/Western States- A commitment to continue an equitable distribution of federal revenues to support poorer states in the Hindi heartland and Eastern India.

6. Conclusion

The core of the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee report is the principle of political, cultural, and economic non-domination. It asserts that a just republic cannot be built on enforced uniformity but on a "new federal compact" that recognizes diversity as the very core of the Indian philosophical and constitutional tradition.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yogendra-yadav-writes-indias-new-federal-compact-must-be-based-on-principle-of-non-domination-10548244/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.02.2026

Index

1. Inglorious retreat- On the Supreme Court and cow vigilantism (TH) -01

2. As forests shrink and herds grow, central India's elephant crisis is primed to spiral (IE) -02

1. Inglorious retreat- On the Supreme Court and cow vigilantism (TH)

1general Studies 2: GOVERNANCE

Topic: Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Sub Topic: Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Restraint; Enforcement of Fundamental Rights; Role of the State in maintaining Law and Order.

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court of India recently declined to actively enforce its landmark 2018 anti-lynching guidelines, labelling the broad directions as "unmanageable." This shift marks a transition from a "constitutional watchdog" role to a "case-by-case" adjudicatory approach. The decision comes amidst a backdrop of rising cow vigilantism and allegations that several states have failed to implement preventive, punitive, and remedial measures mandated six years ago.

2. The 2018 Landmark Judgment- A Recall

To understand the "retreat," one must look at the original mandate established by a Bench led by then CJI Dipak Misra

Condemnation- The Court vehemently condemned mob lynching and cow vigilantism, stating that such acts must be "curbed and crippled."

State Duty- It emphasized that protecting citizens from mob violence is the "sacrosanct duty" of the State.

Preventive Framework- It established a three-tier mechanism-

1. Preventive- Appointing a nodal officer in each district.
2. Remedial- Fast-tracking trials and compensation for victims.
3. Punitive- Action against officials who fail to prevent such crimes.

3. The Current Judicial Shift

The recent observations by the Bench (led by Justice Surya Kant) indicate a significant change in stance-

From Systemic to Specific- The Court now prefers a case-by-case approach rather than monitoring the systemic compliance of all States.

The "Unmanageable" Tag- The Court described the 2018 general directions as difficult to monitor at a national level.

Rejection of Contempt Petitions- The Court declined to entertain contempt proceedings against States that have reportedly ignored the 2018 directives.

Delegation to High Courts- Petitioners challenging the legal backing given to vigilante groups by certain States were advised to approach individual High Courts instead of the Apex Court.

4. Failure of Law Enforcement & State Accountability

The persistence of vigilantism highlights a breakdown in the traditional rule of law-

Institutional Failure- The initial 2018 intervention was a response to the police's failure to act independently. The Court's withdrawal suggests a reliance on the very institutions that necessitated the intervention.

Quasi-Policing Powers- Some States have allegedly granted legal or semi-legal recognition to cow vigilante groups, complicating the distinction between law enforcement and private mobs.
Police Inaction- Reports suggest that in several instances, local authorities have either overlooked or indirectly enabled vigilante actions.

5. Critical Implications

The Supreme Court's "retreat" carries heavy consequences for the Indian legal landscape-
Judicial Diffidence- There are concerns that the Court is showing "judicial diffidence" in the face of sensitive majoritarian politics.
Weakening of Rule of Law- Without a central monitoring body, the enforcement of anti-lynching measures becomes fragmented and inconsistent across different States.
Erosion of Public Confidence- A perceived withdrawal from protecting vulnerable citizens may weaken public trust in the constitutional promise of Equal Protection (Article 14) and Right to Life (Article 21).
Empowerment of Vigilantes- The lack of strict judicial oversight may be interpreted by vigilante groups as a reduction in legal pressure.

6. Conclusion

While the Supreme Court is correct that policing is primarily a State subject under the Seventh Schedule, its role as the "custodian of the Constitution" necessitates oversight when States fail to uphold fundamental rights. The shift from systemic monitoring to a case-by-case approach risks turning a proactive shield against mob violence into a reactive remedy that arrives too late. Upholding the rule of law requires a consistent commitment to state accountability and the unwavering protection of all citizens from extra-judicial violence.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/inglorious-retreat-on-the-supreme-court-and-cow-vigilantism/article70671862.ece

2. As forests shrink and herds grow, central India's elephant crisis is primed to spiral (IE)

General Studies 3: Environment
Topics: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, And Degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment.
Sub Topic: Human-Wildlife Conflict; Habitat Fragmentation; Project Elephant; Linear Infrastructure Impacts.

1. Introduction

Central India, particularly the East-Central landscape (Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal), has emerged as the global epicentre of HEC fatalities. Despite hosting only ~8.4% of India's elephant population (roughly 1,891 out of the national total of 22,446 according to the 2025 WII Status Report), the region accounts for nearly 45% of all human deaths caused by elephants. This disproportionate conflict is driven by the collapse of traditional migration corridors due to mining and infrastructure.

2. The 2025 Scientific Baseline (DNA-Based Census)

The Synchronous All-India Elephant Estimation (SAIEE) 2021–25 released in late 2025 marked a paradigm shift-
New Methodology- For the first time, India used DNA-based mark-recapture (from 21,056 dung samples) to establish a fresh scientific baseline.
Population Dynamics- The estimated total stands at 22,446, a figure not directly comparable to the 2017 count of ~29,000 due to methodological improvements.

State-wise Distribution- Karnataka leads (6,013), followed by Assam (4,159). However, in Central India, numbers are shifting; while Jharkhand and Odisha populations are under stress, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have seen increases due to cross-border migration.

3. Drivers of Displacement- The "Mining-Infrastructure" Trap

The crisis is primarily an anthropogenic one, fuelled by-

Extractive Industries- Coal and iron ore mining in Singhbhum (JH), Keonjhar (OD), and Hasdeo Arand (CT) have shattered core habitats. In Odisha, over 1,700 sq. km of tree cover was lost between 2001 and 2024.

The "Barrier Effect"- Linear infrastructure (National Highways and Rail lines) cuts through 60% of elephant corridors. Train hits and electrocution (the leading cause of elephant death in Odisha and Jharkhand) act as lethal bottlenecks.

Drought & Climate Stress- Historical El Niño events (1980s) and modern climate variability have depleted forest water sources, forcing herds to become "resident crop-raiders" in farmlands.

4. Habitat Fragmentation and Corridor Disruption

Corridor Status- India has identified 150 ground-validated corridors, but many in Central India remain unnotified or encroached upon.

Ecological Carrying Capacity- Fragmented "island" forests cannot support the high calorie demands of megafauna. This pushes elephants into "historical ranges" (like Gadchiroli in Maharashtra) where local communities lack a "culture of coexistence."

Monoculture Impact- Shift toward timber-heavy monoculture plantations provides zero fodder, turning nutritious crops (Paddy, Sugarcane) into the primary food source for herds.

5. Behaviourally Altered Herds- The New Conflict Profile

Disproportionate Killers- Less than 8% of elephants (mostly specific "crop-habituated" bulls or herds) are responsible for the majority of human casualties.

Generational Loss- Calves born into crop-raiding herds no longer learn forest foraging; they are "born into conflict," making traditional mitigation (driving them back to forests) ineffective.

Nutritional Paradox- High-calorie crops lead to better breeding success, increasing elephant densities in already disturbed and high-conflict landscapes.

6. Institutional & Policy Framework

Project Elephant (1992)- The core scheme for protecting 33 Elephant Reserves.

National Elephant Action Plan (2020/2025 updates)- Focuses on "landscape-level" governance rather than isolated reserves.

Technological Interventions- AI-based tracking and SMS alerts (used in Assam and West Bengal) have reduced deaths by 30% in pilot zones.

Compensation Reforms- States like Kerala and Jharkhand are revising ex gratia (up to ₹25 lakh for human death) and exploring voluntary relocation of forest-fringe settlements.

7. Conclusion

The human-elephant crisis in Central India is a symptom of "ecological insolvency." Addressing it requires moving beyond post-mortem compensation to proactive landscape-scale governance. This includes legally notifying corridors under the Environment Protection Act, enforcing stricter mining regulations in the Hasdeo Arand and Saranda forests, and scaling up early-warning technology. As wildlife biologist Qamar Qureshi noted at AAD 2026, India has reached its "social limit" of conservation success; the next phase must prioritize the survival of both the megafauna and the marginal farmer.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/india-elephant-forests-herd-10550119/#-~-text=From%20less%20than%2010%20annual,year%2C%20raiding%20paddy%20and%20maize.

Editorial of the Day – 26.02.2026

Index

1.Unpackaging the myth of safe bottled water in India (TH) -01
2.Deterrence cannot be built on hope. Growing defence budget is a course correction (IE) -02

1.Unpackaging The Myth of Safe Bottled Water in India

General Studies 3 - Environment
Topic - Environmental pollution and degradation; Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub Topic - Plastic pollution (Microplastics); Food safety regulations (FSSAI); Public health infrastructure.

1. Introduction

The "myth" of safe bottled water in India is being unpacked as rising evidence points toward systemic contamination. While consumers pay a premium for perceived purity, studies across major Indian hubs reveal the presence of microplastics and leached chemicals. This shift in news highlights the urgent need for the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to evolve its oversight mechanisms beyond traditional bacterial testing.

2. The Shift in Consumption Patterns

Trust Deficit - A chronic lack of faith in municipal water supplies has transitioned bottled water from an occasional luxury to a daily survival necessity.
Safety Perception - The "sealed" nature of plastic bottles is equated with hygiene, leading to a massive over-dependence across urban and rural India.
Emergency Reliance - It remains the primary source of hydration during disasters and infrastructure failures.

3. Emerging Scientific Concerns - The Invisible Risks

Modern threats in bottled water extend beyond biological pathogens to chemical and physical pollutants -

A. Microplastics & Nano plastics
Definition - Particles smaller than 5mm (microplastics) and even smaller sub-micron particles (nano plastics).
Regional Findings - * Nagpur - 72–212 particles per litter detected across various brands.
Mumbai & Andhra Pradesh - Similar high concentrations found in coastal and metropolitan samples.
Biological Impact - Smaller particles possess the ability to cross biological barriers (like the blood-brain barrier or placenta), posing unknown long-term health risks.

B. Chemical Leaching
The Culprits - Chemicals like Antimony (used in PET production) and Phthalates (plasticizers).
Catalysts - Leaching is significantly accelerated by -

1. Exposure to high temperatures (common during Indian summers).
2. Direct sunlight during transport.
3. Prolonged storage in warehouses.

Cumulative Effect - Current safety checks often look at short-term exposure, ignoring the "cocktail effect" of multiple chemicals over a lifetime.

4. Regulatory Gaps and Enforcement Issues

FSSAI Limitations - While the FSSAI regulates bottled water, current protocols do not mandate limits for microplastics.
Testing Voids - There is no standardized requirement for testing long-term chemical leaching or nano plastic concentration.

Fragmented Industry - While major brands are monitored, thousands of small-scale, local bottling units operate with minimal oversight and poor-quality control.

5. The Environmental-Health Nexus

The Plastic Cycle - Over-dependence fuels India's plastic waste crisis. Single-use bottles degrade in landfills into microplastics, which eventually re-enter the human food chain through soil and water.
Ecosystem Damage - Plastic waste is not just a litter problem; it is a systemic pollutant affecting biodiversity.

6. Strategic Roadmap for Reform

To ensure "water security" that is actually safe, the following steps are required -
Regulatory Update - FSSAI must incorporate routine microplastic and cumulative chemical testing into standard quality norms.
Strengthening Municipal Systems - Reducing the need for bottled water by improving the reliability and "drinkability" of tap water.
Point-of-Use (POU) Alternatives - Encouraging home filtration systems and glass/stainless steel storage to reduce plastic contact.
Public Disclosure - Mandatory labelling or public dashboards regarding the chemical and plastic footprint of bottled water brands.

7. Conclusion

Bottled water can no longer be viewed as a default "safe" convenience. The documented presence of microplastics and chemical leaching signifies a gap between consumer perception and scientific reality. Protecting public health requires a multi-pronged approach - updating safety standards, tightening enforcement on small manufacturers, and ultimately restoring public trust in municipal water to reduce our toxic reliance on single-use plastics.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/unpackaging-the-myth-of-safe-bottled-water-in-india/article70676165.ece

2.Deterrence cannot be built on hope. Growing defence budget is a course correction (IE)

General Studies 3 - INTERNAL SECURITY
Topics - Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Indigenization of technology.
Sub Topic - Defence Budgeting; Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence; Strategic Deterrence; Two-Front War Contingency.

1. Introduction

The 2026–27 defence allocation represents approximately 14.67% of the total Union Budget and roughly 2% of India's GDP. The government's fiscal strategy indicates a decisive shift from maintenance-heavy spending to capital-intensive modernization, aimed at ensuring "credible deterrence" against regional adversaries while fostering a robust domestic defence industrial base.

2. Breakdown of the Defence Surge

Component	Allocation (₹ Crore)	Growth (YoY)	Primary Focus
Total Defence Budget	₹7,84,678	15.2%	Overall National Security
Capital Outlay	₹2,19,306	21.8%	Modernization & New Acquisitions
Revenue (Operational)	₹3,65,479	17.2%	Maintenance, Stores, & Readiness
Defence Pensions	₹1,71,338	6.6%	Support for ~34 lakh pensioners

3. Strategic Logic - Deterrence vs. Militarism

The surge is positioned as a "defensive necessity" rather than offensive expansionism -
Credible Deterrence - Strengthening military hardware to raise the cost of aggression for adversaries, thereby preventing conflict.
Closing Capability Gaps - Addressing critical shortages in fighter jet squadrons (IAF), submarine strength (Navy), and advanced surveillance (Army).

Operation Sindoor Impact - Recent operational requirements on the borders have highlighted the need for immediate force replenishment and high-altitude logistics.

4. Driving "Atmanirbharta" (Self-Reliance)

A cornerstone of this budget is the massive push for indigenous procurement -

Domestic Earmarking - 75% of the modernization budget (approx. ₹1.39 lakh crore) is reserved for procurement from Indian industries.

Defence Exports - India's exports reached a record ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024-25. The new budget aims to scale this toward a target of ₹50,000 crore by 2029.

R&D Boost - Allocation to the DRDO increased to ₹29,100 crore, with a specific focus on private sector-led research through the iDEX and Technology Development Fund (TDF).

5. Key Priority Areas for Modernization

Airpower - ₹63,734 crore (29% of capital outlay) earmarked for aircraft and aero-engines, including Tejas Mk1A and upcoming multi-role fighter acquisitions.

Naval Expansion - ₹25,024 crore (11% of capital outlay) for the naval fleet, focusing on submarines and the third aircraft carrier's preparatory phases.

Border Infrastructure - The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) saw its capital budget increased to ₹7,394 crore to accelerate strategic tunnels and bridges in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

6. Emerging Concerns and Structural Challenges

The Pension Burden - Pensions still consume over 21.8% of the total budget. While the Agnipath scheme aims to lower this in the long run, the current fiscal pressure remains high.

Fiscal Trade-offs - Balancing a ₹7.85 lakh crore military spend against the urgent needs of the social sector (health and education) remains a point of intense policy debate.

Technology Absorption - The challenge lies not just in buying platforms but in integrating AI, Cyber, and Space capabilities into a unified battle-force.

7. Conclusion

India's defence surge in 2026 is a calculated response to the reality of "permanent multi-domain threats." By linking massive capital outlays with the Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda, India is attempting to transform from the world's largest arms importer into a self-reliant security provider. However, the ultimate success of this surge depends on timely procurement, effective technology absorption, and the swift implementation of Integrated Theatre Commands to maximize the bang for the buck.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-writes-deterrence-cannot-be-built-on-hope-growing-defence-budget-is-a-course-correction-10552562/

Editorial of the Day – 27.02.2026

Index

1. Taking sides- On Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel (TH) -01
2. 'Rare earth shortages worsen in US despite trade truce' (IE) -02

1. Taking sides- On Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation
Topic- Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub Topic- India's West Asia Policy; Israel-Palestine Conflict; Strategic Autonomy; Diaspora and Labour Mobility.

1. Introduction

PM Modi's state visit (February 25–26, 2026) was the first by an Indian leader to address the Knesset. While ostensibly a bilateral outreach focused on technology and defense, the visit's optics—marked by intense personal chemistry between Modi and Netanyahu—suggest a shift toward a more visible alliance. While India reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution, the absence of direct criticism regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza has sparked a debate on whether India is finally "taking sides."

2. Key Outcomes- Beyond Traditional Diplomacy

The visit resulted in 17 agreements and over 15 MoUs, reflecting a diversification of ties-
Special Strategic Partnership- Elevation from a 'Strategic Partnership' (2017) to a 'Special' one, emphasizing peace and innovation.
Labor Mobility- A landmark agreement to facilitate the employment of 50,000 Indian workers over five years, filling the vacuum left by the suspension of Palestinian work permits.
Economic Integration- * Fast-tracking of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA).
1. Linking India's UPI with Israel's payment systems for seamless remittances.
Technological Frontiers- Collaboration on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), including AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.

3. The "Palestine Dilemma" and Strategic Balance

India's evolving stance is characterized by "principled pragmatism"-
Indirect References- In the Knesset, PM Modi supported the Gaza Peace Initiative and a two-state solution but refrained from naming specific civilian casualties in Gaza, focusing instead on a broader message that "humanity must not be a victim of conflict."
Terrorism Alignment- India maintained a firm stance against terrorism "in all forms," aligning closely with Israel's security narrative following the October 2023 attacks.
The Balancing Act- Analysts suggest a follow-up visit to Ramallah or increased humanitarian aid to Palestine may be necessary to restore the "moral equilibrium" in India's West Asia policy.

4. Geopolitical and Regional Implications

The visit reinforces India's role as a major stakeholder in West Asian architecture-
Connectivity (IMEC & I2U2)- Reaffirmed commitment to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), positioning Israel as a key maritime and rail gateway for Indian goods to Europe.
Minilateralism- Bolstering the I2U2 framework to address regional food and energy security.
Tensions with Iran- India's "visible" tilt toward Israel occurs amidst U.S.-Iran friction, potentially complicating India's interests in the Chabahar Port and the INSTC.

5. Challenges and Risks

Majoritarian Perception- Critics argue the shift reflects ideological alignment rather than purely pragmatic statecraft, potentially alienating Arab partners.

Regional Polarization- As West Asia divides into pro- and anti-Israel blocs, India's "multi-alignment" strategy faces its toughest test.

Credibility in the Global South- As a leader of the Global South, India's perceived silence on Palestinian displacement could impact its soft power in Africa and Southeast Asia.

6. Conclusion

The Jerusalem visit underscores that for India, Israel is no longer just a defense supplier but a "partner in prosperity." However, the "inglorious retreat" from a balanced moral posture—if it persists—could turn India's West Asia policy into a zero-sum game. To preserve its strategic autonomy, India must ensure that its deepening security embrace of Israel does not come at the cost of its historical credibility as a neutral, peace-seeking power in the region.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/taking-sides-on-prime-minister-narendra-modis-visit-to-israel/article70680503.ece#google_vignette

2. 'Rare earth shortages worsen in US despite trade truce' (IE)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topics- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Indigenization of technology.

Sub Topic- Defence Budgeting; Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence; Strategic Deterrence; Two-Front War Contingency.

1. Introduction

The global shortage of Yttrium and Scandium—two niche but indispensable Rare Earth Elements (REEs)—has emerged as a major flashpoint ahead of the March 2026 U.S.-China Summit. With China controlling over 90% of the processing for these elements, their scarcity has directly impacted the manufacturing of 5G chips and high-temperature jet engine coatings, turning industrial materials into tools of diplomatic leverage.

2. Strategic Importance of Rare Earth Elements (REEs)

REEs are a group of 17 elements (15 Lanthanides + Scandium & Yttrium). They are not "rare" in the crust but are rarely found in concentrations high enough for economic extraction.

Element	Key Application	Strategic Criticality
Yttrium	Thermal Barrier Coatings (TBC) for turbines.	Allows jet engines to operate at 1,600°C+; essential for defence and aviation.
Scandium	5G semiconductors & aluminium alloys.	Reduces aerospace structural weight by 30%; critical for telecom hardware.
Neodymium	Permanent Magnets.	Vital for Electric Vehicle (EV) motors and wind turbines.
Dysprosium	High-temp magnets.	Maintains magnetic strength in heat-intensive environments (missile guidance).

3. China's Dominance and the "Processing Monopoly"

The Chokepoint- While mining occurs globally, China controls 85–90% of the refining and separation capacity.

Weaponization- Beijing's revised Export Control Law (2025/26) requires end-user declarations, allowing it to track and restrict minerals intended for specific U.S. defence or semiconductor firms.

Price Volatility- Yttrium prices have surged 60% since late 2025, reaching nearly 70 times their 2024 levels, leading to rationing by Western manufacturers.

4. Impact on Semiconductor and 5G Ecosystem

Production Halts- Major North American coating firms have temporarily paused production due to a lack of yttrium oxide.

5G Delays- Scandium shortages are risking the rollout of next-generation 5G base stations, as alternative materials often fail to meet the required electrical conductivity and heat tolerance.

Rationalization- Supply chains are currently prioritizing large engine makers (Boeing/Airbus) over smaller tech firms, creating a "tiered" access to technology.

5. India's Emerging Role- Opportunity Amidst Crisis

India is positioning itself as a resilient alternative through aggressive policy shifts in the Union Budget 2026–27-

Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors- Announced for Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu to streamline mining and processing of monazite sands.

Semiconductor Mission 2.0- A ₹40,000 crore outlay to expand beyond chip design into equipment and raw material (REE) processing.

REPM Scheme- Incentivizing the manufacturing of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) to build an end-to-end ecosystem.

International Alliances- India's inclusion in "Pax Silica" (U.S.-led silicon supply chain) and the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) aims to bridge the "skills-to-fab" gap.

6. Key Challenges and Way Forward

Environmental Barrier- REE processing generates radioactive thorium waste; sustainable extraction technologies are a prerequisite for social acceptance.

Technological Gap- India currently lacks the advanced high-purity separation technology mastered by China; R&D and technology transfer via the Quad are crucial.

Recycling (Circular Economy)- Building a secondary supply stream by recovering REEs from e-waste (magnets and screens) to reduce reliance on fresh mining.

7. Conclusion

The 2026 rare earth squeeze is a "watershed moment" for industrial sovereignty. For India, the crisis serves as a catalyst to move from a raw material exporter to a high-value processor. By integrating its Rare Earth Corridors with Semiconductor Mission 2.0, India can secure its technological future and offer a credible "China+1" insurance policy to the global market.

Source- https-//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260227/282235197139355?srsltid=AfmBOoohwEntoYQM9Vr06taFiQ4lsJTyaMbFovNRZV56PWNGaBn5lPn4

Editorial of the Day – 28.02.2026

Index

1. International law is not dead, its rules stay resilient (TH) -01
2. New GDP series boost- Q3 growth at 7.8%, FY26 seen at 7.6% (IE) -02

1. International law is not dead, its rules stay resilient (TH)

General Studies 3- Environment
Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
Sub Topic- Marine Biodiversity, UNCLOS, Blue Economy, and Global Commons.

1. Introduction

The High Seas Treaty is the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982). While UNCLOS provided the "constitution for the oceans," it lacked specific mechanisms to protect biodiversity in the high seas—the waters starting 200 nautical miles from shore. Finalized in 2023 and reaching the 60-ratification milestone in September 2025 (with Morocco being the 60th), it is now legally binding for its parties.

2. Why the Treaty Was Needed

The "Wild West" of Oceans- The High Seas cover two-thirds of the world's oceans and 95% of its volume, yet less than 1% were effectively protected before this treaty.
Regulatory Gaps- Governance was fragmented across various bodies (fisheries, shipping, mining) with no unified focus on biodiversity.
Triple Planetary Crisis- Addressing the combined threats of climate change (acidification/warming), biodiversity loss, and pollution (plastic waste).
Equity Issues- Technological gaps meant only a few wealthy nations could benefit from deep-sea genetic resources.

3. Core Pillars (Key Provisions)

A. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

The 30x30 Target- Provides the legal mechanism to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, as per the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
Collective Action- Enables the international community to designate zones where human activities (fishing, shipping) are restricted to allow ecosystems to recover.

B. Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs)

Common Heritage- Treats genetic material from deep-sea organisms as the "common heritage of humankind."
Benefit Sharing- Ensures that scientific and monetary benefits from discoveries (e.g., new medicines) are shared fairly, preventing "biopiracy."

C. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Mandatory Scrutiny- Requires nations to conduct assessments for any planned activity in international waters that may cause substantial pollution or harmful changes.
Transboundary Impact- Also applies to activities within national waters that could impact the high seas.

D. Capacity Building & Technology Transfer

Bridging the Divide- Mandates developed nations to share marine technology and scientific knowledge with developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

4. Institutional Framework

To ensure implementation, the treaty establishes-

Conference of Parties (COP)- The supreme decision-making body (the first meeting is expected within a year of entry into force).
Scientific and Technical Body- Provides expert advice on MPA designations and EIAs.
Secretariat & Clearing-House Mechanism- A centralized platform for data sharing on MGRs and research.

5. Significance for India

Blue Economy Growth- Supports India's Deep Ocean Mission and sustainable use of marine resources.
Global Leadership- India's early signature (September 2024) and move toward ratification strengthens its position as a "Voice of the Global South."
Climate Resilience- Protecting the high seas—a major carbon sink—is vital for India's long-term climate security and monsoon stability.

6. Challenges and Concerns

Enforcement- Monitoring millions of square miles of remote ocean require expensive satellite and AI technology.
Geopolitics- Major powers like the US (signed but Senate yet to ratify) and Russia (opposed) may create gaps in universal application.
Overlapping Mandates- Potential friction with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) regarding deep-sea mining.

7. Way Forward

Expedited Ratification- Encouraging the remaining 140+ signatories to ratify to ensure truly global enforcement.
Funding- Operationalizing the "Global Ocean Programme" and other financial mechanisms to support developing nations.
Technological Integration- Utilizing digital tracking and remote sensing for real-time monitoring of MPAs.

Conclusion

The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty in 2026 is a "Paris Moment" for the ocean. It shifts the paradigm from "freedom of the seas" (unregulated exploitation) to "collective stewardship." While the legal framework is now in place, its success depends on the political will of nations to prioritize long-term ecological health over short-term commercial interests.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/international-law-is-not-dead-its-rules-stay-resilient/article70685226.ece

2. New GDP series boost- Q3 growth at 7.8%, FY26 seen at 7.6% (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy
Topics- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Sub Topic- National Income Accounting, GDP Estimation Methodology, and Fiscal Policy.

1. Introduction

A base year revision is a periodic exercise to ensure that the GDP reflects the current economic reality. The new 2022–23 series replaces the decade-old 2011–12 series. This update is not just a change in numbers but a comprehensive overhaul of methodology and data sources, providing a more accurate "health check" of the world's fourth-largest economy.

2. Why the Revision Was Needed

Capturing Structural Shifts- The previous base year (2011–12) did not account for the explosion of the gig economy, digital payments, and e-commerce.
Post-Pandemic Normalcy- 2022–23 was chosen as it represents the first "normal" year after the COVID-19 disruptions (2019–2021).
Global Alignment- To bring India's statistical standards in line with the System of National Accounts (SNA) 2008 and prepare for the upcoming SNA 2025.

3. Key Methodological Reforms

A. Shift to Double Deflation

Historically, India used "Single Deflation"—adjusting only the output value for inflation.

New Method- The 2022–23 series adopts Double Deflation for manufacturing and agriculture. It separately deflates inputs and outputs using specific price indices.

Precision- This prevents growth from being overstated when raw material prices fall faster than final product prices.

B. Integration of Supply and Use Tables (SUT)

MoSPI now integrates SUT to ensure internal consistency. It matches what industries produce (Supply) with how those products are consumed (Use), significantly reducing the "discrepancies" often seen in earlier GDP data.

4. Modernized Data Sources

The new series moves away from "proxy indicators" and "extrapolations" toward real-time administrative data-

GST Data- Used for real-time tracking of corporate value addition across states.

ASUSE & PLFS- The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises and Periodic Labour Force Survey allow for an annual, direct measurement of the informal/household sector.

e-Vahan Database- Provides precise data on vehicle registrations for calculating road transport services.

MCA-21 & MGT-7- Enhanced use of corporate filings to segregate value added by specific activities rather than the whole company.

5. Economic Outlook- FY26 and Beyond

Growth Revision- Real GDP growth for FY26 is now estimated at 7.6% (up from 7.4% under the old series).

Sectoral Performance-

1. Manufacturing- Projected to grow at a stellar 12.5% in FY26.
2. Agriculture- Revised upward in absolute size (by ~4–6%) due to better value-chain capturing, though growth rate for FY26 is pegged at 2.5%.
3. Services- High-frequency data shows a seven-quarter high of 9.5% in certain sub-sectors.

FY27 Projection- The Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) projects a steady 7–7.4% growth for the next fiscal year.

6. Broader Implications

Fiscal Arithmetic- While real growth is up, Nominal GDP (in absolute rupee terms) was revised slightly downward.

1. Impact- Since the fiscal deficit is a % of Nominal GDP, the FY26 deficit ratio rises slightly (e.g., from 4.36% to 4.51%) without any change in actual borrowing.

Debt-to-GDP- Lower nominal base increases the debt-to-GDP ratio, making the path to fiscal consolidation mathematically steeper.

Investor Confidence- A more transparent, survey-based methodology enhances the credibility of Indian data among global rating agencies and investors.

7. Way Forward

Back-Series Release- MoSPI must prioritize the release of historical data (back-series) by December 2026 to allow for long-term trend analysis.

Informal Sector Focus- Continual strengthening of ASUSE is vital to prevent the "under-estimation" of India's massive informal workforce.

Institutional Autonomy- Ensuring the National Statistical Office (NSO) remains independent and well-resourced to maintain public and global trust.

Conclusion

The 2022–23 GDP revision is a landmark in India's journey toward evidence-based policymaking. By integrating digital-age data like GST and shifting to double deflation, India has sharpened its

economic lens. However, the resulting tighter fiscal ratios remind policymakers that while the "growth story" is robust, the "fiscal room" requires careful management.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/business/new-gdp-series-boost-q3-growth-at-7-8-fy26-seen-at-7-6-10555274/

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DAILY EDITORIALS
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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 02.03.2026

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1. NEP 2020 - From policy to campus practice(TH) -01

2. New GDP series makes meeting fiscal targets, $4-trillion economy aim more difficult(IE) -03

3. Indian economy - Macro 100. Micro 0 (BL) -06

4. India's innovation gap shows up in the financial data of our firms(Mint) -09

1. NEP 2020 - From policy to campus practice(TH)

General Studies Paper – GS II (Governance & Social Justice)
Topic – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.
Sub-Topic – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic shift in India's pedagogical landscape, replacing the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (1986). Approved in July 2020, it envisions an India-centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society. It aims to make education more holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary, aligning with 21st-century global requirements.

2. Key Objectives & Vision

1. **Universal Access –** Achieve 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from Pre-school to Secondary level by 2030.
2. **Higher Education Expansion –** Raise the GER in higher education to 50% by 2035.
3. **Global Standard –** Transform India into a "Global Knowledge Superpower."
4. **Skill-Centricity –** Shift from a "content-heavy" to a "competency-based" curriculum to foster critical thinking and creativity.

3. Structural Reforms in School Education

The most visible change is the transition from the traditional 10+2 model to a more developmentally appropriate **5+3+3+4** structure -

1. **Foundational Stage (5 Years) -** Ages 3–8. Includes 3 years of Anganwadi/Pre-school + Classes 1 & 2. Focus on play-based and activity-based learning.
2. **Preparatory Stage (3 Years) -** Ages 8–11. Classes 3–5. Focus on interactive classroom learning and building a foundation in reading, writing, and math.
3. **Middle Stage (3 Years) -** Ages 11–14. Classes 6–8. Introduction of abstract concepts in sciences, math, and arts. Coding and vocational internships start here.
4. **Secondary Stage (4 Years) -** Ages 14–18. Classes 9–12. Multidisciplinary study with greater depth, critical thinking, and student choice of subjects.

4. Curricular & Pedagogical Overhaul

1. **Multilingualism –** The policy advocates for the mother tongue, local language, or regional language as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5.
2. **Integration of Subjects –** No rigid separation between "arts and sciences," "curricular and extra-curricular," or "vocational and academic" streams.
3. **Vocational Integration –** 10-day "bagless" periods for middle schoolers to intern with local vocational experts (potters, gardeners, etc.).
4. **Literacy & Numeracy –** Launch of a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to ensure basic skills are attained by Grade 3.

5. Assessment & Evaluation Reforms

1. **PARAKH -** Establishment of a National Assessment Centre, **PARAKH** (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), to set standards for student evaluation.
2. **Redesigning Board Exams -** Board exams will be made "easier" to test actual capacities rather than rote memorization. Students may be allowed to take them twice a year.
3. **360-Degree Report Card -** Holistic progress reports including self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher-assessment.

6. Higher Education - Flexibility & Regulation

1. **Multiple Entry and Exit -** 1 Year - Certificate
    - 2 Years - Advanced Diploma
    - 3 Years - Bachelor's Degree
    - 4 Years - Bachelor's with Research
2. **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) -** A digital storehouse of academic credits earned to facilitate seamless transfer and mobility between institutions.
3. **Single Regulator -** The **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** will serve as an umbrella body (excluding medical and legal education), replacing UGC and AICTE.
4. **Internationalization -** Allowing top global universities to set up campuses in India and vice versa.

7. Teacher Training & Inclusion

1. **B.Ed. Integration -** By 2030, the minimum qualification for teaching will be a 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree.
2. **Gender Inclusion Fund -** Created to assist female and transgender students in accessing education.
3. **Special Education Zones (SEZs) -** Targeting regions with a high population of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

8. Challenges to Implementation

1. **Funding -** The policy envisions spending 6% of GDP on education, a target India has struggled to meet for decades.
2. **Digital Divide -** Integrating technology requires robust internet and hardware access in rural and remote areas.
3. **State Cooperation -** As Education is a Concurrent List subject, the Centre requires proactive cooperation from diverse state governments.
4. **Teacher Readiness -** Training millions of teachers to shift from rote-based instruction to creative, competency-based teaching is a massive logistical task.

9. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 is a visionary document that seeks to decolonize the Indian mind and align the youth with the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Its success hinges on seamless coordination between the Centre and States, sustainable funding, and a mindset shift among educators and parents alike

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/education/colleges/nep-2020-from-policy-to-campus-practice/article70669559.ece

"The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to shift the focus from 'what to think' to 'how to think.' Critically analyze the structural reforms proposed in the policy and the challenges in achieving a 6% GDP expenditure on education." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century in India, replacing the 34-year-old policy of 1986. Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, it aims to transform India into a "Global Knowledge Superpower" by aligning the Indian education system with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

2. Structural Reforms - Shifting the Paradigm

The policy introduces several transformative structural changes to foster critical thinking -

1. **From 10+2 to 5+3+3+4 -** The new structure integrates Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) starting from age 3. This recognizes that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6.
2. **Multidisciplinary Higher Education -** The introduction of a 4-year undergraduate program with **Multiple Entry and Exit options** (Certificate, Diploma, Degree) reduces dropout waste and allows students to combine diverse subjects (e.g., Physics with Fashion Design).
3. **Vocational Integration -** By introducing vocational exposure and coding from Class 6, the policy attempts to remove the social stigma attached to manual skills and improve the employability of the Indian workforce.
4. **Regulatory Simplification -** The creation of the **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** as a "light but tight" single regulator aims to reduce the bureaucratic overlap of UGC and AICTE.

3. The 6% GDP Challenge - A Critical Analysis

The NEP 2020 reiterates the long-standing goal of spending **6% of GDP** on education. However, several hurdles persist -

1. **Historical Shortfall -** Since the Kothari Commission (1966), India's actual public spending on education has stagnated around **3% to 4.6% of GDP**, leading to an "investment deficit" in infrastructure.
2. **Fiscal Constraints -** High fiscal deficits (as seen in the 2026 revisions) and the need for massive capital expenditure in other sectors (infrastructure, defense) often lead to "expenditure compression" in the social sector.
3. **State-Centre Dynamics -** Since education is in the **Concurrent List**, the 6% target requires a synchronized commitment from both the Union and States. Many states face revenue constraints that prevent them from matching the Centre's vision.
4. **Private Sector Reliance -** To bridge the funding gap, there is a risk of over-commercialization if the public sector fails to lead the investment charge.

4. Other Implementation Hurdles

1. **The Digital Divide -** While the policy pushes for "Digital India," the lack of high-speed internet and devices in rural areas creates an "equity gap."
2. **Language Barrier -** Implementing the mother tongue as a medium of instruction requires a massive overhaul of textbooks and teacher training in regional languages.
3. **Teacher Shortage -** The 4-year integrated B.Ed. requirement is visionary, but the current shortage of qualified teachers remains a bottleneck.

5. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 is a blueprint for a decolonized and futuristic education system. However, its success does not lie in the document itself but in its implementation (Execution). To achieve the $4 trillion economy and the "Viksit Bharat" vision, India must treat the 6% GDP expenditure not as a target, but as a mandatory prerequisite for human capital development.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/education/colleges/nep-2020-from-policy-to-campus-practice/article70669559.ece

2. New GDP series makes meeting fiscal targets, $4-trillion economy aim more difficult(IE)

General Studies Paper - GS III (Economic Development)

Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Sub-Topic - Government Budgeting; Fiscal Policy; GDP Calculation Methodology; Debt Sustainability.

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) recently revised the GDP base year to 2022–23. While intended to capture the structural shifts in a post-pandemic economy, this statistical "re-basing" has led to a 3.3% to 4% reduction in the nominal GDP estimates. Consequently, the mathematical denominator for key fiscal ratios has shrunk, making the Union Government's target of a 4.3% fiscal deficit and the $4 trillion economy milestone more computationally demanding.

2. The GDP Revision - Mechanism and Impact

Why the Base Year Changed

1. **Structural Reflection -** Periodic updates (from 2011–12 to 2022–23) ensure that the GDP basket reflects modern consumption patterns, technological shifts, and new industries.
2. **Data Accuracy -** The revision incorporates improved databases, updated corporate filings (MCA-21), and more granular sectoral reclassifications.

The "Denominator Effect"

1. **Nominal GDP Shrinkage -** The new series reduced the absolute rupee value of the nominal GDP.
2. **The Math -** Since Fiscal Deficit is calculated as {Total Borrowings}\{Nominal GDP} x 100, a smaller denominator automatically inflates the deficit percentage even if the borrowing amount remains the same.
3. **Growth Recalibration -** Real GDP growth for FY24 was revised downward from 9.2% to 7.2%, indicating a more conservative measurement of post-COVID recovery.

3. Fiscal Deficit - The New Math

Revised Deficit Projections

1. **FY26 Shift -** Under the old series, the deficit was projected at 4.4%. Under the new series, it effectively climbs to **4.5%**.
2. **The FY27 Challenge -** To hit the target of 4.3%, the economy now requires a 13–14% nominal growth rate, significantly higher than the 10.5%–11% usually assumed in recent budgets.

Constitutional and Statutory Context

1. **Article 112 -** Relates to the Annual Financial Statement (Budget), where the fiscal deficit highlights the gap between expenditure and non-debt receipts.
2. **FRBM Act (2003/2018) -** This framework mandates fiscal prudence. The revision complicates the "glide path" toward reducing the deficit to below 4.5% of GDP.

4. The Quest for 14% Nominal Growth

To maintain fiscal targets without slashing essential spending, India needs aggressive nominal growth.

1. **Composition -** Nominal Growth = Real GDP Growth + Inflation (GDP Deflator).
2. **The Trade-off -** While inflation helps increase nominal GDP (the denominator), high inflation erodes purchasing power. Therefore, the focus must be on high real output.
3. **Policy Implications -** If growth stays at 10%, the government faces a choice -
    - **Reduce Borrowing -** Drastic cuts in spending to meet the 4.3% target.
    - **Expenditure Compression -** Risking a slowdown by cutting capital expenditure (Capex).

5. Debt Sustainability & $4 Trillion Milestone

The Debt Burden

1. **Combined Debt -** General government debt (Centre + States) hovers between 80–85% of GDP.

2. **Interest Payments -** A higher deficit leads to a larger debt stock, where interest servicing "crowds out" social sector spending (education, health).

The Currency Factor

1. **Exchange Rate Sensitivity -** India's GDP is roughly $3.8 trillion at an exchange rate of ~₹90/USD.
2. **The Barrier -** Any significant depreciation of the Rupee against the Dollar makes the $4 trillion goal a moving target, regardless of domestic growth.

6. Macroeconomic Implications

1. **Monetary-Fiscal Coordination -** The RBI must manage inflation carefully; if inflation is too low, nominal GDP growth falls, making fiscal targets harder to reach.
2. **Investor Confidence -** Maintaining a "predictable" fiscal path is vital for sovereign credit ratings and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
3. **Viksit Bharat 2047 -** Fiscal stability is the bedrock for the long-term vision of becoming a developed nation. Structural reforms in the tax base are necessary to increase revenues without raising rates.

7. Conclusion

The shift in GDP base year serves as a reality check for India's fiscal math. To achieve a 4.3% deficit and cross the $4 trillion mark, the strategy must shift from purely statistical reliance to aggressive productive capital expenditure and tax-to-GDP ratio improvements. Fiscal consolidation should not be contractionary; rather, it should be driven by a broader tax base and a stable exchange rate environment.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-gdp-revision-nominal-cut-fiscal-deficit-impact-10558015/

"The recent revision of the GDP base year to 2022–23 has introduced new challenges to India's fiscal consolidation roadmap. In this context, discuss the implications of a shrinking nominal GDP on the fiscal deficit targets and the feasibility of achieving a $4 trillion economy by FY27." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) recently shifted the GDP base year from 2011–12 to 2022–23. While this recalibration captures structural changes and modern data points (like MCA-21), it has resulted in a 3.3–4% reduction in the absolute nominal GDP. This "denominator effect" complicates the government's target of reaching a 4.3% fiscal deficit and the $4 trillion milestone.

2. Implications on Fiscal Deficit Targets

The fiscal deficit is expressed as a ratio of the gap between expenditure and receipts to the nominal GDP. A lower nominal GDP directly impacts this math -

1. **The Denominator Effect -** Even if the government maintains its absolute borrowing levels, a smaller nominal GDP base automatically inflates the fiscal deficit ratio.
2. **Target Slippage -** For instance, the FY26 deficit target, previously seen as 4.4%, effectively rises to **4.5%** under the new series.
3. **Pressure on Nominal Growth -** To maintain a 4.3% deficit target by FY27, India now requires a 13–14% nominal GDP growth, which is significantly higher than the standard budget assumption of 10.5%.
4. **Fiscal Consolidation Strain -** To meet these targets, the government may be forced to either curtail capital expenditure (Capex)—which could hurt long-term growth—or aggressively expand the tax base.

3. Challenges to the $4 Trillion Economy Goal

Achieving the $4 trillion milestone is a function of domestic growth and external currency dynamics -

1. **Growth Requirement -** Higher real GDP growth and moderate inflation (comprising nominal growth) are now essential to compensate for the reduced base.

2. **Exchange Rate Volatility -** Since the milestone is measured in USD, a depreciating Rupee (currently near ₹90/USD) acts as a headwind. Constant nominal growth in Rupees must outpace currency depreciation to hit the $4 trillion mark.
3. **Investment Ratios -** A lower GDP estimate might slightly improve the **Investment-to-GDP ratio** (as the denominator is smaller), but it requires actual "ground-level" capital formation to sustain 7%+ real growth.

4. The Way Forward

To navigate this "Fiscal Math" challenge, the government must adopt a multi-pronged strategy -

1. **Enhancing Tax Elasticity -** Improving GST compliance and direct tax collection to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio without raising rates.
2. **Protecting Capex -** Ensuring that fiscal consolidation does not come at the cost of infrastructure, which has a high multiplier effect on growth.
3. **Monetary-Fiscal Coordination -** Aligning RBI's inflation targeting with the government's growth objectives to ensure nominal growth remains in the "Goldilocks" zone (11-13%).

5. Conclusion

The GDP revision underscores that fiscal targets are not just accounting entries but dynamic indicators of economic health. While the new base year provides a more accurate picture of the economy, it necessitates **accelerated structural reforms and fiscal discipline**. Achieving a 4.3% deficit and a $4 trillion economy will require a delicate balance between aggressive growth and prudent debt management to ensure long-term macroeconomic stability.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-gdp-revision-nominal-cut-fiscal-deficit-impact-10558015/**

3. Indian economy - Macro 100. Micro 0 .(BUSINESS LINE)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub-Topic - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Introduction

India has made significant progress in maintaining macroeconomic stability, reflected in steady GDP growth, controlled inflation, and improved fiscal management. However, strong macroeconomic indicators have not always translated into efficient microeconomic performance, particularly in the business environment and firm-level productivity. Understanding the gap between macroeconomic success and microeconomic constraints is essential for analysing the structural challenges in India's economic governance.

Indian business is subject to political, judicial and bureaucratic oppression

1. Concept of Macro–Micro Economic Divergence

1. Macroeconomic performance refers to indicators such as GDP growth, inflation stability, fiscal deficit control, and external sector balance.
2. Microeconomic performance refers to firm-level productivity, regulatory environment, business competitiveness, and entrepreneurial conditions.
3. India demonstrates a macro–micro divergence, where aggregate economic indicators show improvement while enterprise-level efficiency remains constrained.
4. This gap affects investment, employment generation, and innovation capacity in the economy.

2. Historical Evolution of Economic Governance

1. Between the 1960s and 1980s, the Indian economy experienced slow growth due to heavy state control, commonly described as the "licence–permit–quota raj."
2. The 1991 economic reforms introduced liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, reducing industrial licensing and trade restrictions.
3. Despite reforms, several bureaucratic and regulatory structures inherited from earlier economic systems continue to affect the business ecosystem.

3. Nature of Microeconomic Constraints

1. Firms face complex regulatory procedures, compliance burdens, and administrative delays.
2. Multiple clearances from different authorities increase transaction costs and uncertainty.
3. Judicial delays in dispute resolution weaken contract enforcement and investor confidence.
4. These constraints reduce entrepreneurial dynamism and private sector competitiveness.

4. Institutional and Constitutional Factors

1. India's Constitution distributes legislative powers through the Union List, State List, and Concurrent List.
2. Subjects in the Concurrent List allow both the Union and States to legislate, which can create regulatory overlap.
3. Such overlaps may produce policy ambiguity, duplication of regulations, and administrative inefficiency.
4. Strengthening decentralised governance and cooperative federalism can improve economic decision-making.

5. Bureaucratic and Regulatory Challenges

1. Businesses encounter multiple inspections, licensing requirements, and compliance obligations.
2. Excessive administrative procedures raise the cost of doing business and slow down investment decisions.
3. In some sectors, regulatory frameworks still resemble aspects of the earlier licence-based control system.

6. Structural Contradictions in Economic Governance

1. **Policy Reform vs Implementation Gap -** Policy announcements often face delays in execution due to administrative constraints.
2. **Centralisation vs Federal Flexibility -** Excessive central oversight may limit state-level innovation in economic governance.
3. **Macro Stability vs Micro Efficiency -** National economic stability does not automatically translate into **firm-level productivity and competitiveness**.

7. Policy Directions for Reform

1. Regulatory simplification and digitisation of approvals can reduce compliance burdens.
2. Judicial reforms and faster dispute resolution mechanisms are necessary for improving the investment climate.
3. Strengthening cooperative and competitive federalism can enable states to implement context-specific economic policies.
4. Sustainable growth requires alignment between macroeconomic stability and microeconomic dynamism, ensuring that national growth leads to productive investment, entrepreneurship, and employment generation.

For sustainable and inclusive economic growth, macroeconomic stability must be complemented by efficient microeconomic institutions and a supportive business environment. Addressing regulatory complexities, improving governance, and strengthening federal coordination can help bridge the macro–micro gap and enable India to realise its full economic potential.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indian-economy-macro-100-micro-0/article70692388.ece

PRACTISE QUESTION

Q. *India has achieved considerable macroeconomic stability in recent decades, yet microeconomic inefficiencies continue to constrain business growth and productivity. Examine the reasons for this macro–micro divergence in the Indian economy and suggest measures to address it.* (250 words)

MODEL ANSWER

Introduction

Macroeconomic stability refers to the management of broad economic indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, fiscal deficit, and external balance, while microeconomic efficiency relates to firm-level productivity, regulatory environment, and ease of doing business. India has witnessed significant improvement in macroeconomic indicators since the economic reforms of 1991; however, several structural and institutional constraints at the microeconomic level continue to limit business dynamism and investment.

Reasons for Macro–Micro Divergence

1. Persistence of Regulatory Complexity

1. Businesses face multiple licences, inspections, and compliance requirements across different departments.
2. Overlapping regulations increase transaction costs and administrative delays.

2. Institutional and Governance Constraints

1. Weak coordination between regulatory agencies leads to policy uncertainty and inconsistent implementation.
2. Administrative discretion often results in delays and unpredictability in approvals.

3. Federal and Constitutional Challenges

1. Economic subjects placed in the Concurrent List allow both Union and State governments to legislate, creating regulatory overlaps.
2. Such overlaps produce conflicting rules and duplication of compliance requirements.

4. Judicial Delays and Contract Enforcement Issues

1. Slow judicial processes reduce efficiency in dispute resolution and contract enforcement.
2. This weakens investor confidence and increases the cost of doing business.

5. Legacy of the Licence–Permit System

Despite liberalisation, bureaucratic procedures inherited from earlier regulatory systems continue to affect entrepreneurial activity and market efficiency.

Measures to Address the Gap

1. Regulatory Simplification-Rationalisation of laws and introduction of single-window clearance **mechanisms**.

2. Strengthening Cooperative Federalism-Greater policy autonomy to states for designing business-friendly regulations suited to local conditions.

3. Judicial and Institutional Reforms-Faster dispute resolution through commercial courts, arbitration mechanisms, and digital case management.

4. Administrative Reforms-Expansion of digitised governance platforms and time-bound approvals to reduce bureaucratic delays.

Conclusion

Sustained economic growth requires not only macroeconomic stability but also efficient microeconomic institutions that promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment. Bridging the

macro–micro gap through regulatory, institutional, and federal reforms is essential for transforming India into a globally competitive and investment-friendly economy.

4. India's innovation gap shows up in the financial data of our firms (MINT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Science and Technology – developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
Sub-Topic - Role of innovation, research and development (R&D) in economic growth.

Introduction

Innovation and research & development (R&D) are essential for improving productivity, technological capability, and long-term economic competitiveness.Despite rapid economic growth, India faces an innovation gap, as reflected in the relatively low level of R&D investment by corporate firms and limited breakthrough technological innovations.

1. Concept of Innovation Gap

1. The innovation gap refers to the difference between a country's economic size and its capacity to generate technological innovations and patents.
2. In India, corporate innovation remains limited because private sector investment in research and development (R&D) is relatively low.
3. Innovation-driven economies rely on continuous R&D spending, technological experimentation, and industry–academia collaboration.

2. Low Corporate R&D Expenditure

1. India's gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) is around 0.6–0.7% of GDP, which is significantly lower than innovation-driven economies.
2. Countries such as South Korea, Israel, and the United States invest between 2–4% of GDP in R&D.
3. A large share of R&D spending in India comes from the public sector, while private firms contribute relatively less.

3. Financial Data Reflecting Weak Innovation

1. Corporate financial statements show limited allocation of profits toward research activities.
2. Many Indian firms prioritise short-term profitability and cost efficiency over long-term technological development.
3. This results in incremental improvements rather than breakthrough innovations.

4. Structural Factors Behind the Innovation Gap

Weak Industry–Academia Linkages-Collaboration between universities and private companies remains limited, reducing technology transfer and commercialization of research.

Risk-Averse Corporate Culture-Firms often avoid large investments in R&D due to uncertain returns and long gestation periods.

Limited Venture Capital for Deep Technology-Funding ecosystems are stronger for digital startups but weaker for advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, and deep-tech innovation.

Dependence on Imported Technology-Many industries rely on foreign technology licensing, reducing incentives for indigenous innovation.

5. Sectoral Implications

1. Weak innovation capacity affects manufacturing competitiveness and technological upgrading.
2. It limits India's ability to move up the global value chain in sectors such as electronics, semiconductors, and advanced engineering.
3. This also constrains the country's ambition of becoming a global innovation hub.

6. Policy Measures to Strengthen Innovation

1. Increase private sector R&D incentives through tax benefits and innovation-linked subsidies.
2. Strengthen industry–academia partnerships and technology transfer mechanisms.
3. Expand public funding for research institutions and technology clusters.
4. Promote deep-tech startups through venture capital support and innovation ecosystems.
5. Align initiatives such as Startup India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and production-linked incentives (PLI) with long-term innovation goals.

7. Way Forward

1. Sustained economic growth requires innovation-led industrial transformation rather than cost-based competitiveness.
2. Increasing corporate investment in R&D can enable technological self-reliance, higher productivity, and global industrial competitiveness.

Conclusion

1. Strengthening innovation requires greater corporate investment in R&D, stronger industry–academia collaboration, and supportive policy incentives.
2. Bridging the innovation gap will help India move toward technology-driven growth, higher industrial competitiveness, and sustainable economic development.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-innovation-gap-financial-numbers-indian-companies-r-d-research-and-development-11772121676151.html

PRACTISE QUESTION

Q. *India's innovation gap is reflected in the low research and development (R&D) spending of its corporate sector. Examine the causes and discuss its implications for India's long-term economic competitiveness.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Innovation and research & development (R&D) are crucial drivers of technological advancement, industrial competitiveness, and sustained economic growth. Despite being one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India exhibits a significant innovation gap, reflected in low corporate investment in R&D and limited breakthrough technological developments.

Causes of Low Corporate R&D in India

1. Low Overall R&D Expenditure-India's gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) is about 0.6–0.7% of GDP, significantly lower than innovation leaders like South Korea, Israel, and the United States.

2. Risk-Averse Corporate Culture-Many firms prioritise short-term profitability and cost competitiveness rather than long-term innovation investments.

3. Weak Industry–Academia Collaboration-Limited interaction between universities, research institutions, and private firms restricts technology transfer and commercialization of research.

4. Dependence on Imported Technology-Several industries rely on foreign technology licensing and imports, reducing incentives for domestic innovation.

5. Limited Deep-Tech Financing-Venture capital investment in India is concentrated in digital startups, while sectors like advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, and semiconductors receive limited funding.

Implications for India's Economic Competitiveness

1. Weak Technological Leadership-Low innovation capacity restricts India's ability to develop cutting-edge technologies and patents.

2. Limited Movement in Global Value Chains-Industries remain concentrated in low-value manufacturing and services, rather than high-value innovation-driven sectors.

3. Dependence on Foreign Technology-Excessive reliance on external technology can create strategic and economic vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Bridging India's innovation gap requires greater corporate investment in R&D, stronger industry–academia linkages, and supportive innovation ecosystems. Enhancing research capacity and encouraging private sector innovation will be essential for achieving technological self-reliance and sustained economic competitiveness.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-innovation-gap-financial-numbers-indian-companies-r-d-research-and-development-11772121676151.html

Editorial of the Day – 03.03.2026

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1. The waning sheen- On prices, GST rationalisation (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Economic Development)
Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development.
Sub-Topic- Government Budgeting; Indirect Taxes (GST); External Sector (Imports & Exchange Rate).

1. Introduction

India's GST collections in February 2026 reached a robust ₹1.83 lakh crore, marking an 8.1% year-on-year growth. While the headline numbers suggest economic buoyancy following the 2025 rate rationalization, a deeper dive reveals a significant structural shift- a growing reliance on Import Integrated GST (IGST). This growth is increasingly "mechanically inflated" by global commodity prices and currency depreciation, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of domestic consumption-led revenue.

2. The February Surge- Key Drivers

Revenue Milestones

Collection Figure- ~₹1.83 lakh crore (up from ₹1.69 lakh crore last year).
Growth Rate- 8.1% YoY.
Catalyst- The transition to a two-tier rate structure (5% and 18%) in September 2025 boosted sales in automobiles, appliances, mobile phones, and tourism-related services by lowering taxes on consumer non-durables.

3. The "Import IGST" Phenomenon

The most critical takeaway from the recent data is the surging share of taxes collected at the border.
Surge in IGST- Import IGST grew by over 17% YoY, reaching ₹47,800 crore.
Revenue Share- It now constitutes 27% of total GST revenue (up from 24% in the previous year).
Five-Year Horizon- Collections have jumped nearly 41% compared to February 2022 levels.
Dependence Risk- Rising IGST indicates that the government's fiscal health is becoming increasingly tethered to the import bill rather than domestic value addition.

4. Macroeconomic "Inflators" of GST

Two external factors are artificially boosting the "assessable value" on which GST is levied-

A. Rupee Depreciation

1. The Rupee depreciated by 4% to 6.2% during the FY26 period.
2. Since most imports (oil, chips) are dollar-denominated, a weaker rupee increases the landing cost in rupees.

The Result- Higher rupee value of imports $\rightarrow$ Higher IGST collection, even if the volume of imports remains stagnant.

B. Global Commodity Prices & Supply Shifts

Import Concentration- Crude oil, semiconductors, copper, and aluminium account for 35% of merchandise imports.
Energy Shift- The move from discounted Russian oil back to U.S. and West Asian sources has increased the base price.

Strategic Reliance- With 90% of semiconductors being imported, any global price hike in tech components directly inflates India's tax kitty.

5. Domestic Disparities- The "Waning Sheen"

While the national average growth is 8%, the state-wise data reveals a lack of "broad-based" domestic demand-

Underperforming States- * Tamil Nadu- –6% growth (Negative)

1. West Bengal- 1% growth
2. Maharashtra- 6% (Below national average)

Inference- The "buoyancy" is localized to ports and specific sectors, suggesting that rural and regional domestic demand might be struggling to keep pace with the import-driven tax surge.

6. Key Implications & Concerns

Transmission to Prices- Higher import IGST acts as a "tax on inputs." As semiconductors and metals become costlier, manufacturers in the auto and appliance sectors may pass these costs to consumers, potentially neutralizing the benefits of the 2025 rate cuts.

Fiscal Vulnerability- A sudden drop in global oil prices or a strengthening rupee could lead to a revenue shortfall for the government.

External Sector Risk- Heavy reliance on import-linked taxes makes India's fiscal position vulnerable to geopolitical tensions and global supply chain disruptions.

7. Conclusion

The "Waning Sheen" of GST collections refers to the shift from quality growth (driven by domestic production) to quantity growth (driven by costlier imports). While the ₹1.83 lakh crore figure provides fiscal breathing room, it underscores an urgent need to strengthen the "Make in India" initiative, particularly in semiconductors and electronics, to ensure that future tax buoyancy is driven by domestic value creation rather than global inflation and currency risks.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-waning-sheen-on-prices-gst-rationalisation/article70696287.ece

"While India's GST collections in early 2026 show headline-level resilience, the rising share of Import IGST signals an increasing dependence on external factors. Analyze the structural vulnerabilities arising from this trend and evaluate its impact on the 'Make in India' initiative." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's Gross GST collections reached ₹1.83 lakh crore, growing at 8.1% year-on-year. However, a significant portion of this growth is attributed to a 17.2% surge in Import IGST, which now accounts for 27% of total GST revenue. While the figures suggest fiscal strength, they highlight a growing "mechanical inflation" of revenue driven by a weakening rupee and high global commodity prices.

2. Structural Vulnerabilities- Analysis of the "Import Surge"

The buoyancy in tax collections is currently decoupled from broad-based domestic demand due to several factors-

Currency Depreciation- With the Rupee depreciating by 4–6.2% in FY26, the landing cost of dollar-denominated imports (crude oil, tech) has increased. This inflates the "assessable value" for GST without necessarily reflecting a rise in import volume.

Global Commodity Volatility- India remains heavily dependent on imports for crude oil (over 25% of total imports) and semiconductors (90% requirement). Any spike in global prices for these essentials automatically boosts tax collections, creating a "fiscal illusion" of domestic health.

Inter-State Disparity- The uneven growth (e.g., Tamil Nadu showing –6% growth) suggests that states with less "import-heavy" entry points are not seeing the same revenue buoyancy as port-centric states, pointing to a lack of uniform domestic consumption.

3. Impact on 'Make in India' and Domestic Industry

Input Cost Inflation- Since imports like copper, aluminum, and semiconductors are key inputs, a high Import IGST translates to higher production costs. This may offset the benefits of the 2025 rate rationalization (5% and 18% slabs), leading to "imported inflation."

Inverted Duty Risk- If GST on raw materials (imported) remains high due to price hikes while finished products see rate cuts, domestic manufacturers face compressed margins, discouraging local value addition.

Crowding Out Demand- Higher prices for automobiles and electronics (due to costlier components) could dampen the very domestic consumption that the 'Make in India' initiative aims to satisfy.

4. Way Forward (Elucidate)

To ensure revenue sustainability, India must transition from "Import-Led" tax growth to "Demand-Led" tax growth by-

Strengthening Domestic Value Chains- Accelerating the India Semiconductor Mission to reduce the 90% import reliance.

Enhancing Tax Elasticity- Focus on widening the domestic tax base rather than relying on the "valuation gains" from a falling rupee.

Monetary Stability- Coordination between the RBI and Finance Ministry to manage exchange rate volatility, preventing artificial inflation of the import bill.

5. Conclusion

The current growth in GST is a "double-edged sword." While it provides immediate fiscal space, it underscores India's sensitivity to global shocks. Achieving the goal of a $5 trillion economy requires a shift toward a resilient domestic manufacturing base that generates tax revenue through value creation rather than through the higher costs of foreign dependence.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-waning-sheen-on-prices-gst-rationalisation/article70696287.ece

2. Navigating volatile Af-Pak belt requires Delhi to be nimble (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS II (International Relations)

Topic- India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Sub-Topic- Regional security, trans-border terrorism, and diplomatic recalibration in South and Central Asia.

1. Introduction

The Af-Pak belt, traditionally a zone of managed instability, has shifted into an active combat zone. In February 2026, following a surge in attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Pakistan launched "Operation Ghazab Lil Haq" (Righteous Fury), conducting airstrikes deep into Afghan territory, including Kabul and Kandahar. This "Open War" represents a historic divorce between the Pakistani military and their former proteges, the Afghan Taliban.

2. Historical & Territorial Context

The Durand Line Dispute

Colonial Legacy- Demarcated in 1893 by Sir Mortimer Durand, the 2,640-km line divides the Pashtun heartland between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Non-Recognition- No Afghan government, including the current Taliban regime, has ever formally recognized this line as an international border.

Fencing Friction- Pakistan's post-2017 effort to fence the border has physically split communities, leading to frequent "tearing down" of fences by Taliban fighters.

The Failure of "Strategic Depth"

Traditional Doctrine- Pakistan historically sought a "friendly" (compliant) regime in Kabul to avoid a two-front war (India on the East, hostile Afghanistan on the West).

The Boomerang Effect- Since the Taliban's 2021 takeover, Kabul has asserted a fierce nationalist identity, refusing to act as a Pakistani proxy and providing sanctuary to the TTP.

3. Key Drivers of the 2026 Conflict

The TTP Factor (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan)

Safe Havens- Islamabad alleges the TTP operates freely from Afghan soil. In 2025, over 2,400 Pakistani security personnel were killed in TTP-led attacks, the highest in a decade.

Ideological Kinship- The Afghan Taliban views the TTP as "ideological brothers" and refuses to hand them over to Pakistan.

Escalation Timeline (Feb-Mar 2026)

Feb 6- A major TTP suicide bombing at a Shia Mosque in Islamabad kills 32.

Feb 22- Pakistan launches intelligence-based airstrikes in Nangarhar and Paktika provinces.

Feb 27- Pakistan formally declares "Open War" after Taliban forces captured 19 Pakistani border posts in retaliation.

4. Regional and Global Dimensions

China's CPEC Anxiety- The instability threatens the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Beijing, once a mediator, is increasingly wary as TTP and Baloch insurgents target Chinese interests at both ends of the corridor.

US Position- While the US has expressed support for Pakistan's right to defend itself, the cooling of India-US ties under the 2026 Trump administration has seen Washington pivot back toward a closer military embrace of Pakistan.

ISKP Threat- The Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP) remains a common enemy for both the Taliban and Pakistan, yet serves as a further destabilizing third-party actor.

5. India's Strategic Recalibration

India has moved from "strategic wait-and-watch" to a Pragmatic Re-engagement model.

2026-27 Budget Boost- India increased development assistance to Afghanistan to ₹150 crore (a 27% rise), signalling a commitment to the Afghan people despite the regime's nature.

Diplomatic Upgrading- In early 2026, India upgraded its "technical mission" to a full Embassy in Kabul and accepted a Taliban-appointed Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi.

Connectivity via Chabahar- By using Iran's Chabahar Port, India has successfully bypassed Pakistan to deliver humanitarian aid (wheat, medicine), maintaining soft power without formal recognition.

The "India Factor" in Pak Narrative- Pakistan frequently accuses Kabul of becoming an "Indian proxy," a claim used by Islamabad to justify its internal security failures.

6. Strategic Options for India

Strategy	Objective
1. Nimble Diplomacy	Engage the Taliban on security (ensuring soil isn't used against India) while pushing for an inclusive government.
2. Humanitarian Soft Power	Maintain the flow of aid to build "civilizational goodwill" with the Afghan public.
3. Intelligence Vigilance	Monitor any spillover of TTP or ISKP fighters toward the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.
4. Multilateral Coordination	Work with Russia, Iran, and Central Asian republics to prevent a total regional collapse.

7. Conclusion

The Af-Pak belt is no longer just a "buffer zone" but a primary theater of conflict. For India, the unraveling of the Pakistan-Taliban relationship removes the threat of a unified "Islamic front" but introduces the risk of a chaotic, failed neighbor on its western flank. India's path forward must be defined by Strategic Patience—continuing to invest in the Afghan people while maintaining a robust security posture against the fallout of a full-scale war across the Durand Line.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/navigating-volatile-af-pak-belt-delhi-nimble-10561779/

"The failure of Pakistan's 'Strategic Depth' doctrine and the subsequent eruption of 'open war' with the Taliban regime have significant implications for regional security. Analyze the key drivers of this conflict and critically examine India's strategic options in navigating this volatile landscape." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, Pakistan declared a state of "open war" against Afghanistan following a series of retaliatory airstrikes on Kabul and Kandahar. This escalation from years of proxy warfare to conventional military confrontation signals the complete breakdown of the decades-long relationship between Islamabad and the Taliban, primarily over the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the disputed Durand Line.

2. Key Drivers of the Conflict (Analysis)

The TTP Menace- Pakistan alleges that the Afghan Taliban provides sanctuary to TTP militants, who have intensified attacks inside Pakistan (surging by 34% in 2025). The Afghan Taliban, viewing the TTP as ideological allies, refuses to extradite them.

The Durand Line Dispute- The Taliban has never recognized the 1893 colonial boundary. Frequent attempts by Pakistan to fence the border have led to violent skirmishes and a rejection of Pakistan's sovereignty over the Pashtun heartland.

Nationalist Assertion- Far from being a Pakistani proxy, the Taliban regime is asserting an independent, nationalist Afghan identity, seeking to emerge from Islamabad's shadow.

Failed "Strategic Depth"- Pakistan's historical aim to have a compliant government in Kabul to avoid a two-front war has backfired, as the Taliban now poses a greater conventional and asymmetric threat than previous democratic regimes.

3. India's Strategic Options (Critical Examination)

India's policy must transition from "strategic wait-and-watch" to a proactive, multi-layered engagement-

Pragmatic Realism with the Taliban- While not formally recognizing the regime, India should maintain its "Technical Mission" in Kabul to safeguard its $3 billion investment and prevent the use of Afghan soil by anti-India groups like LeT or JeM.

Strengthening "People-to-People" Ties- Continued humanitarian assistance (wheat, medicines, and the 2026-27 budget increase for Afghan development) preserves India's Civilizational Soft Power, ensuring long-term goodwill regardless of the regime in power.

Chabahar as a Strategic Alternative- India must double down on the Chabahar Port (Iran) to bypass the unstable Af-Pak land routes, ensuring a reliable gateway to Central Asia.

Counter-Terror Preparedness- India must remain vigilant against a "spillover effect." Instability in Pakistan could lead to desperate attempts by its military to divert attention toward the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.

4. Conclusion

The "open war" in the Af-Pak belt exposes the inherent contradictions in Pakistan's use of non-state actors for state policy. For India, the unraveling of the Islamabad-Kabul axis offers a strategic opening to decouple the two neighbors. However, a "failed state" scenario in either country would be a regional disaster. India's path forward should be guided by Strategic Patience, prioritizing border security while maintaining a humanitarian footprint to ensure it remains a relevant stakeholder in Afghanistan's future.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/navigating-volatile-af-pak-belt-delhi-nimble-10561779/

3. Easing key bottlenecks in cities (FE)

General Studies Paper- Paper II – Governance, Constitution and Polity
Topic- Urban governance and decentralization.
Sub-Topic- Issues relating to development and management of urban infrastructure

Introduction

Delegating financial and planning power to locally elected socials can improve urban governance. India is experiencing rapid urbanisation as cities expand due to economic growth and migration. However, urban governance systems have not kept pace with this growth, resulting in problems such as congestion, poor infrastructure, waste management issues, and inadequate public services. Strengthening the institutional and financial capacity of urban local bodies is essential to address these challenges.

1. Rapid Urbanisation and Emerging Urban Challenges

1. India's urban population is expanding rapidly due to migration, economic opportunities, and demographic transition.
2. Rapid urban growth has created severe infrastructure and governance challenges in cities.
3. Problems such as traffic congestion, pollution, waste management issues, housing shortages, and inadequate public services are increasingly visible.
4. Urban expansion often occurs without adequate planning or institutional capacity, reducing the quality of urban life.

2. Governance Bottlenecks in Urban Administration

1. Urban governance in India is characterised by fragmented authority and overlapping institutions.
2. Multiple agencies—such as municipal corporations, development authorities, state departments, and parastatal bodies—share responsibilities.
3. This fragmentation leads to coordination failures, slow decision-making, and inefficient service delivery.
4. Local governments often lack the administrative autonomy required for effective urban management.

3. Weak Implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment

1. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) aimed to strengthen Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) by decentralising powers and finances.
2. It recommended devolution of functions, finances, and functionaries to municipalities.
3. However, in practice many states have not fully transferred key urban functions such as urban planning, water supply, and transport to ULBs.
4. As a result, municipalities remain administratively dependent on state governments.

4. Municipal Finance Constraints

1. Indian cities have limited fiscal autonomy and weak revenue generation capacity.
2. Municipal own-source revenues typically account for only 20–40% of total municipal expenditure.
3. Property tax, one of the main municipal revenue sources, remains under-assessed and poorly collected.
4. Dependence on state transfers and grants reduces financial independence and planning capacity.

5. Institutional Issues in Urban Governance

1. In many cities, elected mayors have limited executive authority, while administrative power rests with state-appointed municipal commissioners.
2. This creates accountability gaps between elected representatives and administrative officials.
3. Lack of clear leadership weakens policy implementation and long-term planning.

6. Measures for Strengthening Urban Governance

Greater Fiscal Devolution

1. Enhance municipal revenues through property tax reforms, user charges, and innovative financing mechanisms.

Empowering Local Governments

1. Transfer planning, financial, and administrative powers to elected municipal authorities.

Institutional Integration

1. Reduce fragmentation by establishing single urban governance authorities or improved coordination mechanisms.

Technology and Data-Based Governance

1. Adoption of digital governance systems, GIS-based planning, and smart city management tools.

7. Way Forward

1. Urban governance reforms should prioritise effective decentralisation, stronger municipal finances, and institutional accountability.
2. Empowered and financially capable local governments are essential for sustainable urban development and improved quality of life in cities.

Conclusion

Improving urban governance requires greater decentralisation of powers, stronger municipal finances, and better coordination among urban institutions. Empowering local governments with adequate authority and resources will help cities manage rapid urbanisation and ensure sustainable and efficient urban development.

Practise Question

Q. Urban governance in India continues to face institutional and financial bottlenecks despite constitutional provisions for decentralisation. Examine the challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies and suggest reforms for strengthening urban governance. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) play a crucial role in managing urban infrastructure, service delivery, and local development. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) aimed to strengthen urban governance through decentralisation. However, Indian cities continue to face governance and financial bottlenecks that limit the effectiveness of ULBs.

Challenges in Urban Governance

1. Limited Devolution of Powers

Many states have not fully transferred the 18 functions listed in the Twelfth Schedule to municipalities.

2. Fragmented Institutional Structure

Urban services are managed by multiple agencies, leading to coordination failures and overlapping responsibilities.

3. Weak Municipal Finance

Municipal own-source revenues remain low, with high dependence on state and central transfers.

4. Lack of Executive Authority for Elected Representatives

Municipal commissioners often hold executive powers, while elected mayors have limited administrative control.

5. Rapid Urbanisation

Increasing population pressure intensifies housing shortages, congestion, waste management problems, and infrastructure deficits.

Measures for Strengthening Urban Governance

Fiscal Empowerment

Improve property tax administration, user charges, and municipal bond financing.

Administrative Decentralisation

Transfer planning and service delivery responsibilities to ULBs.

Institutional Coordination

Establish mechanisms for better integration of urban development agencies.

Technological Reforms

Use digital governance platforms and data-driven planning tools.

Conclusion

Effective urban governance requires strong local institutions, adequate financial autonomy, and accountable leadership. Strengthening Urban Local Bodies through genuine decentralisation and fiscal reforms is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development in India.

4. The new grammar of fiscal federalism (TP)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth and development.

Sub-Topic- Fiscal federalism and intergovernmental fiscal relations.

Fiscal federalism in India defines how financial powers and resources are distributed between the Union and State governments. The Finance Commission plays a crucial role in recommending the sharing of taxes and grants to maintain balance in the federal system. Recent recommendations indicate a gradual shift towards linking fiscal transfers with performance, fiscal discipline, and governance capacity, thereby reshaping the framework of fiscal federalism.

1. Changing Approach to Fiscal Federalism

1. Earlier Finance Commissions primarily focused on equity and redistribution to reduce fiscal disparities among states.
2. Recent approaches attempt to balance equity with efficiency, recognising that economic growth and fiscal responsibility are also important.
3. This indicates a transition from purely redistributive transfers to incentive-based fiscal federalism.

2. Redistribution versus Growth Incentives

1. Traditional fiscal transfers emphasised income distance and population criteria to support poorer states.
2. New criteria increasingly incorporate economic contribution and governance performance.

3. Recognising states' role in generating national income promotes growth-oriented federal cooperation.

3. Demographic Changes and Political Economy

1. Demographic indicators such as population changes and ageing patterns influence fiscal transfer formulas.
2. States with lower population growth fear losing fiscal advantages, creating political tensions in intergovernmental relations.
3. Balancing demographic realities with equity remains a sensitive federal issue.

4. Fiscal Discipline and Public Finance Reform

1. Fiscal federalism increasingly emphasises responsible fiscal management by both the Union and States.
2. Fiscal consolidation targets and deficit management are encouraged to ensure long-term macroeconomic stability.
3. Linking transfers to fiscal discipline strengthens financial accountability and transparency.

5. Strengthening Local Governance

1. Greater emphasis is placed on fiscal decentralisation to local governments, particularly urban and rural bodies.
2. This supports improvements in public services such as sanitation, water supply, and local infrastructure.
3. Strengthening local finances enhances grassroots governance and development outcomes.

6. Implications for Cooperative Federalism

1. The evolving framework promotes cooperative and competitive federalism, where states are encouraged to improve governance and economic performance.
2. However, balancing incentives with equitable redistribution remains essential to prevent widening regional disparities.

Conclusion

India's fiscal federalism is gradually evolving from a purely redistributive system toward a performance-oriented framework that rewards growth, fiscal discipline, and governance capacity. Ensuring a balanced approach that supports both economically stronger and weaker states will be crucial for maintaining cooperative federalism and sustainable economic development.

Source-
https-//dailypioneer.com/news/the-new-grammar-of-fiscal-federalism

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Fiscal federalism in India is gradually shifting from a purely redistributive approach to a framework that also rewards fiscal discipline, governance capacity, and economic performance. Examine the changing approach of Finance Commissions in shaping India's fiscal federalism. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Fiscal federalism in India governs the distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States. The Finance Commission, constituted under Article 280 of the Constitution, plays a central role in recommending tax devolution and grants. In recent years, Finance Commissions have increasingly emphasised fiscal discipline, governance efficiency, and growth incentives, reflecting an evolving framework of fiscal federalism.

Changing Approach in Fiscal Federalism

1. Shift from Pure Redistribution

1. Earlier Finance Commissions focused mainly on equity-based redistribution to support fiscally weaker states.
2. Criteria such as income distance and population were given significant weight.

2. Balancing Equity with Efficiency

1. Recent commissions have attempted to balance horizontal equity with incentives for economic performance.
2. Inclusion of indicators such as tax effort, fiscal discipline, and economic contribution encourages states to improve governance.

3. Recognition of Demographic Changes

1. Population criteria have been updated to reflect demographic changes, which has generated debate between states with varying population growth patterns.

4. Strengthening Fiscal Responsibility

1. Finance Commissions emphasise fiscal consolidation and prudent debt management for both the Union and the States.
2. Linking transfers with fiscal discipline promotes financial accountability and macroeconomic stability.

5. Greater Focus on Local Governments

1. Increased allocations for rural and urban local bodies aim to strengthen grassroots governance and improve delivery of public services.

Conclusion

The evolving framework of fiscal federalism seeks to combine equity, efficiency, and accountability in intergovernmental fiscal transfers. By rewarding fiscal discipline and governance capacity while ensuring support for weaker states, Finance Commissions play a vital role in strengthening cooperative and competitive federalism in India.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/the-new-grammar-of-fiscal-federalism

Editorial of the Day – 05.03.2026

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1. Climate risks must prompt international legal reforms (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (International Relations)
Topic- Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub-Topic- International Treaties (UNCLOS, Montevideo Convention, Refugee Convention), Sovereignty, and Environmental Governance.

1. Introduction

Climate change has moved beyond a mere environmental issue to become a structural challenge that threatens the core foundations of international law. It necessitates a reconsideration of long-standing legal doctrines—from statehood and sovereignty to maritime entitlements and refugee protection. Within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), states must now navigate the urgent task of legal renegotiation to maintain stability amidst unprecedented climate-induced risks.

2. Recalibrating Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR)

The Foundation of PSNR

1. Emerging from the decolonization era, PSNR affirms a state's right to control and exploit its natural wealth, including fossil fuels.
2. It serves as a cornerstone of sovereign equality, self-determination, and national development policies.

The 1.5°C Tension

1. The global goal to limit warming to 1.5°C has created friction between national resource rights and the "common concern of humankind".
2. Proposals like a Fossil-Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty advocate for leaving vast reserves unexploited, challenging traditional PSNR.

Equity and Sovereignty

1. Developing states may accept extraction restrictions only if they do not permanently derail development prospects.
2. Equity demands that developed nations provide climate finance, technology transfer, and carbon-neutral technologies in exchange for these sovereign concessions.

3. The Territorial Requirement for Statehood

Montevideo Criteria Under Threat

1. The Montevideo Convention defines statehood through four criteria- a defined territory, a permanent population, a government, and the capacity for international relations.
2. Sea-level rise (SLR) creates an existential crisis for small island nations whose physical territory may vanish.

Legal Continuity vs. Geopolitical Reality

State Continuity- International law generally presumes the continuity of a state; the ICJ suggests that losing one element (like territory) does not automatically extinguish statehood.

Pacific Islands Forum (2023)- Affirmed that international law does not currently contemplate the demise of states due to climate-related SLR.
Ambiguity- While there is no "minimum territorial threshold" for statehood, the loss of land renders governance and citizenship rights increasingly precarious.

4. Addressing the "Climate Refugee" Gap

Limitations of the 1951 Refugee Convention

1. Current refugee law only protects those fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion.
2. Individuals displaced by environmental degradation or rising seas do not meet this definition, leaving them without international protection or clear nationality rights.

The Shift to Collective Responsibility

1. There is an urgent need for a new legal regime, potentially a protocol under the UNFCCC, to recognize and resettle climate-displaced persons.
2. This represents a move toward "human security," acknowledging that environmental harm generates cross-border consequences that traditional law cannot handle.

5. The Unsettling of Maritime Zones

Baselines and UNCLOS

1. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), maritime zones (Territorial Sea, EEZ, Continental Shelf) are measured from coastal baselines.
2. Rising sea levels shift these baselines, potentially shrinking a nation's maritime entitlements and access to resources.

Permanent vs. Ambulatory Baselines

1. Ambulatory (Traditional)- Baselines move naturally with coastal shifts.
2. Permanent (Proposed)- Small island states advocate for "freezing" maritime claims despite physical changes to the coast to ensure economic and jurisdictional security.
3. This conflict highlights the strain between static legal doctrines and a dynamic, changing environment.

6. Conclusion

Climate change is a transformative moment for international law, straining the concepts of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime jurisdiction. The UNFCCC and its Conference of the Parties (COP) remain the essential forums for advancing legal innovation. Responding to this planetary crisis requires more than incremental changes; it demands global solidarity and a redefined understanding of rights and responsibilities in a warming world.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/climate-risks-must-prompt-international-legal-reforms/article70704340.ece**

"Anthropogenic climate change is not merely an environmental crisis but an existential threat to the core doctrines of international law. Elaborate on the legal challenges posed by climate change to the traditional concepts of statehood, maritime zones, and refugee protection." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Climate change has evolved from an environmental concern into a structural challenge to the foundations of international law. As physical changes like sea-level rise (SLR) and resource scarcity intensify, they unsettle core legal doctrines such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and human rights frameworks.

2. Erosion of the Montevideo Criteria for Statehood

The Montevideo Convention requires a defined territory and a permanent population for statehood.
Existential Threat- SLR threatens the physical existence of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), raising questions about whether a state can exist without territory.

Legal Ambiguity- While customary law presumes state continuity, the erosion of land renders governance and citizenship rights increasingly precarious.
Institutional Position- In 2023, the Pacific Islands Forum affirmed that international law must adapt to ensure statehood remains despite physical land loss.

3. Vulnerability of Maritime Entitlements

Under UNCLOS, maritime zones (EEZ, Territorial Sea) are measured from coastal baselines.
Ambulatory vs. Permanent Baselines- Traditionally, baselines shift with the coastline (ambulatory). However, climate change creates a conflict where states advocate for "permanent baselines" to freeze their maritime claims despite land loss.
Resource Insecurity- Shifting baselines could strip nations of their rights to offshore resources, leading to jurisdictional instability.

4. The Protection Gap in Refugee Law

The 1951 Refugee Convention provides protection based on "persecution" (race, religion, politics), a definition that excludes those displaced by climate change.
Legal Invisibility- Climate migrants risk losing international protection and the benefits attached to nationality.
Need for Reform- There is an urgent call for a dedicated legal mechanism, potentially a protocol under the UNFCCC, to address resettlement and human security for the environmentally displaced.

5. Recalibrating Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR)

1. The doctrine of PSNR, allowing states to exploit their fossil fuels, now clashes with the global imperative to limit warming to 1.5°C.
2. Equity and Finance- Legal reform requires developed states to provide climate finance and technology transfer to developing nations in exchange for restricting their resource rights.

6. Conclusion

Climate change represents a transformative moment that demands more than incremental adaptation; it requires principled legal innovation. To maintain global stability, the UNFCCC framework must lead the way in redefining international rights and responsibilities in a way that balances national sovereignty with collective environmental responsibility.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/climate-risks-must-prompt-international-legal-reforms/article70704340.ece

2. We speak in many tongues. That is not something that should scare us (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS I (Society) & GS II (Governance)
Topic- Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
Sub-Topic- Caste Census, Denotified Tribes (DNTs), Linguistic Diversity, and Enumeration Challenges.

1. Introduction

India's social and cultural landscape is defined by extraordinary diversity across caste, nomadic tribes, and languages. However, a persistent paradox exists- the country lacks precise data on these very categories due to historical colonial classifications and post-Independence administrative choices. With the Census (originally 2021) now expected to conclude by 2027, the enumeration of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs), and languages remains a highly contentious issue.

2. Mapping India's Caste Communities

Evolution and Uncertainty

Origins- No consensus exists on the exact number or origin of caste communities. Theories attribute their emergence to occupational specialization, ritual hierarchy, tribal integration, or regional socio-economic shifts.
OBC Count- There is no precise updated count of OBC communities. While the Mandal Commission (1980) identified thousands of groups, the absence of a modern caste-based Census limits the assessment of their demographic and socio-economic status.

Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)

Colonial Legacy- Many were branded "Criminal Tribes" under the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871, subjected to systemic surveillance.
Post-Independence- The CTA was repealed in 1952, "denotifying" these groups. They were subsequently categorized under SC, ST, OBC, or General categories based on regional classifications.
Data Deficit- India lacks an official national count of DNT communities, representing a major gap in formulating policies for these historically marginalized groups.

3. Linguistic Diversity and Enumeration Gaps

Linguistic Surveys- Then vs. Now

Grierson's Survey (1886)- The first comprehensive map documented 179 languages and 544 dialects.
Modern Gaps- No independent linguistic survey has been conducted since Independence; data is derived solely from the Census.
Declining Figures- The 1961 Census recorded 1,652 mother tongues, whereas the 2011 Census recorded only 1,369. This "disappearance" of 283 mother tongues raises questions about data processing and classification methods.

Methodological Flaws in Census

The 10,000 Threshold- The Census often excludes languages spoken by fewer than 10,000 people—a criterion that linguists argue lacks scientific basis.
Language vs. Mother Tongue- The distinction made between these two terms is often criticized for being methodologically inconsistent and risking the undermining of linguistic diversity.
The "Bharat Bhasha Parivar" Debate- A proposal suggests all Indian languages stem from a single family with Sanskrit at the source. However, linguists argue this lacks comparative scientific evidence and is more ideological than scholarly.

4. Key Challenges & Way Forward

Challenge	Proposed Way Forward
Incomplete Social Data	Conduct a comprehensive caste and community-based census, specifically including OBCs and DNTs.
Linguistic Information Gap	Revive the Linguistic Survey of India using modern digital and field-based methodologies.
Methodological Flaws	Remove arbitrary population thresholds (like the 10,000 rule) and adopt international linguistic standards.
Marginalization of DNTs	Create an official registry and conduct a dedicated socio-economic survey for DNTs.
Politicization of History	Encourage independent academic research free from ideological influence to protect linguistic scholarship.

5. Conclusion

Understanding the true contours of Indian society requires a scientific, transparent, and inclusive approach to data collection. Without an accurate mapping of caste groups, DNTs, and languages, policymaking remains detached from ground realities. Strengthening democratic governance and social justice necessitates bridging these data gaps through a modern Census and a revived Linguistic Survey.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/speak-tongues-scare-us-10563718/

"The absence of precise enumeration for Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) and the exclusion of languages spoken by fewer than 10,000 people in the Census create significant gaps in India's social justice framework. Critically analyse how these data deficits impact evidence-based policymaking and suggest measures for a more inclusive survey methodology." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's socio-linguistic landscape is characterized by deep complexity, yet the tools used to map this diversity often suffer from historical and methodological limitations. The delay of the 2021 Census until 2027 and the lack of a modern linguistic survey have highlighted a persistent "data deficit" regarding Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) and minority languages, which directly undermines the effectiveness of constitutional safeguards.

2. Impact of Data Deficits on Policymaking

Historical Marginalization of DNTs- Since the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952, DNTs have lacked an official national registry. Without accurate population counts, welfare schemes and targeted developmental interventions remain "shots in the dark," failing to reach the intended beneficiaries.

Linguistic Invisibility- The arbitrary 10,000-speaker threshold for language recognition leads to the official "disappearance" of hundreds of mother tongues. Between 1961 and 2011, approximately 283 mother tongues were lost from the Census records, rendering small linguistic communities ineligible for state-sponsored preservation efforts.

Sub-optimal Resource Allocation- Inadequate data on Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and DNTs prevents the state from accurately assessing their socio-economic status, leading to disputes over the proportionality of reservations and social benefits.

3. Methodological Flaws in Enumeration (Critique)

Arbitrary Thresholds- The 10,000-person rule is not linguistically sound; language identity is an inherent right, not a demographic privilege.

Conceptual Confusion- The inconsistent distinction between "mother tongue" and "language" in Census data creates a blurred picture of actual linguistic usage.

Delayed Implementation- A decade-long gap in Census data (2011–2027) leads to the use of outdated projections, which is particularly harmful in a rapidly urbanizing and changing society.

4. Measures for an Inclusive Survey Methodology

Revival of the Linguistic Survey of India- A modern, digital, and field-based survey should be conducted independently of the Census to capture the true depth of dialects.

Scientific Inclusion- Remove the 10,000-speaker threshold to recognize the rights of minority linguistic groups.

Dedicated DNT Registry- Create an official national registry for DNT communities through a specific socio-economic survey to address historical surveillance and neglect.

Evidence-based Research- Decouple linguistic and social research from ideological narratives to ensure that data remains a tool for scholarly and administrative accuracy.

5. Conclusion

A scientific and transparent Census is not merely a statistical exercise but a democratic necessity. To ensure that social justice is truly inclusive, India must bridge the gap between its diverse ground reality and its administrative data. Transforming the Census into an inclusive mapping tool will ensure that no community, however small or nomadic, remains invisible to the state.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/speak-tongues-scare-us-10563718/

3. Red Flags in Corporate Tax Revenue (BL)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic- Government budgeting and taxation.

Sub-Topic- Corporate sector performance and taxation reforms.

Introduction

Corporate taxation is a major source of revenue for the government and an important instrument of fiscal policy. India reduced corporate tax rates significantly in 2019 to encourage investment and economic growth. However, recent trends indicate a slowdown in corporate tax revenue growth, raising concerns about the effectiveness of tax reforms and the structure of corporate taxation.

1. Corporate Tax Reform of 2019

1. In 2019, India reduced the corporate tax rate from around 30–35% to about 22–25% for existing companies.
2. The objective was to boost investment, improve competitiveness, and attract global manufacturing.
3. Firms opting for the lower tax regime were required to forgo various exemptions and incentives.

2. Slowdown in Corporate Tax Collections

1. Despite improved corporate profitability in some sectors, corporate tax collections have slowed in recent years.
2. Many companies continue to remain in the old tax regime to utilise exemptions and tax credits.
3. This reduces the expected increase in revenue under the new simplified tax structure.

3. Role of Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT)

1. Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) ensures that companies with significant profits pay a minimum level of tax even after claiming deductions.
2. MAT credits accumulated during earlier years can be carried forward and used to offset future tax liabilities.
3. As companies adjust their MAT credits, the actual tax payments may temporarily decline.

4. Structural Issues Affecting Corporate Tax Revenue

1. Large corporations often benefit from multiple tax exemptions and incentives that reduce effective tax rates.
2. The gap between statutory tax rates and effective tax rates remains significant.
3. Economic uncertainties and pandemic-related disruptions have also influenced investment decisions and tax contributions.

5. Fiscal Implications

1. Slower growth in corporate tax collections can affect government revenue mobilisation and fiscal deficit management.
2. Corporate taxes form an important component of direct tax revenue alongside personal income taxes.
3. Weak tax growth may limit the government's capacity to fund public expenditure and welfare programmes.

6. Policy Measures and Way Forward

1. Simplifying the corporate tax system by reducing exemptions and improving compliance mechanisms.
2. Encouraging companies to shift to the new tax regime with lower rates but fewer deductions.
3. Strengthening tax administration and data analytics to improve compliance and transparency.
4. Promoting investment and economic growth, which ultimately expands the corporate tax base.

Conclusion

Corporate tax reforms aim to create a competitive and investment-friendly business environment while ensuring stable revenue for the government. Addressing structural issues such as

excessive exemptions and improving compliance will be essential to sustain corporate tax collections and maintain fiscal stability.
Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/red-flags-in-corporate-tax-revenue/article70704415.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Corporate tax reforms in India aimed to stimulate investment and improve competitiveness, but recent trends show slower growth in corporate tax revenues. Examine the reasons for this slowdown and discuss its fiscal implications. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Corporate tax constitutes a significant portion of direct tax revenue in India and plays an important role in fiscal policy. The government reduced corporate tax rates in 2019 to promote investment and economic growth. However, recent data indicate slowing growth in corporate tax collections, raising questions about the effectiveness of these reforms.

Reasons for Slow Corporate Tax Growth

1. Continued Use of Old Tax Regime

1. Many firms remain in the old tax regime to retain exemptions and deductions, reducing expected revenue gains.

2. Use of Minimum Alternate Tax Credits

1. Companies utilise MAT credits accumulated from previous years, lowering their current tax liabilities.

3. Lower Effective Tax Rates

1. Tax incentives and deductions reduce the effective tax rate paid by companies, especially large firms.

4. Economic and Investment Trends

1. Economic uncertainties and slower investment expansion can limit profit growth and tax contributions.

Fiscal Implications

1. Pressure on Government Revenues

1. Slower corporate tax growth can constrain public spending and fiscal consolidation efforts.

2. Shift in Tax Composition

1. The government may rely more on personal income tax and indirect taxes to maintain revenue stability.

Conclusion

Corporate tax reforms remain important for improving India's investment climate. However, ensuring stable tax revenues requires simplifying the tax structure, reducing exemptions, and strengthening compliance mechanisms, while supporting sustained economic growth.
Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/red-flags-in-corporate-tax-revenue/article70704415.ece

4. The 'Orange Economy' Offers A Path to Inclusive Growth (MT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
Sub-Topic- Women empowerment and gender equality in economic development.

Introduction

The orange economy, also known as the creative economy, refers to economic activities based on creativity, culture, intellectual property, and knowledge. It includes sectors such as media, design, digital content, music, gaming, and performing arts. As economies increasingly move toward knowledge-based production, the creative sector offers new opportunities for employment generation, innovation, and inclusive growth.

1. Understanding the Orange Economy

1. The orange economy includes industries driven by creativity, cultural expression, and intellectual property rights.
2. Key sectors include animation, gaming, visual effects (AVGC), design, music, film, digital media, crafts, and fashion.
3. These industries rely more on human talent and creativity rather than physical capital, making them accessible to a wider section of society.

2. Contribution to Economic Growth

1. Creative industries contribute significantly to global GDP and employment generation.
2. As digital platforms expand, creative products and services gain greater global market access.
3. The growth of digital technologies allows creators from smaller towns and rural areas to participate in the global creative marketplace.

3. Role in Social Inclusion

1. The creative economy has strong potential to promote gender equality and social empowerment.
2. Women form a large share of the workforce in creative industries such as design, crafts, and cultural production.
3. Creative sectors provide opportunities for marginalised communities to express cultural identity and access economic opportunities.

4. Policy Initiatives Supporting Creative Industries

1. India has begun emphasising sectors such as Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) to strengthen the creative economy.
2. Government initiatives aim to build digital infrastructure, skill development programs, and innovation ecosystems for creative sectors.
3. Policy support can help transform India's cultural heritage and creative talent into economic assets.

5. Challenges in Developing the Orange Economy

1. Limited access to finance and formalisation for creative professionals and small enterprises.
2. Weak intellectual property protection and awareness among creators.
3. Digital divide and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas restrict equal participation in digital creative markets.

6. Policy Measures for Strengthening the Orange Economy

1. Expand skill development and creative education programs to build talent in creative industries.
2. Improve intellectual property rights protection and awareness among artists and entrepreneurs.
3. Increase investment in digital infrastructure and innovation hubs.
4. Encourage formalisation of creative enterprises and provide financial support through startup ecosystems.

Conclusion

The orange economy offers significant potential for inclusive economic growth by combining creativity, technology, and cultural capital. By supporting creative industries through policy reforms,

infrastructure development, and skill building, India can harness its rich cultural heritage to generate employment, promote gender equality, and strengthen the knowledge-based economy.
Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-creative-economy-gender-parity-creator-empower-marginalized-workforce-11772466608563.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The "orange economy" or creative economy has emerged as an important driver of inclusive growth and employment generation. Examine its potential in India and discuss the challenges in harnessing it effectively. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

The orange economy, also known as the creative economy, comprises economic activities based on creativity, cultural expression, and intellectual property. With the growing importance of knowledge-based industries, the creative economy has emerged as a significant driver of innovation, employment generation, and inclusive growth.

Potential of the Orange Economy in India

1. Employment Generation

1. Creative industries rely on human talent and skills, enabling large-scale employment opportunities.

2. Gender Empowerment

1. Women constitute a significant proportion of the workforce in creative and cultural sectors, promoting gender inclusion.

3. Cultural and Economic Value

1. India's rich cultural heritage, arts, crafts, and digital content industries provide strong foundations for the creative economy.

4. Digital Market Expansion

1. Digital platforms allow creators to access global markets and new sources of income.

Challenges

1. Limited Access to Finance

1. Many creative professionals operate in the informal sector with limited financial support.

2. Weak Intellectual Property Awareness

1. Inadequate understanding of copyright and intellectual property laws affects creators' earnings.

3. Infrastructure and Digital Divide

1. Limited internet connectivity and digital infrastructure restrict participation from rural areas.

Conclusion

The orange economy has the potential to combine economic growth with cultural preservation and social inclusion. Strengthening policy support, digital infrastructure, and intellectual property protection will be essential to unlock its full potential in India.
Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-creative-economy-gender-parity-creator-empower-marginalized-workforce-11772466608563.html

Editorial of the Day – 06.03.2026

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1. **Transforming Representation into Real Change By 2029(TH)** -01
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1. Transforming Representation into Real Change By 2029(TH)

General Studies Paper: GS II (Governance & Social Justice)
Topic: Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.
Sub-Topic: Women's Political Participation, Welfare Schemes for the Elderly, and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.

1. Introduction

India is on the verge of a democratic milestone with the Women's Reservation Act, which mandates a one-third reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha beginning in 2029. This reform is poised to create the most gender-representative Parliament in the nation's history. However, for this representation to be truly transformative, it must move beyond symbolism and address structural gaps, specifically the long-overlooked crisis of elder care and the unique vulnerabilities of aging women.

2. Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation

1. **Potential for Change:** Increased representation can reshape national policy priorities and broaden parliamentary debates.
2. **The Risks of a Blank Agenda:** Without a clear mandate to address gender-specific issues, representation may fail to produce structural reform.
3. **Groundwork for 2029:** Political parties and civil society must begin identifying issues that affect women across their **entire life cycle**—not just during reproductive or working years.
4. **Manifesto Inclusion:** Critical issues like elder care must be integrated into party manifestos and electoral campaigns before the 2029 cycle.

3. The Socio-Economic Realities of Aging in India

Demographic Shifts

1. **Rapidly Aging Population:** India currently has over **100 million** citizens above age 60, a figure projected to exceed **250 million by 2040**.
2. **Gendered Longevity:** Women generally live **four to five years longer** than men, leading to a higher proportion of elderly women in the population.

Economic and Personal Vulnerabilities

1. **Financial Insecurity:** Aging women often lack savings, property, or assets due to **broken employment histories** caused by lifelong caregiving responsibilities.
2. **Private vs. Public Burden:** Elder care is currently treated as a **private family burden**—largely shouldered by daughters and daughters-in-law—rather than a matter of public infrastructure.
3. **The "Caregiver's Worry":** Women often care for aging relatives while simultaneously facing uncertainty regarding their own future security and access to services.

4. Policy Gaps and Institutional Invisibility

1. **Gender-Blind Frameworks:** Existing policies, such as the **National Policy for Older Persons (1999)** and the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme**, focus on poverty and health but lack a specific **gender perspective**.
2. **Policy Invisibility:** Aging women are not recognized as a distinct policy category, leading to their specific needs being ignored in legislative sessions.

3. **Health Crisis (Dementia):** A 2023 study found that **8 million** elderly Indians live with dementia—a number expected to double by 2036. Women are disproportionately affected due to longevity and a higher likelihood of living alone.

5. Strategic Steps for the 2029 Parliament

To ensure the new Parliament is effective, several institutional steps are required:

1. **Comprehensive Data:** Future census data must provide **age- and gender-disaggregated statistics** to facilitate evidence-based policy design.
2. **Targeted Budgeting:** Governments must implement **transparent budgeting** specifically for elder-care programs and support systems.
3. **Holistic Representation:** Candidate pipelines must be trained to understand women's issues beyond childcare and employment, extending to **geriatric healthcare** and **dignified aging**.
4. **Political Commitment:** Dignified aging must be elevated to a visible political commitment well before the 2029 elections.

6. Conclusion

The Women's Reservation Act is a historic opportunity to reshape India's legislative priorities. However, the true success of this reform will be measured by its ability to protect women throughout all stages of life. By recognizing the realities of aging and building supportive institutions now, India can ensure that its most representative Parliament also becomes its most **transformative**.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/transforming-representation-into-real-change-by-2029/article70708309.ece

"The true measure of the Women's Reservation Act will lie in its ability to move beyond symbolic representation to address the structural 'policy invisibility' of aging women. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Women's Reservation Act, which reserves one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women beginning in **2029**, is the largest expansion of political representation ever legislated in India. However, representation alone does not guarantee reform; it must be coupled with a clear policy mandate that recognizes women across their **entire life cycle**, particularly the overlooked demographic of the elderly.

2. The Reality of 'Policy Invisibility' for Aging Women

1. **Demographic Shift:** India's elderly population (above 60) is projected to exceed 250 million by 2040. Women disproportionately comprise this group as they tend to live four to five years longer than men.
2. **Economic Vulnerability:** Aging women often face acute financial insecurity due to broken **employment histories** caused by lifelong caregiving responsibilities, leaving them with limited savings or property.
3. **Health and Social Isolation:** Women are at a higher risk of conditions like dementia—expected to affect 16 million Indians by 2036—and are more likely to live alone in their later years.
4. **Private vs. Public Burden:** Currently, elder care is treated as a private family burden, predominantly shouldered by younger women, rather than a matter of public infrastructure or national welfare.

3. Transforming Representation into Real Change (Commentary)

1. **Beyond Symbolism:** Expanding representation has the potential to reshape national priorities, but without a specific agenda, it risks remaining purely symbolic. Future representatives must advocate for issues like geriatric healthcare and economic security.
2. **Gender-Sensitive Frameworks:** Existing policies like the National Policy for Older Persons (1999) lack a distinct gender perspective. The 2029 Parliament must leverage its new composition to treat aging women as a distinct policy category.
3. **Data and Budgeting:** To be effective, the government must utilize age- and gender-disaggregated statistics from future censuses and ensure transparent budgeting for elder-care programs.

4. Conclusion

The Women's Reservation Act offers a historic opportunity to build a more inclusive social contract. The success of the 2029 Parliament will be judged by its ability to transition from being a symbol of progress to a catalyst for dignified aging. By integrating the concerns of elderly women into the political mainstream now, India can ensure that its most representative Parliament is also its most transformative.

Source: **https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/transforming-representation-into-real-change-by-2029/article70708309.ece**

2. How West Asia Conflict Has Hit India's Rice Exports, Left Thousands of Containers Stuck at Ports (IE)

General Studies Paper: GS III (Economic Development & Environment)
Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System; Food security; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation.
Sub-Topic: Agricultural Exports, Water Footprint (Virtual Water Trade), and Crop Diversification.

1. Introduction

India stands as the global leader in rice production and exports, achieving a record output of 150 million tonnes and exporting 21.69 million tonnes in 2024–25. However, this dominance faces a paradox: while it ensures global food security, it leads to severe domestic water depletion. The current strategy is under scrutiny for its high "virtual water" export and low value realization from non-basmati varieties, prompting a call for a sustainability-oriented model.

2. India's Global Dominance: Production and Exports

1. **Export Leadership**: India has been the world's largest rice exporter since 2011–12. Its 2024–25 export volume (~21.7 mt) vastly outstrips competitors like Vietnam (~8 mt) and Thailand (~7.8 mt).
2. **Global Food Security**: Indian rice is a lifeline for developing regions in Africa, West Asia, and Southeast Asia.
3. **Economic Impact**: Exports generate billions in foreign exchange and support millions of farmers across states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana.
4. **Export Basket**: The trade is split between high-value Basmati (targeted at Europe and the Middle East) and volume-heavy non-Basmati rice for developing markets.

3. Environmental Sustainability Concerns

1. **The "Virtual Water" Export**: Producing 1 kg of rice requires nearly 3,000 litres of water. By exporting massive quantities of rice, India is effectively exporting its scarce water resources.
2. **Groundwater Depletion**: Intensive paddy cultivation, especially in the north-western states of Punjab and Haryana, has led to a severe drop in water tables.
3. **Irrigation Inefficiency**: Conventional flooding methods can consume up to 5 million litres of water per acre.
4. **Climate Vulnerability**: Rising temperatures and erratic monsoons increase the risk of high-water-demand systems failing.

4. Financial and Economic Sustainability

1. **The Value Gap**: Non-basmati rice fetches only ₹34–₹39 per kg, whereas Basmati earns ₹82–₹92 per kg. Despite lower volumes (5–6 mt), Basmati's total value is comparable to the much larger non-basmati segment.
2. **Subsidy Burden**: Large-scale exports of low-value rice are often indirectly supported by heavy government outlays in MSP, fertilizers, and power, creating a fiscal strain.
3. **Global Competition**: To remain competitive against Vietnam and Pakistan, India must shift focus from quantity to quality and branding.

5. Shifting to High-Value and GI-Tagged Varieties

The Basmati Advantage

1. **Niche Market**: Globally recognized for its unique aroma and grain length, Basmati provides a strong premium niche.
2. **Eco-Friendly Timing**: Basmati is typically transplanted during the monsoon, reducing the need for summer irrigation.
3. **Expansion Potential**: India has 6.2 million hectares of GI-protected Basmati land, but only **2.1 million hectares** are currently utilized.

Specialty GI Rice

1. **Regional Diversity**: Varieties like **Kalanamak** (UP), **Gobindobhog** (West Bengal), **Seeraga Samba** (TN), and **Jeerakasala** (Kerala) offer unique tastes and higher market value.
2. **Rural Development**: Promoting these traditional varieties supports local economies and preserves heritage agricultural practices.

6. Policy and Strategic Challenges

1. **Regional Imbalance**: Excessive cultivation in water-scarce North-West India persists, while water-abundant Eastern states remain underutilized for rice.
2. **Procurement Trap**: MSP and procurement policies heavily favored in Punjab and Haryana encourage farmers to stick with water-intensive paddy.
3. **The Need for Diversification**: Incentivizing shifts to **millets, pulses, and oilseeds** is essential for ecological recovery in stressed zones.

7. Conclusion

India's future as an agricultural powerhouse depends on transitioning to a sustainability-oriented export model. By leveraging its GI-tagged specialty rice, expanding Basmati zones, and shifting volume-heavy cultivation to water-abundant regions, India can maintain its global market share while safeguarding its natural resources.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/west-asia-conflict-india-rice-exports-10565738/**

"India's emergence as the world's largest rice exporter has led to a significant 'virtual water' drain, particularly from water-stressed regions. Enumerate the environmental and fiscal challenges of the current rice export regime and discuss the strategy for transitioning toward a sustainability-oriented export model." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India is the world's largest producer and exporter of rice, with exports reaching approximately 21.69 million tonnes in 2024–25. While this dominance bolsters global food security and foreign exchange earnings, the reliance on high-volume, low-value exports has raised alarms regarding the massive "virtual water" export and the ecological depletion of India's primary agricultural zones.

2. Environmental and Fiscal Challenges (Enumeration)

1. **Groundwater Depletion:** Paddy is highly water-intensive, requiring nearly 3,000 litres of water for every 1 kg of rice. In states like Punjab and Haryana, this has led to a critical drop in water tables.
2. **Virtual Water Export:** By exporting over 21 million tonnes of rice, India is effectively exporting billions of cubic meters of its scarce freshwater resources to the rest of the world.
3. **Low Value Realization:** Non-basmati rice fetches only ₹34–₹39 per kg, meaning the environmental cost is not adequately reflected in the economic return.
4. **Fiscal Burden:** The heavy use of Minimum Support Price (MSP), electricity subsidies for pumping groundwater, and fertilizer subsidies creates a significant fiscal strain when supporting high-volume, low-value exports.
5. **Climate Risk:** Intensive flooding irrigation methods contribute to methane emissions and increase the vulnerability of the sector to erratic monsoons.

3. Strategy for a Sustainability-Oriented Model (Discussion)

To address these challenges, India must shift from a "quantity-driven" to a "value-driven" strategy:

1. **Focus on Basmati and GI-Tagged Rice:** Basmati rice earns significantly higher prices (**₹82–₹92 per kg**) and is typically grown during the monsoon, reducing irrigation pressure. Expanding Basmati into its 6.2 million hectares of GI-potential area can boost revenue without increasing the water footprint.
2. **Promoting Specialty Varieties:** Leveraging GI-tagged rice like **Kalanamak, Gobindobhog, and Seeraga Samba** allows India to capture niche, high-value global markets.
3. **Regional Recalibration:** Incentivizing rice cultivation in water-abundant Eastern states (Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh) while encouraging crop diversification (millets, pulses) in the water-stressed North-West.
4. **Improved Irrigation Efficiency:** Promoting scientific developments like **Pusa Basmati-1509** and Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) to reduce crop duration and water demand.

4. Conclusion

The transition toward a sustainable rice export strategy is essential to safeguard India's natural resources without compromising its status as a global agricultural leader. By aligning procurement policies with agro-climatic zones and prioritizing high-value branding over sheer volume, India can ensure that its agricultural trade is both economically profitable and ecologically responsible.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/west-asia-conflict-india-rice-exports-10565738/**

3. Informal Sector Growth Holds Up (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Indian economy and issues relating to growth and development..
Sub-Topic: Employment and informal sector dynamics

Introduction

The informal sector plays a crucial role in India's economy by providing employment opportunities and supporting livelihoods for a large section of the population. Recent revisions in the national accounts series have provided improved estimates of economic activity, particularly in the unorganised sector. These new estimates suggest that the informal sector has shown greater resilience and growth than previously assumed.

1. Revision of the National Accounts Series

1. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) introduced a revised National Accounts Series with a 2022–23 base year.
2. The revision incorporates updated datasets, improved enterprise surveys, and administrative data sources.
3. This improves measurement of economic activity in private corporate and unincorporated enterprises.

2. Importance of the Informal Sector in India

1. The informal sector accounts for a large share of employment and economic activity, especially in sectors such as trade, manufacturing, and services.
2. Many workers depend on small-scale enterprises and self-employment for livelihoods.
3. Accurate estimation of this sector is essential for understanding India's overall economic structure.

3. Evidence of Informal Sector Resilience

1. The revised data suggest that the informal sector has experienced robust growth in recent years.
2. Growth in unincorporated enterprises has kept pace with or exceeded that of the organised sector in certain periods.
3. This indicates that earlier assessments may have underestimated the sector's contribution to economic growth.

4. Reassessment of Earlier Economic Concerns

1. Earlier narratives suggested a severe contraction of the informal sector following events such as demonetisation, the introduction of GST, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Updated statistical methods indicate that the sector has recovered and adapted to changing economic conditions.
3. However, the revised estimates also highlight the limitations of earlier data sources and methodologies.

5. Structural Challenges of the Informal Economy

1. Despite its resilience, the informal sector faces challenges such as low productivity, limited access to credit, and lack of social security.
2. Informal enterprises often operate with limited technological adoption and capital investment.
3. These constraints restrict long-term productivity growth and formalisation.

6. Policy Implications

1. Strengthening data systems is essential for better measurement of informal economic activity.
2. Policies should focus on gradual formalisation, skill development, and access to finance for small enterprises.
3. Expanding social protection and digital integration can improve working conditions and productivity in the informal sector.

Conclusion

The revised national accounts series highlights the significant role and resilience of the informal sector in India's economy. While improved data provide a clearer understanding of its contribution, sustained policy support aimed at enhancing productivity, facilitating formalisation, and improving worker welfare will be crucial for inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/informal-sector-growth-hasnt-fallen-short/article70707727.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *The revised national accounts series suggests that India's informal sector has performed more robustly than previously believed. Examine the significance of the informal sector in India's economy and discuss the challenges in measuring and strengthening it.* (250 words)

Introduction

The informal sector forms a vital component of India's economy, providing employment and income opportunities for a large proportion of the workforce. Recent revisions in the national accounts series by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) have improved the measurement of unincorporated enterprises, indicating stronger growth in the informal sector than earlier estimates suggested.

Significance of the Informal Sector

1. Major Source of Employment- A large share of India's workforce is employed in informal and unorganised enterprises.

2. Contribution to Economic Activity- Informal enterprises play a significant role in sectors such as trade, manufacturing, and services.

3. Economic Resilience- The revised data indicate that the sector has adapted and recovered from economic disruptions.

Challenges

1. Measurement Difficulties- Informal enterprises often lack formal records and reliable datasets, making accurate estimation difficult.

2. Low Productivity- Limited access to technology, finance, and infrastructure constrains productivity.

3. Lack of Social Security- Workers in the informal sector often face income instability and inadequate social protection.

Conclusion

Improved statistical methods provide a clearer understanding of the informal sector's role in India's economy. Strengthening policies that promote formalisation, financial inclusion, and social protection will be essential to enhance productivity and ensure inclusive economic growth.
Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/informal-sector-growth-hasnt-fallen-short/article70707727.ece

4. Opening The Floodgates (THE STATESMAN)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Environment and Ecology
Topic: Conservation, environmental protection and biodiversity.
Sub-Topic: Climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration

Introduction

Forests play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity, ecological balance, and climate stability. India's forest governance framework, particularly the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, aims to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. Recent amendments to the Act have generated debate regarding their implications for forest conservation, ecological sustainability, and economic development.

1. Objectives of the Forest (Conservation) Act

1. The Act was enacted to prevent large-scale diversion of forest land for non-forest activities.
2. It introduced central approval mechanisms to regulate forest land use.
3. The law aimed to ensure sustainable forest management and protection of biodiversity.

2. Plantation Forestry and Industrial Use

1. Forest development corporations in several states promoted plantation forestry using fast-growing species such as eucalyptus, poplar, and acacia.
2. These plantations were intended to supply raw materials for industries such as paper and timber.
3. However, such monoculture plantations often replace diverse natural forests.

3. Ecological Concerns

1. Natural forests possess higher biodiversity and stronger carbon sequestration capacity than monoculture plantations.
2. Replacement of natural forests with industrial plantations can lead to loss of ecological diversity and ecosystem services.
3. Monoculture species may also affect soil quality, water availability, and wildlife habitats.

4. Policy and Legal Implications

1. Amendments to forest laws may expand the scope for commercial exploitation of forest land.
2. Concerns arise that relaxing regulatory safeguards could weaken environmental protection mechanisms.
3. Balancing development needs with ecological sustainability remains a key challenge in forest governance.

5. Climate Change and Forest Conservation

1. Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide and helping mitigate climate change.
2. Preserving natural forests is essential for maintaining long-term climate resilience and ecosystem stability.
3. Large-scale deforestation or conversion to plantations can reduce the overall carbon storage potential.

6. Policy Measures for Sustainable Forest Management

1. Prioritise restoration of degraded forests with native species instead of monoculture plantations.
2. Strengthen environmental impact assessment and regulatory oversight.
3. Promote community participation in forest conservation through local governance mechanisms.

4. Align forest management policies with climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation goals.

Conclusion

Effective forest governance must strike a balance between economic utilisation of forest resources and ecological conservation. Strengthening environmental safeguards and prioritising restoration of natural forests will be essential to protect biodiversity, support climate mitigation, and ensure sustainable forest management in India.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/opening-the-floodgates-1503566647.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Recent changes in forest governance have raised concerns about balancing economic development with ecological sustainability. Examine the challenges associated with plantation forestry and forest land diversion in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Forests are vital for biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and ecological stability. India's forest governance framework, particularly the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, seeks to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. However, increasing emphasis on plantation forestry and industrial use of forest land has raised concerns about ecological sustainability.

Challenges Associated with Plantation Forestry

1. Loss of Biodiversity- Monoculture plantations replace diverse natural forests, reducing species diversity and ecological resilience.

2. Reduced Carbon Sequestration- Natural forests generally store more carbon compared to short-rotation plantation species.

3. Ecological Imbalance-Plantation species can affect soil health, water availability, and wildlife habitats.

Issues in Forest Land Diversion

1. Industrial Expansion-Forest land diversion for industries can lead to deforestation and habitat fragmentation.

2. Weak Environmental Safeguards- Relaxation of regulatory mechanisms may reduce environmental oversight and accountability.

Conclusion

Sustainable forest management requires balancing economic development with environmental conservation. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and prioritising restoration of natural forests will be crucial for maintaining ecological stability and climate resilience.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/opening-the-floodgates-1503566647.html

Editorial of the Day – 07.03.2026

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1. Balancing Innovation with Women's Digital Safety (TH) -01
2. India–Europe Strategic Partnership and Global Cooperation (IE) -03
3. The Universalisation of Ai (TP) -05
4. A Peculiar Silence in The Heart of Delhi (TT) -07

1. Balancing innovation with women's digital safety (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (Governance & Social Justice) & GS III (Science and Technology)
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic- Challenges to internal security through communication networks; Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges; Ethical AI and Women Empowerment.

1. Introduction

Following the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the discourse on Artificial Intelligence has intensified, particularly regarding its ethical implications for women's safety. While AI symbolizes rapid innovation, it has simultaneously expanded the theatre of violence against women from physical to digital spheres. On International Women's Day (March 8, 2026), the focus is squarely on protecting women's digital rights to ensure that technological progress does not become an instrument of disproportionate harm.

2. Escalating Digital Threats to Women

The digital environment presents unique challenges that traditional precautionary measures cannot address.
Widespread Harassment- Estimates suggest that 16%–58% of women have experienced some form of online harassment, indicating that digital abuse is both borderless and pervasive.
Anonymity and Integration- Unlike the physical world, digital platforms offer anonymity to perpetrators and are deeply integrated into daily life, making escape from harassment difficult.
Specific Risks- Women are increasingly vulnerable to doxxing, targeted abuse, and persistent online stalking.

3. The Deepfake Challenge and AI Misuse

Deepfake technology creates false but highly realistic depictions of individuals, posing an existential threat to women's digital safety.
Non-Consensual Imagery- AI tools, such as the recently highlighted Grok AI, have been misused to generate non-consensual sexualized images of women.
Amplification of Harm- In societies already struggling with gender inequality, the easy access to these technologies amplifies psychological and social harm.

4. Underrepresentation of Women in AI Development

A fundamental cause of gender-insensitive AI is the lack of diversity in its design.
Professional Gap- According to UNDP data, women constitute only about 22% of AI professionals.
Leadership Deficit- Less than 14% of senior roles in the AI field are held by women.
Consequences of Bias- UN Women notes that many deepfake tools are developed primarily by men and disproportionately target women, reflecting the narrow perspectives of the development teams.
The Inclusion Benefit- Research indicates that diverse teams are better equipped to address gender-specific risks and enable faster removal of harmful content.

5. Strengthening Legal and Educational Frameworks

Regulatory and grassroots interventions are critical for ensuring ethical AI.

Expedited Content Removal- Recent MeitY notifications mandate that intermediaries remove deepfake content within three hours of receiving a takedown notice.
Enforcement Hurdles- While these guidelines are a step forward, India's existing laws on online abuse still face challenges in slow implementation and enforcement.
Digital Safety Education- Given that one in three internet users are children, schools must introduce early education on cyber abuse, AI misuse, and responsible digital behaviour.

6. Conclusion

Technological resistance is neither practical nor sustainable in the AI era. Instead, the priority must be a "safety-by-design" approach that incorporates women's lived experiences into technological innovation. Protecting women's digital safety in 2026 is essential to ensuring they remain equal and empowered stakeholders in the digital world.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/balancing-innovation-with-womens-digital-safety/article70712806.ece

Question

"The emergence of deepfake technology has transformed online harassment into a potent threat to women's digital dignity and privacy. Elucidate the technological and ethical challenges posed by deepfakes and suggest a multifaceted strategy to safeguard women in the evolving AI landscape." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In the wake of the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence has become a national priority. Deepfakes—AI-generated media that falsely depict individuals—have emerged as a primary tool for digital abuse, disproportionately targeting women and challenging the existing legal and social frameworks meant to protect their privacy.

2. Technological and Ethical Challenges

Non-Consensual Sexualized Imagery- Tools such as Grok AI have been misused to generate non-consensual sexualized images of women, causing profound psychological and social harm.
Anonymity and Ease of Access- The digital environment shields perpetrators through online anonymity, making deepfake abuse borderless and difficult to trace.
Gender Bias in Development- Women are severely underrepresented in AI, forming only 22% of professionals and less than 14% of senior roles. This lack of diversity leads to the creation of tools that overlook gender-specific risks and biases.
Erosion of Truth- Beyond individual harm, deepfakes undermine the "right to truth," as they make it increasingly difficult for the public to distinguish between authentic and fabricated media.

3. A Multifaceted Strategy for Safeguarding Women

Strengthening Legal Frameworks- Implementation of strict regulations, such as the MeitY notification mandating the removal of deepfake content within three hours of a takedown notice, is essential.
Incentivizing Diversity in AI- Encouraging greater participation of women researchers and developers can ensure that "lived experiences" are incorporated into AI design, promoting "safety-by-design".
Grassroots Digital Education- Introducing digital safety education in schools to teach children about AI misuse, deepfakes, and responsible digital behaviour.
Technological Safeguards- Developing AI-driven detection tools and watermarking systems to identify and neutralize deepfake content at the source.

4. Conclusion

On International Women's Day 2026, it is evident that technological progress must not come at the cost of women's safety. A combination of rapid legal response, inclusive technology development, and early education is required to ensure that AI serves as a tool for empowerment rather than an instrument of digital violence.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/balancing-innovation-with-womens-digital-safety/article70712806.ece

2. India–Europe Strategic Partnership and Global Cooperation (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS II (International Relations)
Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub-Topic- India-Europe relations, Strategic Autonomy, Digital Diplomacy, and Global Peace making.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, during the state visit of Finnish President Alexander Stubb, India and Finland officially upgraded their bilateral relations to a Strategic Partnership. Discussions held on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue—India's flagship geopolitical conference—Centered on digitalisation, sustainability, and emerging technologies. Significantly, the Finnish President recognized India as a unique global actor capable of engaging all major powers, thereby positioning it as a potential peacemaker in an increasingly fragmented global order.

2. The India–Finland Strategic Partnership

The elevation of ties marks a transition toward technology-led economic cooperation.

Digitalisation and Innovation

Telecommunications- Finnish firm Nokia already plays a major role in India, supporting a significant share of the nation's 5G infrastructure.
Emerging Tech- Cooperation is slated to expand into Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, cybersecurity, and advanced digital networks.
Complementary Strengths- The partnership leverages Finland's innovation ecosystem and India's massive digital market and scale.

Sustainability and Green Technology

Circular Economy- India seeks to adopt Finland's leadership in clean technologies and sustainable economic models.
Climate Resilience- Collaborative efforts will focus on green energy and sustainable infrastructure to support India's climate commitments.

Linkage with EU Relations

Economic Integration- As an EU member, Finland's partnership strengthens the broader India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.
Supply Chain Resilience- Deepened ties contribute to more stable and secure trans-continental supply chains.

3. India's Role in a Changing Global Order

Multipolar Dynamics

Shift from Unipolarity- The global system is transitioning from US dominance to a multipolar framework involving India, China, and the EU.
Economic Credibility- With a 6–7% growth rate and having lifted 250 million people out of poverty in a decade, India's internal success bolsters its external influence.
Diplomatic Bridge- India serves as a vital link between the Global North (Western democracies) and the Global South (developing nations).

Multilateral Leadership

Global Forums- India's active roles in the G20, BRICS, and Global South Summits reflect its capacity to shape international policy debates.

4. India as a Global Peacemaker

President Stubb highlighted India's potential to mediate in global conflicts due to its unique diplomatic positioning.

Strategic Autonomy- India's refusal to align strictly with geopolitical blocs allows it to maintain open channels with diverse actors like the US, Russia, and Europe.
Dialogue with All Parties- In crises such as the Russia–Ukraine conflict, India is among the few countries that can talk to all conflicting parties simultaneously.
Historical Legacy- India is historically one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions.
Neutral Legitimacy- India's commitment to South-South cooperation enhances its credibility as a neutral mediator.

5. International Law and Governance Challenges

The visit brought to light significant concerns regarding the current state of global governance.
Unilateralism- The Finnish President expressed concerns that certain powers, including the US, sometimes act outside traditional international legal frameworks.
Erosion of Norms- Geopolitical rivalries are weakening the United Nations and established multilateral norms.
India's Stance- India consistently advocates for a rules-based order rooted in the UN Charter, emphasizing respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

6. Conclusion

The India-Finland Strategic Partnership is a testament to India's growing strategic influence and its pivot toward high-tech, sustainable growth. As international norms face the strain of unilateral actions, India's ability to maintain dialogue across ideological divides positions it as an essential pillar of a stable, multipolar world.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/finland-president-alexander-stubb-see-india-as-a-peacemaker-one-of-the-few-countries-that-can-talk-to-everyone-10568911/

Question
"Analyse the strategic significance of the newly upgraded India–Finland partnership in the context of digitalisation and sustainability. To what extent does India's policy of 'Strategic Autonomy' enhance its credibility as a potential global peacemaker?" (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In March 2026, India and Finland elevated their bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership during President Alexander Stubb's visit to the Raisina Dialogue. This upgrade reflects a shared commitment to digital transformation and green growth, while acknowledging India's growing influence as a diplomatic bridge in a fractured global order.

2. Strategic Significance of Digitalisation and Sustainability

The partnership centres on high-tech cooperation and environmental resilience-
Telecommunications and 5G- Finland's Nokia already supports a major share of India's 5G infrastructure, providing a foundation for future digital networks.
Emerging Technologies- The collaboration extends to cutting-edge fields such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and cybersecurity, where both nations possess complementary strengths.
Green Transition- Finland's leadership in circular economy models and clean technologies is vital for India's transition toward sustainable development and climate resilience.
Link with the European Union- As an EU member, Finland's deeper engagement strengthens the broader India–EU partnership, particularly during Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.

3. Strategic Autonomy and Peace-making Potential

India's "Strategic Autonomy" is increasingly viewed as an asset for global stability-
Diplomatic Bridge- India's ability to engage with diverse actors—from Western democracies to Russia and the Global South—allows it to maintain open diplomatic channels during crises.

Credibility through Neutrality- Unlike nations bound by strict geopolitical blocs, India's balanced foreign policy gives it the legitimacy to act as a neutral mediator in international disputes.
Leadership in Multilateralism- India's roles in G20, BRICS, and the Global South Summit reflect its capacity to bridge the gap between competing global interests.
Commitment to International Law- India's consistent advocacy for the UN Charter, sovereignty, and territorial integrity provides a principled basis for its peace-making efforts.

4. Challenges in Global Governance

The partnership also highlights growing concerns over global order-
Unilateralism- Finland has noted that some powers, including the US, may act outside traditional international law frameworks, creating a vacuum that India could help fill through multilateralism.
Erosion of Norms- Geopolitical rivalries are weakening institutions like the UN, making "peacemaker" roles both more difficult and more necessary.

5. Conclusion

The India–Finland Strategic Partnership is more than a bilateral agreement; it is a building block for a stable, multipolar international system. By combining technological synergy in digitalisation and sustainability with its unique role as a diplomatic bridge, India is well-positioned to navigate the challenges of the 21st-century global order.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/balancing-innovation-with-womens-digital-safety/article70712806.ece

3. The Universalisation of Ai (TP)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Science and Technology
Topic- Developments and applications of Artificial Intelligence.
Sub-Topic- Impact of emerging technologies on society and economy.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming economies, industries, and societies across the world. As AI technologies become increasingly integrated into daily life, countries must build strong research ecosystems, skilled human capital, and robust educational institutions. For India to emerge as a leader in the AI era, technological advancement must be supported by quality education, academic integrity, and institutional capacity.

1. Growing Global Importance of Artificial Intelligence

1. AI is rapidly becoming a foundational technology shaping sectors such as healthcare, finance, manufacturing, and governance.
2. Nations are investing heavily in AI research, innovation ecosystems, and digital infrastructure.
3. The global race for AI leadership depends on talent development, data resources, and technological innovation.

2. India's Emerging AI Ecosystem

1. India has made progress through digital infrastructure expansion, startup ecosystems, and technology adoption.
2. Initiatives such as the India AI Mission and national digital platforms aim to strengthen AI development.
3. The country's large pool of engineering graduates and technology professionals provides a strong foundation for AI innovation.

3. Role of Higher Education in AI Development

1. Universities and research institutions are central to training AI professionals and conducting advanced research.
2. Academic institutions must foster interdisciplinary learning, innovation, and ethical research practices.

3. Strong collaboration between industry, academia, and government is necessary to build a robust AI ecosystem.

4. Challenges in India's Higher Education System

1. Many universities face shortages of faculty, research funding, and advanced infrastructure.
2. Variations in institutional quality create gaps in research output and technological capability.
3. Weak academic governance and limited global collaboration can hinder innovation and knowledge creation.

5. Policy Framework and NEP 2020

1. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises multidisciplinary education, research excellence, and technological integration.
2. It aims to create flexible academic structures, improved institutional autonomy, and research-focused universities.
3. Effective implementation of NEP reforms is essential to prepare students for AI-driven economic transformation.

6. Ethical and Social Considerations

1. AI raises concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and job displacement.
2. Responsible AI development requires ethical frameworks, transparency, and regulatory oversight.
3. Education systems must prepare students not only with technical skills but also ethical and societal awareness.

Conclusion

The universalisation of AI presents both opportunities and challenges for India's development. Strengthening higher education institutions, promoting research excellence, and ensuring ethical technological adoption will be crucial for enabling India to compete in the global AI landscape and harness the benefits of emerging technologies for inclusive growth.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/the-universalisation-of-ai

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Artificial Intelligence is emerging as a transformative technology shaping the future of economies and societies. Examine the role of higher education institutions in preparing India for the AI era. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming industries, governance, and economic systems worldwide. As countries compete for technological leadership, the development of AI capabilities increasingly depends on strong research institutions, skilled human capital, and innovation ecosystems.

Role of Higher Education in AI Development

1. Talent Development

1. Universities play a key role in producing AI engineers, data scientists, and technology researchers.

2. Research and Innovation

1. Academic institutions provide the foundation for advanced research, experimentation, and knowledge creation in AI technologies.

3. Industry–Academia Collaboration

1. Partnerships between universities and industries help translate research outcomes into practical technological solutions.

4. Interdisciplinary Education

1. AI requires integration of computer science, mathematics, social sciences, and ethics in education.

Challenges

1. Limited Research Infrastructure

1. Many institutions lack advanced laboratories and research funding.

2. Faculty Shortages

1. Shortage of qualified faculty affects quality of teaching and research output.

3. Uneven Institutional Quality

1. Differences between elite institutions and other universities create skill gaps in the workforce.

Conclusion

Preparing for the AI era requires strengthening higher education institutions, research ecosystems, and innovation networks. Effective implementation of educational reforms and investment in research capacity will enable India to harness AI technologies for economic growth and global competitiveness.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/the-universalisation-of-ai

4. A Peculiar Silence in The Heart of Delhi (TT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- India and its neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood.
Sub-Topic- India–West Asia relations.

Introduction

India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by the principle of strategic autonomy, allowing the country to pursue independent decisions in international affairs. In an increasingly polarised geopolitical environment, particularly in West Asia, India faces the challenge of balancing relationships with multiple countries while protecting its national interests.

1. Evolution of India's Foreign Policy Approach

1. India historically followed the policy of non-alignment, avoiding formal alignment with major power blocs during the Cold War.
2. In the post-Cold War era, this approach evolved into multi-alignment, where India maintains partnerships with diverse countries simultaneously.
3. Strategic autonomy allows India to engage with competing global powers without entering rigid alliances.

2. India's Interests in West Asia

1. West Asia is crucial for India due to energy security, trade, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora.
2. The region supplies a significant portion of India's oil and gas imports.
3. Millions of Indian workers in Gulf countries contribute through remittances and economic linkages.

3. Balancing Relations with Competing Actors

1. India maintains close relations with Israel, Iran, and Gulf Arab states, despite tensions among them.
2. Cooperation with Israel focuses on defence technology, agriculture, and innovation.
3. Relations with Iran remain important for energy supplies and connectivity projects such as Chabahar Port.
4. Diplomatic balancing is necessary to ensure that engagement with one partner does not undermine ties with others.

4. Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

1. Intensifying geopolitical rivalries may pressure countries to choose sides in regional conflicts.
2. Aligning too closely with any single bloc could reduce India's diplomatic flexibility.
3. Domestic political narratives and international expectations may also influence foreign policy decisions.

5. Importance of Independent Decision-Making

1. Strategic autonomy enables India to protect its national interests while contributing to regional stability.
2. It allows the country to maintain credibility as an independent global actor.
3. A balanced diplomatic approach helps India preserve long-term partnerships across geopolitical divides.

Conclusion

Maintaining strategic autonomy remains central to India's foreign policy in a complex global environment. By carefully balancing relations with multiple partners and avoiding rigid alignments, India can safeguard its national interests while strengthening its role as an independent and responsible global actor.

Source- https-//www.tribuneindia.com/news/the-great-game/a-peculiar-silence-in-the-heart-of-delhi/

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Strategic autonomy continues to guide India's foreign policy in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Discuss the relevance of this principle in shaping India's relations with West Asian countries. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Strategic autonomy has been a defining feature of India's foreign policy since independence. It refers to the ability of a nation to pursue independent foreign policy decisions without aligning permanently with any major power bloc. In the context of West Asia's complex geopolitics, this principle remains highly relevant for India.

Relevance of Strategic Autonomy in West Asia

1. Balancing Diverse Partnerships

1. India maintains relations with Israel, Iran, and Gulf countries, despite political tensions among them.

2. Protecting Energy Security

1. West Asia remains a key supplier of oil and natural gas to India, making stable relations essential.

3. Safeguarding the Indian Diaspora

1. Millions of Indians working in Gulf countries contribute through remittances and economic engagement.

4. Maintaining Diplomatic Flexibility

1. Strategic autonomy allows India to engage with multiple partners without being constrained by alliance politics.

Challenges

1. Regional Conflicts

1. Ongoing conflicts and rivalries in West Asia complicate diplomatic balancing.

2. Pressure from Major Powers

1. Global powers may expect India to align with their geopolitical positions.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy enables India to pursue a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy in West Asia. By maintaining independent decision-making and constructive engagement with all regional actors, India can protect its national interests and contribute to regional stability.

Source- https-//www.tribuneindia.com/news/the-great-game/a-peculiar-silence-in-the-heart-of-delhi/

Editorial of the Day – 09.03.2026

Index

1. **One Nation, One Election — Remedy Worse Than Disease (TH) - 01**
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1. One Nation, One Election — Remedy Worse Than Disease (TH)

General Studies Paper - GS II (Governance & Constitution)
Topic - Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
Sub-Topic - Electoral Reforms, Federalism, and Constitutional Amendments.

1. Introduction

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) refers to the proposal of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies across India. The primary goal is to streamline the electoral process and reduce the frequent disruptions and fiscal strain caused by a continuous cycle of elections in various parts of the country. The discussion has gained global momentum following the experience of countries like Indonesia, where simultaneous elections in 2019 and 2024 caused severe strain on poll workers, leading to a June 2025 court order to separate national and local polls starting in 2029.

2. Historical Background & Context

1. **Initial Practice -** Simultaneous elections are not a new concept in India; they were the norm in 1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967.
2. **Disruption of the Cycle -** The cycle was broken in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the premature dissolution of several State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha.
3. **Current Revival -** The idea has been revived to restore synchronized cycles to ensure governance stability and resource optimization.

3. Key Objectives of ONOE

1. **Fiscal Prudence -** To significantly reduce the cumulative election expenditure incurred by the government, political parties, and individual candidates.
2. **Policy Continuity -** To minimize the frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which often halts policy decisions and development projects.
3. **Administrative Efficiency -** To allow the executive machinery to focus on long-term policymaking rather than being in a state of "continuous campaigning".
4. **Voter Engagement -** To enhance voter participation by curbing "voter fatigue" associated with frequent trips to the polling booth.

4. Advantages of Simultaneous Elections

1. **Cost Efficiency -** Consolidation of administrative and security expenses results in massive savings for the exchequer.
2. **Security Force Management -** It allows for a one-time, efficient deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and administrative personnel nationwide.
3. **Governance Stability -** Governments at both the Centre and State levels can function without the distraction of impending mid-term polls.
4. **Higher Turnout -** A single, unified nationwide election may generate stronger public engagement and higher overall turnout.

5. Challenges and Concerns

1. **Constitutional Hurdles -** Implementation would require extensive amendments to several Articles, including Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356.
2. **Federalism Issues -** Critics argue that states may lose their autonomy regarding election timing, potentially undermining the federal spirit.
3. **Issue Overshadowing -** There is a risk that national narratives might dominate local/state issues, potentially affecting the representation of regional parties.
4. **Logistical Gigantism -** Conducting elections for the entire country at once requires an unprecedented scale of administrative preparation, including a massive surge in EVM/VVPAT requirements.

6. Proposed Implementation Measures

1. **Transitional Synchronization -** Extending or curtailing the tenures of certain current Assemblies to align them with the Lok Sabha cycle.
2. **Constructive Vote of No Confidence -** Implementing a system where a government can only be removed if an alternative government is simultaneously ready, ensuring assemblies are replaced rather than dissolved.
3. **Two-Phase Model -** A hybrid approach where elections are held twice in a five-year cycle to maintain partial synchronization and reduce total polling events.

7. Conclusion

One Nation, One Election offers a pathway to a more stable and cost-effective electoral system. However, its success depends on achieving a broad political consensus and ensuring that the structural changes do not dilute India's diverse federal character. Careful safeguarding of regional interests is essential for this transition to be truly transformative.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-nation-one-election-remedy-worse-than-disease/article70719321.ece

2. Maharashtra's New Farm Loan Waiver, Despite Past Warnings of Impact on Credit Culture — And Farmers Themselves (IE)

General Studies Paper - GS III (Economic Development)
Topic - Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System; Issues of buffer stocks and food security; Economics of animal-rearing.
Sub-Topic - Agricultural Credit, Rural Indebtedness, Fiscal Policy, and Agrarian Distress.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, the Maharashtra government announced a massive ₹35,000 crore farm loan waiver intended to benefit approximately 30 lakh farmers. While the move provides immediate debt relief in the face of agrarian distress, it has reignited a long-standing economic debate regarding the "moral hazard" it creates within the credit system. Over the past 35 years, central and state governments have expended more than ₹3 lakh crore on such schemes, despite repeated cautions from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regarding their impact on fiscal stability and credit discipline.

2. Rationale Behind Farm Loan Waivers

1. **Debt Relief -** Waivers are primarily intended to reduce the crushing debt burden on farmers facing crop failures or price crashes.
2. **Agrarian Crisis Response -** They serve as an immediate financial safety net during periods of severe rural distress.
3. **Stimulating Rural Demand -** Proponents argue that by clearing debt, farmers gain improved purchasing capacity, which can stimulate broader rural economic activity.

4. **Political Economy -** With agriculture supporting nearly 45% of India's workforce, loan waivers have become a frequent and powerful electoral instrument.

3. Historical Evolution of Waiver Schemes

1. **Agricultural and Rural Debt Relief Scheme (1990) -** The first nationwide program covering short-term loans owed to public sector and regional rural banks.
2. **Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme (2008) -** A major relief program covering small and marginal farmers with landholdings up to five acres, costing roughly ₹52,500 crore.
3. **Rising State-Level Waivers -** Since 2014, states have taken the lead, with massive outlays in Tamil Nadu (₹52,800 crore), Karnataka (₹44,000 crore), and Uttar Pradesh (₹36,360 crore).
4. **Recent Wave -** The trend continues with significant announcements from Telangana (2024) and Maharashtra (2026).

4. Impact on Agricultural Credit Culture

Frequent waivers often lead to unintended institutional consequences -

1. **Moral Hazard -** Constant expectations of waivers encourage "strategic defaults," where farmers who can afford to pay choose to delay or avoid repayments.
2. **Rising NPAs -** Agricultural Gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) reached 8.44% in 2019, partly due to repayment disruptions following waiver announcements.
3. **Credit Contraction -** Banks often become hesitant to lend in regions with frequent waivers, leading to slower growth in formal credit availability.
4. **Informal Debt Trap -** When formal institutional lending dries up, farmers are forced to turn back to high-interest moneylenders.

5. Fiscal Implications for States

1. **Budgetary Pressure -** Waivers can cost between 0.1% to 2% of a state's GSDP, putting severe strain on fiscal resources.
2. **Opportunity Cost -** Funds used for waivers are often diverted from long-term productive investments such as irrigation, cold storage, and rural infrastructure.
3. **Long-Term Liability -** Payments are typically spread over 3–5 years, creating lingering fiscal liabilities that may challenge FRBM deficit targets.

6. Structural Issues & Alternative Approaches

Research indicates that only about 50% of eligible farmers actually benefit from these schemes. Sustainable solutions require addressing the root causes of distress -

1. **Income Support -** Schemes like PM-Kisan provide predictable direct transfers without distorting credit behavior.
2. **Risk Management -** Strengthening crop insurance like PMFBY helps manage risks from weather volatility.
3. **Market Reforms -** Enhancing e-NAM and contract farming to improve price realization for small and marginal farmers (who make up over 85% of the sector).
4. **Infrastructure Investment -** Focused spending on irrigation and storage to reduce crop vulnerability.

7. Conclusion

Farm loan waivers offer a temporary reprieve for distressed rural households but fail to address the underlying structural inefficiencies of Indian agriculture. For long-term sustainability, India must move toward a comprehensive strategy that balances immediate relief with institutional credit discipline, enhanced productivity, and robust risk management.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/farm-loan-waiver-maharashtra-trend-debate-finances-10571053/

QUESTION

"Farm loan waivers are often viewed as an immediate panacea for agrarian distress, yet they risk institutionalizing a 'moral hazard' that undermines the formal credit culture. Critically examine the

impact of frequent loan waivers on India's agricultural credit system and discuss whether direct income support offers a more sustainable alternative." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

With the recent announcement of a ₹35,000 crore waiver in Maharashtra, India has spent over ₹3 lakh crore on agricultural debt relief in the last 35 years. While these schemes aim to provide immediate relief to distressed farmers, their repeated implementation raises serious concerns about fiscal stability and the long-term viability of institutional lending.

2. Impact on the Agricultural Credit System

Frequent loan waivers have a multi-dimensional impact on the rural financial ecosystem -

1. **The Problem of 'Moral Hazard'** - Regular waivers create an expectation of future relief, prompting even solvent farmers to delay or strategicially avoid repayments.
2. **Deteriorating Asset Quality** - The agricultural sector's Gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) reached approximately 8.44% in 2019, a trend significantly influenced by the disruptions caused by waiver announcements.
3. **Lending Contraction** - Banks often respond to deteriorating credit discipline by becoming more cautious, leading to slower growth in formal agricultural credit.
4. **Reliance on Informal Credit** - When banks restrict formal lending, vulnerable farmers are often forced back to informal moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates.

3. Fiscal and Structural Constraints

1. **Opportunity Cost** - The massive outlays for waivers (often 0.1% to 2% of GSDP) divert resources away from critical long-term investments in irrigation, cold storage, and rural infrastructure.
2. **Limited Reach** - Research indicates that only about 50% of eligible farmers actually benefit from these schemes, often leaving out those most in need.

4. Direct Income Support - A Sustainable Alternative?

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes, such as PM-Kisan, offer several advantages over loan waivers -

1. **Predictability** - They provide regular, predictable financial assistance without distorting the borrower-lender relationship.
2. **Credit Discipline** - Unlike waivers, income support does not incentivize defaults, thus maintaining the integrity of the formal credit culture.
3. **Risk Management** - When combined with robust crop insurance (PMFBY) and market reforms like **e-NAM**, income support addresses the root causes of income volatility rather than just the symptoms of debt.

5. Conclusion

While farm loan waivers provide short-term political and financial relief, they act as a "band-aid" solution that creates a cycle of dependency and fiscal strain. A sustainable agricultural strategy must prioritize structural reforms—enhancing productivity, improving market access, and strengthening formal credit mechanisms—to ensure that the Indian farmer is resilient rather than reliant.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/farm-loan-waiver-maharashtra-trend-debate-finances-10571053/**

QUESTION

"Elucidate the concept of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) and its potential impact on the Indian political landscape. To what extent would this move address the challenges of frequent elections while safeguarding the country's federal spirit?" (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) refers to a synchronized electoral system where polls for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies are held simultaneously across the country. While India followed this model in its initial decades (1951–1967), the cycle was eventually disrupted by premature dissolutions of

various assemblies. The idea has recently been revived to address the inefficiencies of a "permanent election mode".

2. Governance and Economic Rationale

Simultaneous elections aim to rectify several systemic inefficiencies -

1. **Fiscal Prudence** - Conducting unified elections significantly reduces the cumulative administrative and security expenditure incurred by the exchequer and political parties.
2. **Policy Continuity** - Frequent elections result in the recurrent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which often stalls crucial developmental work and policy decisions.
3. **Administrative Efficiency** - Governments can focus on long-term governance rather than being distracted by continuous campaigning for regional polls.
4. **Security Management** - A one-time deployment of central security forces and polling personnel optimizes human resources.

3. Challenges to Federalism and Implementation

Despite the advantages, the proposal faces substantial constitutional and federal hurdles -

1. **Constitutional Amendments** - Implementation requires changes to key provisions, including Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356, involving both the Parliament and State ratifications.
2. **Autonomy of States** - Critics argue that synchronizing cycles may strip States of their autonomy in deciding election timing, potentially weakening the federal balance.
3. **Overshadowing of Local Issues** - There is a concern that national-level narratives might dominate State-specific issues, diluting the focus on regional political representation.
4. **Logistical Complexity** - The massive administrative preparation required—including a huge surge in EVM/VVPAT requirements—remains a daunting task.

4. Global Context and Lessons

The experience of Indonesia provides a cautionary tale; while simultaneous national and local elections were held in 2019 and 2024, the severe strain on poll workers led to their Constitutional Court ordering separate elections starting from 2029. This underscores the need for robust administrative safeguards.

5. Conclusion

One Nation, One Election seeks to create a cost-effective and stable electoral system. However, transitioning to this model necessitates a broad political consensus and careful legal mechanisms—such as the "constructive vote of no confidence"—to ensure that the structural shift does not come at the cost of India's diverse and vital federal character.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-nation-one-election-remedy-worse-than-disease/article70719321.ece**

3. Rot in Education (THE STATESMAN)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Social Sector

Topic - Issues relating to development and management of social sector services relating to education and health.

Sub-Topic - Human resource development and skill formation.

Introduction

Education and healthcare are critical pillars of human development and national capacity building. In India, debates surrounding medical entrance examinations such as NEET-PG highlight deeper structural issues in the education system, particularly the quality of schooling and preparedness of students for higher education. These challenges raise important questions about equity, access, and the effectiveness of educational reforms.

1. Purpose of NEET-PG and Standardised Testing

1. NEET-PG is a national-level examination used for admission to postgraduate medical courses.
2. It aims to create a uniform and transparent selection process for medical education across India.
3. Standardised testing helps maintain academic merit and professional competency in specialised medical fields.

2. Issues in Medical Education Admissions

1. Concerns have been raised about cut-off scores and vacant medical seats, indicating mismatches between demand and eligibility.
2. Lowering qualifying marks may increase access but could raise concerns about quality and competency of medical professionals.
3. The situation reflects broader problems in educational preparation and institutional capacity.

3. Weaknesses in the School Education System

1. Many students struggle with basic conceptual understanding in science and mathematics.
2. Government schools often face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and overcrowded classrooms.
3. These systemic issues affect students' readiness for competitive examinations and higher education.

4. Role of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

1. NEP 2020 aims to transform the education system through multidisciplinary learning, improved pedagogy, and stronger foundational education.
2. It emphasises skill development, analytical thinking, and vocational exposure.
3. Effective implementation of NEP reforms is essential for improving learning outcomes and preparing students for specialised careers.

5. Implications for Human Capital Development

1. Weak educational foundations affect the quality of professionals in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and research.
2. Improving school education is crucial for strengthening India's human capital and knowledge economy.
3. Balanced reforms in school education, higher education, and professional training are necessary.

Conclusion

The debate surrounding NEET-PG highlights deeper systemic challenges in India's education system. Strengthening foundational schooling, improving teaching quality, and effectively implementing educational reforms such as NEP 2020 are essential for ensuring high-quality professional education and long-term human capital development.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/rot-in-education-1503567882.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Debates surrounding medical entrance examinations in India reflect deeper structural issues in the education system. Examine the challenges in preparing students for professional education and suggest reforms.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Professional entrance examinations such as NEET-PG play a critical role in ensuring merit-based admission to specialised medical education. However, controversies surrounding qualifying marks and vacant seats highlight deeper issues in India's school education system and student preparedness for higher education.

Challenges in Preparing Students for Professional Education

1. Weak Foundational Learning- Many students lack strong conceptual understanding in science, mathematics, and analytical reasoning.

2. Infrastructure and Teacher Shortages- Government schools often face inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and limited teaching resources.

3. Inequality in Educational Opportunities- Differences between public and private schooling systems create disparities in learning outcomes.
4. Exam-Oriented Learning- Excessive focus on rote memorisation rather than conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

Reforms Needed

1. Strengthening Foundational Education- Improve early learning outcomes and basic competencies.
2. Teacher Training and Infrastructure- Invest in teacher capacity building and school infrastructure.
3. Effective Implementation of NEP 2020- Promote multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and experiential education.

Conclusion

Addressing the challenges in professional education requires strengthening school education, improving teaching quality, and ensuring equitable learning opportunities. Such reforms are essential for building a skilled and competent workforce capable of supporting India's healthcare and knowledge sectors.
Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/rot-in-education-1503567882.html

4. Why India must not take sides in foreign wars in a fractured world (MINT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic - Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
Sub-Topic - India's foreign policy and strategic autonomy.

Introduction

The contemporary global order is increasingly characterised by geopolitical conflicts, strategic rivalries, and shifting alliances. In such a fragmented world, countries often face pressure to align with competing power blocs. For India, maintaining strategic autonomy and a balanced foreign policy is essential to safeguard national interests while navigating complex international conflicts.

1. Growing Global Geopolitical Fragmentation

1. The international system is witnessing rising tensions due to conflicts such as Russia–Ukraine war and geopolitical rivalry among major powers.
2. These conflicts reflect the emergence of a multipolar world with competing strategic interests.
3. Increased fragmentation makes global diplomacy more complex for middle powers like India.

2. India's Stakes in Multiple Regions

1. India maintains economic, strategic, and diplomatic relations with multiple countries across rival blocs.
2. Its interests include energy security, trade partnerships, defence cooperation, and diaspora welfare.
3. Taking sides in external conflicts could strain relationships with important partners.

3. Tradition of Strategic Autonomy

1. Since independence, India has followed the principle of non-alignment and later strategic autonomy.
2. This approach enables India to engage with different powers while retaining policy independence.
3. Strategic autonomy enhances India's credibility as an independent global actor.

4. Risks of Aligning in Foreign Conflicts

1. Aligning with one side in international wars could expose India to economic sanctions, diplomatic tensions, or security risks.
2. Such alignment may also limit India's flexibility in pursuing long-term foreign policy objectives.
3. Remaining neutral allows India to focus on domestic development and economic priorities.

5. Role as a Responsible Global Actor

1. By avoiding direct involvement in foreign wars, India can contribute to diplomatic dialogue, conflict resolution, and humanitarian assistance.
2. A balanced approach strengthens India's image as a responsible and pragmatic global power.

Conclusion

In an era of increasing geopolitical fragmentation, maintaining strategic autonomy allows India to protect its national interests while preserving diplomatic flexibility. By avoiding alignment in foreign conflicts and promoting balanced engagement with multiple partners, India can effectively navigate global uncertainties and strengthen its position in the international system.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-neutral-wars-europe-west-asia-east-russia-ukraine-iran-israel-11772866918631.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *In an increasingly fragmented global order, India should avoid taking sides in foreign conflicts to safeguard its national interests. Discuss the relevance of strategic autonomy in India's foreign policy.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Strategic autonomy has long been a guiding principle of India's foreign policy. It refers to the ability of a country to pursue independent diplomatic and security decisions without aligning permanently with any major power bloc. In the context of growing geopolitical conflicts, this principle remains crucial for India.

Changing Global Geopolitical Context

1. The international system is increasingly characterised by multipolarity, strategic competition, and regional conflicts.
2. Conflicts such as the Russia–Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific highlight growing global instability.
3. In this environment, aligning with one power bloc may limit diplomatic flexibility and create new strategic vulnerabilities.

Relevance of Strategic Autonomy for India

1. Protection of Diverse National Interests

1. India has strong diplomatic, economic, and security relationships with multiple countries across rival blocs.
2. These relationships involve energy security, trade partnerships, defence cooperation, and diaspora welfare.

2. Diplomatic Flexibility

1. Strategic autonomy allows India to engage simultaneously with different partners such as the United States, Russia, European Union, and West Asian countries.
2. This flexibility enhances India's ability to pursue issue-based partnerships without permanent alliances.

3. Avoiding Economic and Strategic Risks

1. Taking sides in external wars may expose India to sanctions, supply disruptions, or diplomatic tensions.
2. Maintaining neutrality reduces the risk of becoming entangled in conflicts that do not directly serve India's interests.

4. Role in a Multipolar Global Order

1. Strategic autonomy strengthens India's position as an independent pole in global politics.
2. It allows India to support the emergence of a balanced and multipolar international system.

Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

1. Increasing polarisation between major powers may create external pressure on countries to take sides.
2. Economic interdependence and security partnerships sometimes make complete neutrality difficult.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy remains a cornerstone of India's foreign policy in a complex and fragmented global order. By maintaining independent decision-making and balanced engagement with multiple partners, India can safeguard its national interests while contributing to global stability and the development of a multipolar international system.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-neutral-wars-europe-west-asia-east-russia-ukraine-iran-israel-11772866918631.html

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Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 10.03.2026

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1. **Bitter milk- On the Rajamahendravaram milk adulteration case (TH) -01**
2. **What is driving the early summer and heat-wave conditions in north India? (IE) -03**
3. **Leadership Gender Gap (THE STATESMAN) -05**
4. **Communication ethics in an age of conflict (THE PIONEER) -07**

1. Bitter milk- On the Rajamahendravaram milk adulteration case (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (Governance & Social Justice)

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Sub-Topic- Food Safety Regulations (FSSAI), Public Health, and Consumer Protection.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, a mass poisoning incident in Rajamahendravaram, Andhra Pradesh, caused 11 deaths and approximately 20 hospitalizations (including infants and the elderly) due to milk contaminated with ethylene glycol. This disaster has exposed profound systemic failures in food safety enforcement, the illegal operation of unlicensed dairies, and the gross negligence of vendors, sparking a national debate on the efficacy of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

2. The Incident- Key Issues and Implications

1. **Contamination Source-** Authorities suspect a coolant leak containing ethylene glycol—a highly toxic industrial chemical—contaminated the milk supply during processing or storage.
2. **Gross Negligence-** Despite receiving complaints about a "bitter taste" and warnings regarding potential toxic contamination, the local vendor allegedly continued to distribute the milk.
3. **Public Health Crisis- Infant Vulnerability-** Children and infants are at higher risk due to their metabolic sensitivity.
    1. **Elderly Risk-** Older individuals face increased danger due to lower renal (kidney) reserves to process toxins.
    2. **Public Distrust-** Such incidents erode trust in unbranded or locally sourced milk, which is a staple in the Indian diet.

3. Legal Action and Accountability

The state has treated this as a criminal offense rather than a mere regulatory lapse, invoking the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)-

1. **Section 103-** Punishment for murder, reflecting the severity of the vendor's decision to sell despite warnings.
2. **Section 105- Culpable homicide** not amounting to murder, for the extreme negligence involved in handling a staple commodity.

4. Regulatory and Enforcement Failures

The tragedy highlights a massive "blind spot" in India's food safety architecture-

1. **Unlicensed Operations-** The dairy in question reportedly operated for 11 years without a safety license, going completely undetected by local authorities.
2. **Inspection Gaps-** Both the FSSAI and local health inspectors failed to conduct regular audits, allowing unsafe practices to become normalized.
3. **Weak Deterrence-** The current system relies on post-disaster punishment rather than active prevention, as weak detection systems make violations unlikely to be caught in real-time.

5. Impact on the Milk Supply Chain

1. **Shift to Organised Sector-** Consumers may migrate toward regulated cooperatives like Amul or Vijaya Milk, which maintain stricter cold-chain and safety standards.

2. **Informal Market Squeeze-** Harsh criminal charges without supporting infrastructure might push small, honest vendors out of the market or force them into deeper, less-regulated informality.

6. Proposed Reforms and Policy Lessons

To prevent a recurrence, the focus must shift from "punishment only" to "preventive monitoring"-

1. **Subsidized Testing-** Providing affordable, rapid-testing kits to small dairy operators to detect common contaminants.
2. **Infrastructure Support-** Developing cooperative chilling and cold-chain facilities for small-scale vendors.
3. **Safe-Harbor Provisions-** Encouraging vendors to report contamination voluntarily without fear of immediate criminal prosecution, focusing on saving lives first.
4. **Consistent Enforcement-** Effective regulation depends on frequent, low-stakes inspections and timely penalties rather than rare, extreme punishments.

7. Conclusion

The Rajamahendravaram tragedy is a call for an overhaul of India's dairy supply chain regulation. While strict legal action under the BNS is necessary to punish negligence, the long-term solution lies in better licensing, mandatory periodic inspections, and improved cold-chain infrastructure. Protecting public health requires a shift from a reactive to a proactive food safety culture to restore trust in India's most essential daily commodity.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/bitter-milk-on-the-rajamahendravaram-milk-adulteration-case/article70722654.ece

QUESTION

"The Rajamahendravaram milk poisoning incident exposes the deep-seated vulnerabilities in India's decentralized food supply chain and the 'regulatory vacuum' in monitoring informal vendors. Discuss the challenges faced by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in ensuring food safety and suggest a roadmap for systemic reform." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The recent mass poisoning in Rajamahendravaram due to ethylene glycol contamination in milk, leading to 11 deaths, underscores a critical failure in India's food safety ecosystem. While the state has invoked the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for criminal negligence, the incident reveals that the primary challenge lies not in the lack of laws, but in their ineffective enforcement within the informal market.

2. Challenges in Ensuring Food Safety

1. **The "Unorganized" Hurdle**- A significant portion of India's milk supply is distributed through millions of small, informal vendors who often operate outside the licensing and audit net of the FSSAI.
2. **Regulatory Vacuum**- The fact that the dairy involved operated for 11 years without a license highlights a massive gap in local surveillance and periodic inspections.
3. **Detection vs. Deterrence**- Current mechanisms are reactive. Weak detection systems mean that violations are only discovered after a tragedy occurs, rendering the threat of punishment an ineffective deterrent.
4. **Vulnerable Demographics**- The impact is disproportionately severe on infants and the elderly, who have lower physiological resilience to industrial toxins like ethylene glycol.

3. Roadmap for Systemic Reform

To move from a reactive to a proactive safety culture, the following measures are essential-

1. **Strengthening Grassroots Inspection**- Decentralizing inspection powers to local bodies while ensuring mandatory third-party audits for small-scale dairies.
2. **Technology-Led Monitoring**- Implementing blockchain-based traceability in the dairy supply chain to pinpoint the source of contamination instantly.
3. **Empowering Small Vendors**- Instead of mere punitive action, the state should provide subsidized rapid-testing kits and access to shared cold-chain infrastructure to ensure compliance is affordable.

4. **Safe-Harbor Policies**- Encouraging a culture of "voluntary disclosure" where vendors can report contamination without immediate criminal liability, prioritizing public health over prosecution.
5. **Public Awareness**- Strengthening consumer education to recognize signs of contamination (like the "bitter taste" reported in this case) and simplifying the grievance redressal mechanism.

4. Conclusion

The "Bitter Milk" tragedy is a call for the FSSAI to transition from being a licensing body to an active monitoring agency. Ensuring food safety requires a blend of consistent enforcement, affordable technology, and robust infrastructure. Only by bridging the gap between the organized and unorganized sectors can India protect its citizens from recurring public health disasters.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/bitter-milk-on-the-rajamahendravaram-milk-adulteration-case/article70722654.ece**

2. What is driving the early summer and heat-wave conditions in north India?(IE)

General Studies Paper- GS I (Geography) & GS III (Environment & Agriculture)
Topic- Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features; Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country.
Sub-Topic- Western Disturbances, Climate Change, Heatwaves, and Rabi Crop Vulnerability.

1. Introduction

In early March 2026, several regions across North and West India experienced a premature transition into summer, with temperatures soaring 8–13°C above normal. This anomaly is primarily attributed to a massive deficit in winter rainfall (60% below normal) and a significant reduction in the frequency and intensity of Western Disturbances. These early heatwave conditions pose a severe threat to India's food security, particularly the standing Rabi crops.

2. Role of Western Disturbances (WD) in India's Climate

Western Disturbances are the lifeblood of North India's winter climate.

1. **Nature & Origin-** These are extra-tropical cyclones originating in the Mediterranean region that travel eastward, bringing moisture to the Indian subcontinent.
2. **Contribution-** They account for 70–80% of winter rainfall in Northwest India (Punjab, Haryana, J&K, Himachal Pradesh).
3. **Himalayan Impact-** Snowfall in the Western Himalayas depends almost entirely on these systems. In 2025–26, reduced WD activity led to a critical lack of snow and rain.
4. **Agricultural Utility-** They provide the "temperate" environment and soil moisture necessary for the maturation of Rabi crops.

3. The 2026 Rainfall Deficit and Dry Winter

The winter of 2026 has been documented as one of the driest in over a century.

1. **Statistical Deficit-** January–February 2026 received only 16 mm of rainfall, which is 60% below the long-term average. February 2026 was the third driest since 1901.
2. **Atmospheric Factors-** Weak wind convergence and fewer WD systems reduced moisture inflow from the surrounding seas.
3. **Changing Patterns-** The traditionally gradual transition from winter to summer (March–April) has been replaced by sudden temperature spikes.

4. The Feedback Loop- Soil Moisture and Heat

A lack of winter rain creates a physical feedback loop that accelerates heating.

1. **Evaporative Cooling Loss-** Normally, moist soil uses solar energy for evaporation, which keeps the ground cool.

2. **Rapid Surface Heating-** Dry soil lacks this cooling mechanism, absorbing heat quickly and causing daytime temperatures to spike abruptly.
3. **Amplified Risk-** Low soil moisture significantly increases the duration and intensity of early-season heatwaves.
4. **Urban Heat Island-** In cities, concrete structures trap this early heat, further worsening the localized climate.

5. Impact on Agriculture and Water Resources

The "Early Summer" of 2026 has direct negative consequences for the agrarian economy-

1. **Rabi Crop Stress-** Wheat, mustard, gram, and sesame are at a critical growth stage. High heat causes terminal heat stress, shortening the grain-filling period and reducing yields.
2. **Horticultural Loss-** Fruits like apples (Himalayan belt) and vegetables like potatoes are highly sensitive to sudden thermal shifts, affecting quality and market value.
3. **Irrigation Pressure-** To combat dry soil, farmers must increase groundwater extraction, placing immense pressure on already depleting aquifers.

6. Way Forward- Climate Resilient Strategy

To mitigate the impact of increasing climate variability, India must adopt a proactive strategy-

1. **Heat-Resistant Varieties-** Accelerating the adoption of wheat and mustard varieties that can withstand higher temperatures during the maturation phase.
2. **Advanced Forecasting-** Enhancing the monitoring of Western Disturbances to provide farmers with better early-warning systems.
3. **Sustainable Water Management-** Promoting micro-irrigation and mulch-based farming to retain soil moisture.
4. **Long-term Adaptation-** Strengthening climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and rural insurance schemes like PMFBY.

7. Conclusion

The early heatwaves of 2026 are a clear indicator of shifting climate patterns and the increasing unreliability of traditional weather systems like Western Disturbances. Addressing this requires a shift from reactive relief to climate-adaptive governance, ensuring that India's agricultural backbone and water resources are protected against the growing volatility of the "new normal" in global weather.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/behind-an-early-summer-is-a-lack-of-winter-rains-10573814/

QUESTION

"The weakening of Western Disturbances and the subsequent rainfall deficit in early 2026 have triggered a premature summer in India. Analyze the relationship between soil moisture and temperature anomalies, and discuss the implications of such climatic shifts on India's Rabi productivity." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In early 2026, India witnessed temperatures 8–13°C above normal, marking a premature onset of summer. This phenomenon is largely a result of a 60% deficit in winter rainfall, caused by the failure of Western Disturbances—the extra-tropical cyclones from the Mediterranean that provide 70–80% of North India's winter moisture.

2. Relationship Between Soil Moisture and Temperature Anomalies

The absence of winter rainfall creates a direct thermal feedback loop-

1. **Loss of Latent Heat Flux-** When soil is moist, solar radiation is primarily used for the evaporation of water (latent heat). This "evaporative cooling" keeps the land surface cool.
2. **Sensible Heat Dominance-** In dry conditions, solar energy directly heats the ground (sensible heat). Without water to evaporate, the dry land surface heats up rapidly, leading to the abrupt temperature spikes seen in March 2026.

3. **Thermal Retention-** Dry land and reduced vegetation cover allow for faster absorption and retention of heat, prolonging heatwave conditions.

3. Implications for Rabi Productivity

The timing of this heat is particularly damaging for the Rabi harvest-

1. **Terminal Heat Stress-** Wheat is currently in its grain-filling stage. High temperatures cause the grain to shrivel and mature too early, significantly reducing the "Test Weight" and overall yield.
2. **Horticultural Vulnerability-** In the Himalayan region (e.g., Shimla), temperatures above 25°C in early March affect the flowering and fruit-setting of apple and stone-fruit crops.
3. **Water Stress-** Increased evaporation leads to a surge in irrigation demand, depleting groundwater levels precisely when the water table is at its lowest.

4. Conclusion

The early summer of 2026 highlights the growing impact of climate variability on India's food security. To safeguard Rabi productivity, there is an urgent need for heat-tolerant crop varieties, enhanced weather-based agro-advisories, and a transition toward water-efficient farming techniques like Drip Irrigation and Mulching.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/behind-an-early-summer-is-a-lack-of-winter-rains-10573814/**

3. Leadership Gender Gap (THE STATESMAN)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper I – Society
Topic- Role of women and women's organisations.
Sub-Topic- Women in political leadership and decision-making.

Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for building inclusive and democratic societies. Increasing participation of women in leadership positions has been shown to improve governance outcomes, strengthen social justice, and promote inclusive development. However, despite progress, women remain underrepresented in political and institutional leadership across the world.

1. Importance of Women's Leadership

1. Women leaders often emphasise collaborative decision-making, empathy, and social welfare policies.
2. Research suggests that gender-diverse leadership can improve policy responsiveness and governance effectiveness.
3. Greater representation of women strengthens democratic legitimacy and inclusiveness.

2. Global Examples of Women's Leadership

1. Several women leaders have demonstrated effective governance during crises and development challenges.
2. Leadership examples across countries highlight strong crisis management, social policy focus, and inclusive governance approaches.
3. Such examples demonstrate that women's leadership contributes positively to public policy and social development.

3. Persistent Gender Gap in Political Representation

1. Women remain underrepresented in national parliaments and executive leadership positions globally.
2. Structural barriers such as social norms, limited political opportunities, and unequal access to resources restrict women's participation.
3. These barriers prevent many capable women from entering decision-making roles.

4. Importance of Institutional Measures

1. Policies such as political reservations, gender quotas, and leadership training programs can improve representation.
2. Strengthening education, economic empowerment, and legal protections also enhances women's participation in governance.
3. Institutional reforms are necessary to address systemic gender inequalities.

5. Impact of Women's Leadership on Development

1. Women leaders often prioritise healthcare, education, social protection, and community welfare.
2. Increased representation of women can improve policy outcomes related to gender equality and social justice.
3. Inclusive leadership contributes to sustainable and equitable development.

Conclusion

Expanding women's leadership in governance is essential for achieving gender equality and inclusive development. Strengthening institutional mechanisms, addressing social barriers, and promoting women's participation in decision-making will help build more representative, equitable, and effective governance systems.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/leadership-gender-gap-1503568303.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Women's leadership plays a significant role in promoting inclusive governance and social development. Examine the challenges faced by women in political leadership and suggest measures to enhance their representation.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Women's participation in leadership and governance is a key component of democratic inclusiveness and social empowerment. Although women constitute nearly half of the global population, they remain underrepresented in political decision-making institutions.

Challenges Faced by Women in Political Leadership

1. Socio-Cultural Barriers- Traditional gender norms often restrict women's access to political participation and leadership roles.

2. Limited Political Opportunities- Women face difficulties in obtaining party nominations, campaign funding, and political networks.

3. Institutional Constraints-Lack of supportive institutional frameworks limits women's representation in legislatures and executive offices.

4. Gender Bias and Discrimination-Women leaders often face stereotyping, harassment, and unequal treatment in political environments.

Measures to Enhance Women's Representation

1. Political Reservations and Quotas- Ensuring minimum representation of women in legislative bodies.

2. Capacity Building and Leadership Training- Strengthening women's political skills and leadership capabilities.

3. Socio-Economic Empowerment- Expanding education, employment, and financial independence for women.

Conclusion

Increasing women's participation in leadership is essential for creating inclusive, equitable, and responsive governance systems. Institutional reforms and social transformation are necessary to ensure equal opportunities for women in political decision-making.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/leadership-gender-gap-1503568303.html

4. Communication ethics in an age of conflict (THE PIONEER)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper IV – Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude
Topic- Ethics in public life
Sub-Topic- Case studies on ethical dilemmas in public communication.

Introduction

In the digital era, communication technologies enable instant transmission of information across the world. During conflicts and crises, media coverage and digital communication can significantly influence public perception and political responses. Therefore, responsible communication guided by ethical principles, accuracy, and restraint becomes essential to prevent misinformation, panic, and escalation of tensions.

1. Transformation of Conflict Communication

1. Advances in digital media have created a real-time communication environment where information spreads rapidly.
2. Social media platforms, television broadcasts, and online news channels provide continuous updates on conflicts and crises.
3. This immediacy increases both public awareness and the risk of misinformation or sensationalism.

2. Media's Influence on Public Perception

1. Visual images and dramatic narratives can shape public opinion and emotional responses during conflicts.
2. Repeated exposure to violent images may amplify fear, anger, or nationalism.
3. Media narratives often influence political decision-making and diplomatic reactions.

3. Ethical Challenges in Conflict Reporting

Sensationalism and Commercial Pressure-Media organisations sometimes prioritise dramatic visuals and breaking news over contextual analysis.
Misinformation and Speculation- Rapid reporting may lead to unverified claims or misleading interpretations.
Manipulation of Narratives- Governments or interest groups may attempt to shape media narratives for political advantage.
Impact on Social Harmony-Irresponsible reporting can worsen social divisions, panic, or hostility between communities or nations.

4. Ethical Principles for Responsible Communication

1. Accuracy and verification before dissemination of information.
2. Contextual reporting that explains the broader political and humanitarian implications of conflicts.
3. Avoidance of sensationalism that prioritises spectacle over understanding.
4. Respect for human dignity and victims of conflict.

5. Role of Media Institutions and Journalists

1. Journalists must balance the public's right to information with social responsibility.
2. Media organisations should develop ethical guidelines and editorial standards for conflict reporting.
3. Training in conflict-sensitive journalism can help ensure responsible coverage.

Conclusion

In an age of instant communication, ethical responsibility in information dissemination is more important than ever. By prioritising accuracy, context, and moral responsibility, media institutions can contribute to informed public discourse while preventing misinformation and escalation during conflicts.
Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/communication-ethics-in-an-age-of-conflict

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *In the age of instant communication and digital media, ethical journalism plays a crucial role during conflicts. Discuss the ethical challenges in conflict reporting and suggest principles for responsible communication.* (250 words)

Introduction

Advances in communication technologies have transformed the way conflicts are reported and perceived. With real-time media coverage and widespread social media platforms, information spreads rapidly, influencing public opinion and policy responses. In this context, ethical journalism becomes essential to ensure accurate, responsible, and balanced communication.

Ethical Challenges in Conflict Reporting

1. Sensationalism in Media Coverage- Competition for viewership often encourages dramatic narratives and emotional visuals.

2. Spread of Misinformation- Rapid dissemination of unverified information can lead to false narratives and confusion.

3. Political and Strategic Manipulation- Governments and interest groups may attempt to shape media narratives for strategic advantage.

4. Social Impact- Irresponsible reporting may increase fear, hostility, or social divisions.

Principles for Responsible Communication

1. Accuracy and Verification- Ensuring information is fact-checked before dissemination.

2. Contextual Reporting- Providing background and balanced analysis rather than isolated events.

3. Ethical Sensitivity- Respecting human dignity and avoiding exploitative imagery.

Conclusion

Ethical communication is essential for maintaining public trust and preventing misinformation during conflicts. By prioritising truth, responsibility, and contextual understanding, media institutions can contribute to informed public discourse and social stability.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/communication-ethics-in-an-age-of-conflict

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Editorial of the Day – 11.03.2026

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1. **Catch Them Young (TH)** -01
2. **The Election Commission of India (ECI) (IE)** -03
3. **Paradigm Shift in Trade Facilitation (BUSINESS LINE)** -05
4. **Hormuz And Other Chokepoints Are Forcing Big Shifts in Strategy (MINT)** -06

1. Catch Them Young (TH)

General Studies Paper: GS II (Governance & Social Justice)
Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic: Public Health, Child Nutrition, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), and Regulatory Policies.

1. Introduction

The phrase "Catch them young" has traditionally been associated with skill development, but in 2026, it serves as a grim warning for public health. India is witnessing a staggering rise in childhood obesity, driven by a transition toward sedentary lifestyles and ultra-processed diets. This trend is not merely a cosmetic concern but a precursor to a lifelong struggle with chronic, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), necessitating immediate policy and social interventions.

2. Scale of the Problem: A Statistical Overview

1. **Current Status (2025-26):** According to the World Obesity Atlas 2026, India is home to 14.9 million overweight/obese children in the 5–9 age group and 26.4 million in the 10–19 age group.
2. **High BMI Prevalence:** Approximately 41 million children currently have a high Body Mass Index (BMI).
3. **Future Projections (2040):** The numbers are set to explode, with an estimated 20 million obese and 56 million overweight children in India by 2040.
4. **The Looming NCD Crisis:** Nearly 120 million school-age children are at risk of developing early markers of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

3. Global Context: India as a Leading Contender

1. **Global Ranking:** India currently ranks second globally in the number of children with high BMI, trailing only behind China (62 million) and followed by the United States (27 million).
2. **Economic Shift:** The crisis has shifted from high-income countries to low- and middle-income countries like India, where "over-nutrition" now coexists with "under-nutrition."

4. Health Consequences: Beyond the Weight

Childhood obesity triggers a cascade of metabolic dysfunctions previously seen only in adults:

1. **Metabolic Disorders:** High BMI is directly linked to diabetes, hyperglycemia, and elevated cholesterol.
2. **Liver Health:** A rising number of children are being diagnosed with Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD).
3. **Chronic Conditions:** Early-onset hypertension and vascular aging are becoming increasingly common among adolescents.

5. Key Causes and Risk Factors

The crisis is multi-factorial, rooted in both individual behavior and the environment:

1. **Dietary Transition:** High consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPF) and sugary beverages.
2. **Lifestyle Factors:** Increased screen time and sedentary behavior, often at the cost of outdoor play.
3. **Nutritional Gaps:** Insufficient breastfeeding (especially in the first 5 months) and poor-quality school meals.
4. **School Environment:** Limited emphasis on physical activity and easy access to junk food in and around school premises.

6. Needed Policy and Social Interventions

1. **Marketing Restrictions:** Stricter regulations on how packaged and junk foods are marketed to children.
2. **Fiscal Measures:** Implementing sugar levies and taxes on unhealthy food products to discourage consumption.
3. **School Reforms:** Mandatory standards for healthy school meals and a minimum requirement for physical activity.
4. **Primary Healthcare Integration:** Embedding obesity prevention and treatment into the primary healthcare system to ensure early detection.
5. **Early-Life Support:** Promoting and supporting mandatory breastfeeding practices for optimal early-childhood nutrition.

7. Conclusion

The childhood obesity crisis in India is a major roadblock to achieving long-term demographic and economic potential. Addressing this issue early is not just a health imperative but a socio-economic necessity. Without a robust, multi-sectoral strategy involving parents, schools, and the government, the future generation will bear the heavy cost of a largely preventable crisis.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/catch-them-young-on-overweight-or-obese-children-in-india/article70727136.ece#google_vignette

QUESTION

"The rapid surge in childhood obesity in India signifies a shift in the nature of the country's public health challenges. Elucidate the socio-economic drivers of this trend and suggest a multi-pronged regulatory framework to 'catch them young' and safeguard future human capital." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

With over 41 million children suffering from high BMI, India ranks second globally in childhood obesity. This "Nutritional Transition" from under-nutrition to over-nutrition indicates that obesity is no longer a disease of the affluent but a systemic public health challenge affecting the nation's future productivity.

2. Socio-Economic Drivers of the Trend

1. **Environmental Shift:** The "obesogenic environment" is characterized by the easy availability of low-cost, calorie-dense, ultra-processed foods.
2. **Lifestyle Changes:** Rapid urbanization has led to reduced physical spaces for play and a surge in sedentary behaviors, amplified by "screen exposure."
3. **Economic Pressures:** Working parents often rely on convenient, processed meals, while poor early-life nutrition (insufficient breastfeeding) predisposes children to metabolic disorders.
4. **Lack of Awareness:** Misconceptions regarding "chubby children" being healthy often delay early intervention.

3. Multi-Pronged Regulatory Framework

1. **Nutritional Labeling (Front-of-Pack):** Implementing "traffic-light" labeling to clearly identify high-fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) content.
2. **Fiscal Policy:** Introducing a "Sin Tax" on sugar-sweetened beverages and subsidizing fresh produce to alter consumption patterns.
3. **Institutional Intervention:** Banning the sale and advertisement of junk food within 100 meters of schools and making "Physical Education" a core, graded subject.
4. **Public Health Integration:** Utilizing the POSHAN Abhiyaan framework to include obesity monitoring alongside traditional malnutrition metrics.

4. Conclusion

Childhood obesity is a precursor to a lifetime of NCDs, which can derail India's "demographic dividend." A robust regulatory framework that combines behavioral change with strict corporate accountability is essential to "catch them young" and ensure a healthy, productive future for the nation.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/catch-them-young-on-overweight-or-obese-children-in-india/article70727136.ece#google_vignette

2. The Election Commission of India (ECI) (IE)

General Studies Paper: GS II (Governance & Constitution)
Topic: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
Sub-Topic: Removal of Constitutional Authorities, Independence of Election Commission, and Article 324.

1. Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a permanent, independent constitutional body established to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections. Given its role in managing the world's largest democratic exercise involving over 970 million voters, the Constitution provides the Chief Election Commissioner with a security of tenure similar to that of a Supreme Court judge. This stringent removal process ensures that the head of the ECI remains shielded from executive interference and political vendetta.

2. Constitutional Status of the ECI

1. **Article 324:** Vests the "superintendence, direction, and control" of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the ECI.
2. **Independent Authority:** Designed as a watchdog of democracy to prevent partisan influence in electoral administration.
3. **Composition:** Consists of the CEC and other Election Commissioners (ECs) as determined by the President.
4. **Tenure:** Six years or until the age of 65, ensuring administrative stability.

3. Constitutional Safeguards for the CEC

1. **Security of Tenure:** Under Article 324(5), the CEC cannot be removed from office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
2. **Executive Protection:** Unlike the other Election Commissioners, who can be removed on the recommendation of the CEC, the CEC himself cannot be dismissed by the President at will.
3. **Impartiality:** These safeguards are comparable to those for the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and Supreme Court Judges, reinforcing the CEC's role as a neutral arbiter.

4. The Legal Framework for Removal

The removal process is governed by a combination of constitutional provisions and parliamentary law:

1. **Article 324(5) & Article 124(4):** These articles link the CEC's removal to the judicial impeachment process.
2. **Grounds for Removal:** The Constitution specifies only two grounds: "Proved misbehaviour" or "Incapacity."
3. **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:** This Act details the exact investigation and parliamentary procedures required for the motion.
4. **2023 Election Commission Act:** The *Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023* reaffirms these constitutional protections.

5. Detailed Parliamentary Procedure for Removal

The process is notoriously difficult, designed to prevent arbitrary removal:
Step 1: Initiation of the Motion- A notice of the motion must be signed by at least 100 members of the Lok Sabha OR 50 members of the Rajya Sabha.

Step 2: Admission by Presiding Officer- The Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha) has the discretion to admit or refuse the motion.

Step 3: Constitution of an Inquiry Committee

If admitted, a three-member committee is formed, consisting of:

1. A Supreme Court Judge.
2. A Chief Justice of a High Court.
3. A distinguished jurist.

Step 4: Investigation & Voting

1. **Report:** The committee investigates the charges. If they find the CEC guilty of misbehaviour or incapacity, the report is tabled in Parliament.
2. **Special Majority:** Each House must pass the motion by a Special Majority:
    1. A majority of the total membership of that House.
    2. A majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting.

Step 5: Presidential Order- Once both Houses pass the motion in the same session, an address is presented to the President, who then issues the order of removal.

6. Conclusion

The stringent "impeachment-style" removal process for the CEC is a testament to the importance of electoral independence in India. While the mechanism allows for accountability in cases of proven misconduct, it ensures that the office remains a bastion of neutrality. Preserving the credibility of the ECI is fundamental to maintaining public trust in the democratic transfer of power and India's standing as a global benchmark for electoral management.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-key-impeaching-cec-essential-commodities-act-patent-10576879/

QUESTION

"The constitutional independence of the Election Commission is a prerequisite for a thriving democracy. In light of recent developments, elaborate on the procedural safeguards provided to the Chief Election Commissioner and discuss why a stringent removal process is essential for institutional autonomy." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI), under Article 324, is the bedrock of the country's democratic process. To ensure its impartiality, the Constitution provides the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) with robust security of tenure, making their removal a matter of high parliamentary threshold rather than executive discretion.

2. Procedural Safeguards

1. **Equivalence to Judiciary:** Article 324(5) mandates that the CEC can only be removed in the same manner as a Supreme Court Judge (under Article 124(4)).
2. **Limited Grounds:** Removal is restricted to "proved misbehaviour or incapacity," preventing politically motivated dismissals.
3. **Parliamentary Barrier:** The process requires a Special Majority in both Houses—a feat rarely achieved without broad bipartisan consensus.
4. **Investigative Rigour:** The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, ensures that charges are first vetted by a judicial committee before a vote is even cast.

3. Importance of a Stringent Removal Process

1. **Insulation from Executive Pressure:** If the CEC served at the pleasure of the President (the Executive), the ruling party could potentially influence election scheduling or conduct.
2. **Neutrality of the Arbiter:** The CEC often has to make tough calls against high-ranking political figures. The security of tenure allows them to perform their duty "without fear or favour."

3. **Public Trust:** A robust process ensures the public that the "referee" of the electoral game cannot be easily intimidated, thereby legitimizing the democratic outcome.
4. **Stability of the Institution:** It prevents frequent leadership changes that could lead to administrative paralysis in the world's most complex electoral ecosystem.

4. Conclusion

While accountability is necessary, the high bar for the removal of the CEC is a deliberate constitutional design to safeguard the soul of Indian democracy—free and fair elections. Any move to initiate this process must therefore be grounded in substantial evidence of "proved misbehaviour" to maintain the sanctity of this constitutional office.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-key-impeaching-cec-essential-commodities-act-patent-10576879/

3. Paradigm Shift in Trade Facilitation (BUSINESS LINE)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Infrastructure and logistics development.
Sub-Topic: Digital governance and technology-driven reforms

Introduction

Efficient trade facilitation is essential for improving a country's global competitiveness and boosting economic growth. India has been working to modernise its trade ecosystem through digitalisation, customs reforms, and logistics improvements. Recent initiatives in digital trade facilitation aim to simplify procedures, reduce delays, and create a more efficient system for exports and imports.

1. Challenges in India's Traditional Trade Processes

1. Historically, India's trade processes involved complex documentation, manual inspections, and multiple regulatory approvals.
2. Exporters and importers often had to deal with lengthy customs procedures and compliance requirements.
3. These inefficiencies increased transaction costs, delays, and logistics bottlenecks.

2. Digital Trade Facilitation Initiatives

1. The proposed Digital Trade Facilitation Bill, 2026 aims to recognise digital records as legally valid for trade documentation.
2. Digital documentation can reduce reliance on paper-based processes and physical verification.
3. Such reforms improve transparency, efficiency, and ease of compliance for businesses.

3. Customs Reforms and Technological Integration

1. Customs systems are being upgraded with digital platforms and automated clearance mechanisms.
2. Initiatives such as faceless assessment and electronic documentation reduce human intervention and improve efficiency.
3. Advanced technologies such as AI-driven risk assessment and X-ray scanning systems help identify high-risk consignments more effectively.

4. 'Scan Every Container' Initiative

1. The proposed system aims to digitally scan cargo containers to detect irregularities.
2. Automated scanning reduces the need for manual inspection and physical handling of containers.
3. This helps minimise delays, improve security, and reduce potential damage to goods.

5. Role of Authorised Economic Operators (AEO)

1. The AEO programme recognises trusted exporters and importers who comply with high security and compliance standards.
2. Certified operators receive benefits such as faster clearance and reduced inspections.

3. This improves efficiency in the movement of goods and enhances supply chain reliability.

6. Economic Benefits of Trade Facilitation Reforms

1. Faster cargo clearance can significantly reduce logistics costs and port congestion.
2. Digital systems improve transparency and reduce corruption risks.
3. Efficient trade processes strengthen India's position in global value chains and international trade networks.

Conclusion

Digital trade facilitation and customs reforms represent an important step toward modernising India's trade infrastructure. By leveraging technology and simplifying regulatory procedures, India can improve its ease of doing business, enhance export competitiveness, and integrate more effectively into the global trading system.

Source: **https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/paradigm-shift-in-trade-facilitation/article70727645.ece**

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Digitalisation of trade processes can significantly improve efficiency and competitiveness in international trade. Discuss the role of digital trade facilitation and customs reforms in strengthening India's trade ecosystem. (250 words)

Introduction

Trade facilitation refers to measures that simplify and streamline international trade procedures, documentation, and customs clearance processes. With increasing global trade and complex supply chains, digitalisation has become an essential tool for improving efficiency and competitiveness.

Role of Digital Trade Facilitation

1. Simplification of Trade Procedures- Digital records reduce dependence on paper-based documentation and manual approvals.

2. Faster Customs Clearance- Automated systems and faceless assessment enable quicker processing of export and import consignments.

3. Improved Transparency- Digital platforms reduce human intervention and minimise corruption and administrative delays.

4. Strengthening Supply Chains- Efficient trade processes help integrate India more effectively into global value chains.

Role of Customs Reforms

1. Risk-Based Inspection- Technology such as AI-driven risk assessment and scanning systems helps identify suspicious consignments.

2. Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme- Trusted traders receive priority clearance and reduced inspections, improving efficiency.

Conclusion

Digital trade facilitation and customs reforms are crucial for enhancing India's global trade competitiveness. By leveraging technology and improving logistics systems, India can reduce trade costs, boost exports, and strengthen its integration with the global economy.

Source: **https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/paradigm-shift-in-trade-facilitation/article70727645.ece**

4. Hormuz And Other Chokepoints Are Forcing Big Shifts in Strategy (MINT)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
Sub-Topic: Important international institutions, agencies and global supply chains

Introduction

Global trade and energy supply depend heavily on a few critical maritime chokepoints and strategic trade routes. Disruptions in these chokepoints can significantly affect global supply chains, energy markets, and economic stability. Recent geopolitical tensions highlight how control over such strategic locations has become increasingly important in international politics.

1. Importance of Strategic Chokepoints

1. Strategic chokepoints are narrow geographic passages through which major volumes of global trade and energy supplies pass.
2. Examples include the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal, and Bab-el-Mandeb.
3. Any disruption in these routes can affect global energy prices and trade flows.

2. Interdependence in the Global Economy

1. Modern economies are deeply interconnected through global supply chains and trade networks.
2. Energy imports, industrial inputs, and technology components often move through critical maritime routes.
3. Disruptions in one region can therefore trigger global economic consequences.

3. Rising Geopolitical Competition

1. Increasing geopolitical rivalry has intensified competition over strategic trade routes and technological supply chains.
2. Major powers are attempting to secure access to key resources and transportation corridors.
3. Economic tools such as sanctions, trade restrictions, and supply chain controls are increasingly used as instruments of geopolitical influence.

4. Impact on Global Economic Stability

1. Disruptions at chokepoints can cause sudden spikes in energy prices and supply shortages.
2. Trade interruptions can affect manufacturing production, global markets, and economic growth.
3. Countries dependent on imported resources are particularly vulnerable to such disruptions.

5. Strategic Responses for Countries

1. Nations are attempting to diversify supply chains and energy sources to reduce vulnerability.
2. Strengthening regional partnerships and alternative trade routes can improve resilience.
3. Investments in domestic production, technology, and strategic reserves help enhance economic security.

6. Implications for India

1. India relies heavily on maritime trade for energy imports and international commerce.
2. Ensuring the security of sea lanes and supply chains is essential for economic stability and national security.
3. Diversification of energy sources and strengthening maritime partnerships are key strategic priorities.

Conclusion

Strategic chokepoints remain critical to the functioning of the global economy and international security. In an era of increasing geopolitical competition, countries must strengthen supply chain resilience and maritime security to protect economic interests and ensure stable global trade flows.
Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/hormuz-chokepoints-countries-economic-strategy-bottlenecks-cold-war-supply-chain-11773057843729.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Strategic maritime chokepoints play a crucial role in global trade and energy security. Discuss their geopolitical significance and examine their implications for India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Strategic maritime chokepoints are narrow sea routes through which a large share of global trade and energy supplies pass. These locations hold immense geopolitical importance because

disruptions in these routes can significantly affect international trade, energy markets, and economic stability.

Geopolitical Significance of Chokepoints

1. Control of Global Trade Routes- Chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and Strait of Malacca handle significant portions of global oil and trade flows.

2. Strategic Leverage in International Politics- Countries controlling these routes can influence global energy supply and maritime security.

3. Vulnerability to Conflicts- Regional conflicts or blockades in chokepoints can disrupt global supply chains and trade networks.

Implications for India

1. Energy Security- India depends heavily on imported oil transported through critical maritime routes.

2. Maritime Security- Ensuring secure sea lanes in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is vital for India's economic interests.

3. Supply Chain Resilience- Diversification of energy sources and strengthening maritime partnerships can reduce vulnerability.

Conclusion

Strategic chokepoints remain central to global economic stability and geopolitical competition. For India, strengthening maritime security and diversifying supply chains will be essential to safeguard energy security and national economic interests.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/hormuz-chokepoints-countries-economic-strategy-bottlenecks-cold-war-supply-chain-11773057843729.html

Editorial of the Day – 12.03.2026

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1. Reforming choice-based education (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (Governance & Social Justice)
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic- Higher Education Reforms, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and Institutional Governance.

1. Introduction

The Indian higher education landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift from a rigid, "one-size-fits-all" model to a flexible, learner-centric system. The introduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic move to institutionalize multidisciplinary learning. However, the gap between policy ideals—such as personalized academic pathways—and the ground reality of classroom constraints remains a significant challenge for systemic reform.

2. The Shift Toward Student-Centric Education

Personalization- Moving away from standardized curricula to focus on individual student abilities, needs, and career aspirations.
Inclusivity- Recognizing diverse talents by allowing students to define their own academic journey.
Learner-Centred Pedagogy- A fundamental transition where the student, rather than the teacher or the institution, becomes the focal point of the educational process.

3. Emergence of Multidisciplinary Learning

Academic Pathways- Students are no longer confined to "streams." They can now pursue diverse combinations, such as majoring in Physics while minoring in Music.
Holistic Understanding- Cross-disciplinary exposure is designed to provide a broader worldview, breaking the "silos" of traditional academic departments.
Transdisciplinary Approach- Encouraging the application of knowledge across different fields to solve complex, real-world problems.

4. The "Illusion of Choice"- Gaps in Implementation

Despite the promises of the Choice-Based Credit and Semester System (CBCSS) introduced in 2009, several limitations emerged-
Inconsistent Credits- Disparities in credit allocation and teaching hours across different departments.
Departmental Control- Electives were often pre-determined by departments based on faculty availability rather than student preference.
Core Dominance- The majority of courses remained compulsory, leaving very little room for genuine "open courses" or external electives.

5. Structural and Institutional Challenges

The successful implementation of FYUGP faces deep-seated structural hurdles-
Resource Constraints- Poor student-teacher ratios and large class sizes make personalized mentoring nearly impossible.

Faculty Burden- Heavy workloads for teachers limit their ability to innovate or support multidisciplinary pathways.
Outdated Evaluation- Traditional, rote-learning-based examination systems are incompatible with flexible, skill-based multidisciplinary learning.
Infrastructure Gaps- Many institutions lack the digital and physical infrastructure required to support inter-college or inter-departmental mobility.

6. Conclusion

Reforming choice-based education is an essential step toward making India a global knowledge superpower. However, flexibility must be more than a symbolic policy promise. For FYUGP to succeed, it requires a systemic transformation—including teacher training, pedagogical innovation, and massive infrastructure investment—to translate "choice" from an abstract concept into a meaningful classroom reality.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece

Question

"The transition from a rigid academic structure to a flexible, multidisciplinary Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) is a cornerstone of NEP 2020. Discuss the structural challenges that hinder the effective realization of 'student choice' in Indian higher education." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to revolutionize Indian higher education through the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP). By introducing multiple entry/exit points and multidisciplinary pathways, it seeks to replace the rigid 20th-century model with a student-centric system. However, the path from policy to practice is obstructed by significant structural and institutional bottlenecks.

2. Structural Challenges to 'Student Choice'

Institutional Rigidity- Most Indian universities operate in silos. Administrative hurdles in credit transfers and the lack of "Academic Bank of Credits" (ABC) implementation at the grassroots level limit student mobility.
Faculty and Pedagogy- Multidisciplinary teaching requires specialized training. Currently, a high teacher-student ratio and excessive administrative workloads prevent faculty from adopting the innovative teaching methods required for flexible learning.
The "Core" vs. "Elective" Conflict- Due to faculty shortages, colleges often force students to pick from a narrow list of electives that the college can provide, rather than what the student desires, rendering the "choice" symbolic.
Evaluation Mismatch- While the curriculum is changing to be choice-based, the evaluation system remains largely centralized and standardized, focusing on summative assessments rather than continuous, skill-based evaluation.

3. The Way Forward

To realize the potential of FYUGP, the focus must shift to Institutional Restructuring. This includes-

1. Investing in teacher sensitization and training.
2. Upgrading infrastructure to allow for inter-disciplinary labs and classrooms.
3. Granting greater administrative and financial autonomy to colleges to design their own elective baskets based on local industry needs.

4. Conclusion

The success of choice-based education in India depends on bridging the gap between "Policy Vision" and "Institutional Capacity." Without deep-seated reforms in faculty recruitment and evaluation

systems, the FYUGP risks becoming a "new label on an old bottle." True student-centricity requires a flexible mindset at the administrative level as much as it does in the curriculum.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece

2. Era of gentle trade is over. Global village is being replaced by law of jungle (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS II (International Relations) & GS III (Indian Economy)
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub-Topic- Geopolitics, De-globalization, Supply Chain Resilience (Friend-shoring/Near-shoring), and India's Trade Strategy.

1. Introduction

In 2026, the global economic order is undergoing a structural shift. The traditional model of cooperative globalization—characterized by borderless trade and "just-in-time" efficiency—is being replaced by geoeconomic competition. Rising protectionism, tariff wars, and the weaponization of trade tools have signaled the decline of the post-Cold War era of liberalization. Nations now view economic interdependence not as a stabilizer, but as a potential strategic vulnerability.

2. The Concept of "Gentle Trade" (Doux Commerce)

Philosophical Roots- Proposed by Enlightenment thinker Montesquieu, the doctrine of *doux commerce* suggested that trade "softens" manners and promotes peace by creating mutual dependence.
Trade as a Civilizing Force- For decades, the liberal world order operated on the belief that countries that trade together are less likely to go to war, as conflict would lead to mutual economic destruction.
Institutional Anchor- The World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1995, institutionalized this philosophy by promoting a rules-based, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system.

3. The Era of Hyper-Globalization (1990s–2010s)

Unprecedented Integration- The period following the Cold War saw the rapid expansion of global value chains (GVCs), particularly after China's entry into the WTO in 2001.
Efficiency at All Costs- Corporations prioritized comparative advantage and offshoring, creating highly efficient but brittle supply chains concentrated in a few manufacturing hubs.
Growth and Poverty Reduction- This era contributed significantly to global GDP growth and lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty, particularly in emerging economies like India and China.

4. The Rise of Geoeconomic Competition

In 2026, geoeconomic confrontation has emerged as a top global risk.
Weaponization of Trade- Trade is now used as a tool of foreign policy through export controls, sanctions, and technology restrictions (e.g., semiconductors and AI).
Technology Rivalry- Strategic sectors like telecommunications, quantum computing, and green tech are at the heart of global power struggles between major blocs.
Tariff Proliferation- The resurgence of broad-based tariffs, particularly between the US and China, has led to Geoeconomic Fragmentation, where trade is increasingly restricted to politically aligned "blocs."

5. From Efficiency to Resilience- Supply Chain Reconfiguration

The Lessons of Disruption- The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine War exposed the "fragility of hyper-efficiency," where a single bottleneck could paralyze global industries.
Near-shoring and Friend-shoring- Countries are relocating production to geographically closer nations (near-shoring) or politically trusted allies (friend-shoring) to ensure economic security.

Strategic Autonomy- Nations are adopting industrial policies—like the US Inflation Reduction Act or the EU's Green Deal—to promote domestic manufacturing of critical components.

6. Implications for India in 2026

India is positioning itself as a pivotal "alternative hub" in this new fragmented order.

Alternative Supply Chain Hub- Through the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) 2.0 and the India Semiconductor Mission, India aims to capture the "China Plus One" manufacturing shift.

Strategic Trade Pacts- India is diversifying its trade by concluding multiple Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the UK, EU, and EFTA, moving away from over-reliance on single markets.

Digital Governance Benchmark- With the implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act and GST 2.0, India is building a resilient internal "fortress market" that also serves as an incubator for global exports.

Defense and Energy Sovereignty- India's target of ₹50,000 crore in defense exports by 2029 and its lead in green hydrogen reflect its pursuit of geoeconomic sovereignty.

7. Conclusion

The decline of traditional globalization is not the end of trade, but its "rewiring." While the quest for resilience is necessary, an over-correction toward extreme protectionism risks secular stagnation and increased global inflation. For India, the challenge lies in balancing its "Atmanirbhar" (self-reliant) objectives with its role as a shaper of the new global

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-writes-era-of-gentle-trade-is-over-global-village-is-being-replaced-by-law-of-jungle-10577259/?ref=todays-paper

Question

"The global shift from 'Efficiency-driven Globalization' to 'Resilience-driven Geoeconomics' represents a fundamental change in the world order. Analyse the factors behind this transition and evaluate India's readiness to emerge as a reliable alternative in the global supply chain." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In 2026, the world is witnessing "multipolarity without multilateralism." The decline of the WTO-led cooperative trade era has given way to geoeconomic fragmentation, where nations prioritize supply-chain sovereignty and "friend-shoring" over traditional comparative advantages.

2. Factors Behind the Transition

Strategic Vulnerability- The pandemic and geopolitical shocks (Russia-Ukraine, Red Sea crises) proved that hyper-efficient supply chains are brittle.

Weaponization of Interdependence- Trade tools like export controls on critical minerals and semiconductors are now used to achieve geopolitical leverage.

Rise of Economic Nationalism- Major economies have pivoted to Offensive Industrial Policies (e.g., PLI in India, CHIPS Act in the US) to protect national security interests.

Technological Decoupling- The "Data and AI race" has forced nations to treat technology as a sovereign asset rather than a global commodity.

3. India's Readiness as an Alternative Hub

India has significantly improved its geoeconomic standing-

Policy Execution- Realized investments in PLI schemes (over $22 billion) have converted policy intent into measurable manufacturing scale, especially in electronics and biopharma.

Infrastructure and DPI- The "Digital Public Infrastructure" (DPI) and improved logistics have reduced the cost of doing business, making India a "trusted" digital partner.

Strategic Partnerships- By signing nine FTAs in three years, India has secured preferential access to ~70% of global GDP, reducing market-specific risks.

Endogenous Strengths- A vast, increasingly high-skilled human capital base and a continental-scale domestic market provide an "insulator" against global shocks.

4. Conclusion

While India is well-poised to be a "shaper" of the new order, challenges remain in regulatory consistency and land-labour reforms. To truly emerge as a global hub, India must continue its transition from a market participant to a "Systemic Resilience Architect" in the 21st-century global economy.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-writes-era-of-gentle-trade-is-over-global-village-is-being-replaced-by-law-of-jungle-10577259/?ref=todays-paper

3. A tilted balance (BS)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- Fiscal federalism and Centre–State financial relations.
Sub-Topic- Public finance and fiscal responsibility

Introduction

Fiscal federalism in India governs the distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States. The Finance Commission plays a central role in recommending tax devolution and grants to maintain fiscal balance. However, debates continue regarding the fairness of resource distribution and the relative fiscal responsibilities of the Centre and States.

1. Nature of Fiscal Imbalance in India

1. India's federal structure exhibits vertical fiscal imbalance, where the Union collects a larger share of revenues while states bear significant expenditure responsibilities.
2. States are responsible for major sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure development.
3. Finance Commission transfers aim to correct this imbalance through tax devolution and grants-in-aid.

2. Concerns Regarding Fiscal Discipline

1. The Union government often emphasises fiscal discipline and responsible spending by states.
2. However, critics argue that the Centre's own fiscal policies, including off-budget borrowing and expanded welfare schemes, also contribute to fiscal pressures.
3. This raises questions about equitable accountability in fiscal management.

3. Role of Cesses and Surcharges

1. A growing share of central tax revenue is collected through cesses and surcharges, which are not part of the divisible pool shared with states.
2. This reduces the effective share of states in central tax revenues.
3. States argue that this practice weakens the spirit of fiscal federalism.

4. Conditional Transfers and Central Schemes

1. Many central transfers to states occur through centrally sponsored schemes with specific conditions.
2. Such schemes may limit the financial autonomy and policy flexibility of states.
3. States sometimes face difficulties in meeting the matching fund requirements for these schemes.

5. Implications for Cooperative Federalism

1. Imbalances in fiscal relations can lead to tensions between the Centre and the States.
2. Strengthening transparency and ensuring fair resource distribution are essential for cooperative federalism.
3. Effective coordination is necessary to ensure efficient public service delivery and balanced development.

Conclusion

A balanced fiscal federal framework requires equitable sharing of resources and mutual fiscal responsibility between the Union and the States. Strengthening transparency in revenue sharing and reducing fiscal distortions can enhance cooperative federalism and sustainable economic governance in India.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/a-finance-commission-that-questions-states-but-spares-the-union-government-126031101376_1.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Fiscal federalism in India faces challenges due to imbalances in revenue sharing and fiscal responsibilities between the Union and the States. Examine these challenges and suggest measures to strengthen cooperative fiscal federalism. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Fiscal federalism refers to the distribution of financial powers and resources between different levels of government. In India, the Finance Commission recommends the sharing of taxes and grants between the Union and the States to maintain fiscal balance and support development.

Challenges in Fiscal Federalism

1. Vertical Fiscal Imbalance

1. The Union collects a larger share of revenues, while states undertake major expenditure responsibilities.

2. Increasing Use of Cesses and Surcharges

1. Revenues from cesses and surcharges are not shared with states, reducing their effective fiscal share.

3. Conditional Transfers

1. Centrally sponsored schemes often require matching contributions from states, limiting fiscal flexibility.

4. Fiscal Accountability Issues

1. Both Union and state governments face challenges in maintaining fiscal discipline and transparent budgeting.

Measures to Strengthen Fiscal Federalism

1. Expanding the Divisible Pool

1. Reducing excessive reliance on cesses and surcharges.

2. Strengthening Finance Commission Mechanisms

1. Ensuring transparent and equitable resource distribution.

3. Greater Fiscal Autonomy for States

1. Allowing states more flexibility in designing development programs.

Conclusion

Strengthening fiscal federalism requires balancing equity, efficiency, and accountability in resource distribution. Cooperative financial relations between the Union and States are essential for ensuring sustainable development and effective governance.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/a-finance-commission-that-questions-states-but-spares-the-union-government-126031101376_1.html

4. West Asia- India's strategic clarity amid selective outrage (TP)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations

Topic- India and West Asia relations.
Sub-Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Introduction

West Asia remains one of the most strategically significant regions for India due to its importance for energy security, trade, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora. In the context of ongoing conflicts and geopolitical rivalries in the region, India faces the challenge of maintaining a balanced diplomatic approach while safeguarding its national interests.

1. Strategic Importance of West Asia for India

1. The region supplies a large share of India's crude oil and natural gas imports.
2. West Asia hosts millions of Indian expatriates, whose remittances contribute significantly to the Indian economy.
3. The region is also important for maritime trade routes and regional stability.

2. Complex Geopolitical Landscape

1. West Asia is characterised by multiple rivalries and shifting alliances, including tensions involving Iran, Israel, and several Gulf countries.
2. Regional conflicts often involve major global powers, increasing geopolitical complexity.
3. These dynamics require careful diplomatic engagement from external factors such as India.

3. India's Balanced Diplomatic Strategy

1. India maintains strong relations with Israel, Iran, and Arab Gulf states simultaneously.
2. Cooperation with Israel focuses on defence technology, agriculture, and innovation.
3. Engagement with Gulf countries emphasises energy partnerships, trade, and diaspora welfare.
4. Relations with Iran remain important for connectivity projects and regional stability.

4. Importance of Strategic Autonomy

1. India follows a policy of strategic autonomy, allowing it to avoid taking sides in regional conflicts.
2. This approach enables India to maintain constructive relations with multiple partners.
3. Strategic neutrality also helps protect economic and security interests.

5. Challenges in Maintaining Balance

Escalating regional conflicts may create pressure on countries to align with particular blocs.

1. Domestic political narratives and international expectations may complicate foreign policy decisions.
2. Ensuring the safety of Indian citizens in conflict zones is another critical challenge.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy in West Asia requires a pragmatic and balanced approach that prioritises national interests over geopolitical alignments. By maintaining strategic autonomy and engaging constructively with all regional actors, India can safeguard its economic and security interests while contributing to regional stability.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's approach to West Asia reflects a strategy of balancing diverse partnerships while maintaining strategic autonomy. Discuss the challenges and significance of this approach in the context of regional conflicts. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

West Asia holds immense strategic importance for India due to its role in energy supply, trade routes, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora. The region's complex geopolitical landscape requires India to pursue a balanced and pragmatic diplomatic strategy.

Significance of India's Balanced Approach

1. Energy Security

1. West Asia remains a major source of India's oil and gas imports, making stable relations essential.

2. Diaspora and Economic Interests

1. Millions of Indians working in Gulf countries contribute through remittances and economic engagement.

3. Strategic Partnerships

1. India maintains strong relations with Israel for defence cooperation and with Gulf countries for economic and energy ties.

Challenges

1. Regional Conflicts

1. Ongoing tensions between regional actors complicate diplomatic balancing.

2. External Pressures

1. Global powers may expect India to align with their geopolitical positions.

Conclusion

India's strategy of maintaining balanced relations and strategic autonomy allows it to protect national interests while navigating the complexities of West Asian geopolitics. This approach strengthens India's role as a pragmatic and independent global actor.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/west-asia-india-s-strategic-clarity-amid-selective-outrage

Editorial of the Day – 13.03.2026

Index

1. Reforming choice-based education (TH) -01
2.Inflation rose to 3.21% in February, but US-Israel-Iran war impact yet to be felt (IE) -03
3. Indian Fertilizers' Hormuz Choke (BL) -05
4. Long Shadow of Public Health's Colonial Legacy (HT) -07

1. Reforming choice-based education (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (Governance & Social Justice)
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic- Higher Education Reforms, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and Institutional Governance.

1. Introduction

The Indian higher education landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift from a rigid, "one-size-fits-all" model to a flexible, learner-centric system. The introduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic move to institutionalize multidisciplinary learning. However, the gap between policy ideals—such as personalized academic pathways—and the ground reality of classroom constraints remains a significant challenge for systemic reform.

2. The Shift Toward Student-Centric Education

Personalization- Moving away from standardized curricula to focus on individual student abilities, needs, and career aspirations.
Inclusivity- Recognizing diverse talents by allowing students to define their own academic journey.
Learner-Centred Pedagogy- A fundamental transition where the student, rather than the teacher or the institution, becomes the focal point of the educational process.

3. Emergence of Multidisciplinary Learning

Academic Pathways- Students are no longer confined to "streams." They can now pursue diverse combinations, such as majoring in Physics while minoring in Music.
Holistic Understanding- Cross-disciplinary exposure is designed to provide a broader worldview, breaking the "silos" of traditional academic departments.
Transdisciplinary Approach- Encouraging the application of knowledge across different fields to solve complex, real-world problems.

4. The "Illusion of Choice"- Gaps in Implementation

Despite the promises of the Choice-Based Credit and Semester System (CBCSS) introduced in 2009, several limitations emerged-
Inconsistent Credits- Disparities in credit allocation and teaching hours across different departments.
Departmental Control- Electives were often pre-determined by departments based on faculty availability rather than student preference.
Core Dominance- The majority of courses remained compulsory, leaving very little room for genuine "open courses" or external electives.

5. Structural and Institutional Challenges

The successful implementation of FYUGP faces deep-seated structural hurdles-

Resource Constraints- Poor student-teacher ratios and large class sizes make personalized mentoring nearly impossible.
Faculty Burden- Heavy workloads for teachers limit their ability to innovate or support multidisciplinary pathways.
Outdated Evaluation- Traditional, rote-learning-based examination systems are incompatible with flexible, skill-based multidisciplinary learning.
Infrastructure Gaps- Many institutions lack the digital and physical infrastructure required to support inter-college or inter-departmental mobility.

6. Conclusion

Reforming choice-based education is an essential step toward making India a global knowledge superpower. However, flexibility must be more than a symbolic policy promise. For FYUGP to succeed, it requires a systemic transformation—including teacher training, pedagogical innovation, and massive infrastructure investment—to translate "choice" from an abstract concept into a meaningful classroom reality.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece

Question

"Discuss the transformative potential of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in fostering a student-centric higher education ecosystem in India. To what extent do institutional and structural constraints hinder its effective realization? (250 Words, 15 Marks)"

1. Introduction

The Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP), introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, represents a paradigm shift from a rigid "one-size-fits-all" model to a flexible, multidisciplinary framework. By early 2026, over 300 universities in India have commenced its implementation, aiming to foster holistic development and align Indian education with international standards.

2. Transformative Potential of FYUGP

Multidisciplinary Flexibility- Students are no longer confined to traditional "streams." The ability to combine Major and Minor subjects (e.g., Physics with Philosophy) breaks down academic silos.
Multiple Entry and Exit Points- The system provides flexibility to exit with a certificate, diploma, or degree, reducing the stigma and loss of time associated with dropouts.
Research Integration- The fourth year is dedicated to research, bridging the gap between undergraduate studies and doctoral programs, thereby fostering a culture of innovation.
Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)- The digital storage of credits via the APAAR ID system facilitates seamless mobility between institutions.

3. Institutional and Structural Constraints

Despite the visionary policy, several "classroom realities" act as bottlenecks-
Resource and Faculty Shortages- Many state and private universities suffer from high student-teacher ratios. The burden of mentoring students through personalized pathways often overwhelms existing faculty.
The "Illusion of Choice"- In practice, many colleges restrict elective options based on available faculty expertise rather than student interest, rendering the "choice" symbolic.
Evaluation Lag- While the curriculum emphasizes skills, the evaluation systems often remain rooted in traditional, rote-learning-based summative exams.
Administrative Silos- Lack of coordination between departments hinders the scheduling of multidisciplinary classes, often leading to time-table clashes for students opting for cross-disciplinary minors.

4. The Way Forward

The success of choice-based education depends on systemic restructuring. This involves-
Capacity Building- Extensive teacher training to handle new pedagogical and multidisciplinary demands.
Infrastructure Investment- Upgrading digital and physical infrastructure to support the Academic Bank of Credits and inter-departmental mobility.
Granting Autonomy- Providing colleges with greater autonomy to design innovative, local-needs-based curriculum modules.

5. Conclusion

The FYUGP is an essential step toward making India a global knowledge hub. However, for the policy to translate into real learning opportunities, the focus must shift from mere "rollout numbers" to addressing the grassroots institutional gaps. True student-centricity will be achieved only when the administrative flexibility matches the academic intent.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece

2.Inflation rose to 3.21% in February, but US-Israel-Iran war impact yet to be felt (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Economic Development)
Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub-Topic- Inflation Dynamics, Monetary Policy, CPI Revision, and Global Geopolitics.

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation witnessed a moderate uptick to 3.21%, up from 2.74% in January. While inflation has remained below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) medium-term target of 4% for over a year, new challenges have emerged. Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia, particularly involving Iran and the strategic Strait of Hormuz, pose a significant risk to global energy prices, which could soon spill over into India's domestic inflation trajectory.

2. Understanding Inflation & the New CPI Framework

Core Definition- Inflation is the sustained rise in the general price level, which erodes purchasing power and impacts economic stability.
Primary Indicator- The CPI is the retail inflation index used by the RBI to steer its monetary policy decisions.
The 2024 Base Year Revision- India recently updated the CPI series with 2024 as the base year. This revision incorporates updated consumption patterns from the *2023–24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey*, making the index more representative of modern Indian spending.

3. Analysis of Current Inflation Trends (Feb 2026)

India's current price stability is characterized by "localized" spikes rather than generalized inflation-
The Food Basket- Food inflation rose to 3.47%. Specific vegetables like Tomato (45%) and Cauliflower (44%) saw sharp spikes, while Onion (-28%) and Potato (-18%) prices cooled, providing a balancing effect.
Precious Metals Surge- A major contributor to the headline rise was the inflation in Gold (48%) and Silver jewellery (161%), driven by global market volatility.
Core Inflation Stability- Core inflation (excluding food and fuel) remained stable at 3.4%. Notably, if precious metals are excluded, the "adjusted core inflation" drops to a low 2%, suggesting very limited underlying price pressure across most sectors.

4. Global Geopolitics and Energy Risks

The primary threat to future stability is external-

The Strait of Hormuz Crisis- Nearly 20% of global oil supply passes through this channel. Tensions involving Iran have pushed crude oil prices toward $120 per barrel.

Transmission Mechanism- High crude prices lead to increased costs for fuel, transport, and fertilizers, eventually causing "cost-push" inflation in the domestic market.

Lagged Effect- Since these tensions intensified in late February, the full impact is expected to manifest in the March and April 2026 inflation data.

5. Monetary Policy and Management Framework

Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT)- The RBI is mandated to keep CPI inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of ± 2%.

Policy Tools- Management is achieved through repo rate adjustments, liquidity control, and open market operations.

Fiscal Coordination- The government supports the RBI through supply-side measures, such as food subsidies, export restrictions on essentials, and strategic petroleum reserve management.

6. The Way Forward

To maintain price stability amidst global volatility, India must focus on-

Supply-Side Infrastructure- Enhancing agricultural cold chains and logistics to reduce the volatility of food items.

Energy Diversification- Expanding renewables and securing long-term import contracts to reduce "crude-dependence."

Data-Driven Policy- Utilizing real-time price monitoring and the revised CPI basket for quick policy responses.

Diplomatic Engagement- Strengthening trade ties with energy-producing regions to mitigate the economic fallout of West Asian conflicts.

7. Conclusion

India's inflation dynamics in early 2026 reflect a resilient domestic economy that has successfully managed internal pressures. However, the shadow of global geoeconomic rivalry and energy price shocks looms large. Sustaining the current stability will require a delicate balance between prudent monetary policy and aggressive supply-side management to ensure that external shocks do not derail India's growth momentum.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/business/india-retail-inflation-february-2026-cpi-data-nso-new-series-10578368/lite/

Question

"India's transition to a revised CPI base year in 2024 reflects an attempt to capture modern consumption patterns. Analyze the current drivers of retail inflation in India and evaluate the risks posed by 'imported inflation' due to West Asian geopolitical volatility." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's retail inflation stood at 3.21%, well within the RBI's target band. This stability is supported by the 2024 CPI revision, which better aligns policy with actual household expenditure. However, the rise of "geopolitical risk premiums" in the oil market presents a new challenge for the inflation-targeting framework.

2. Current Drivers of Retail Inflation

Localised Food Volatility- Current spikes are primarily "item-specific" (e.g., Tomatoes and Cauliflower) rather than a general surge in the food basket.

The 'Precious Metal' Factor- A significant portion of the core inflation uptick is due to the global surge in gold and silver, reflecting global safe-haven buying.

Low Underlying Momentum- Adjusted for precious metals, core inflation remains at a low 2%, indicating that domestic demand is not yet causing "overheating" of the economy.

3. Risks of Imported Inflation

Energy Price Pass-Through- As a net oil importer, a spike to $120/barrel (due to the Strait of Hormuz tensions) directly raises the transport and logistics costs for all commodities.

Fertiliser and Input Costs- High energy prices increase the cost of natural gas—a key input for urea—potentially raising the government's subsidy burden or food prices.

Currency Depreciation- Global uncertainty often leads to capital flight to the US Dollar, weakening the Rupee and making all imports (electronic components, edible oils) more expensive.

4. Conclusion

While India's internal inflation dynamics are currently stable, the "imported" component remains the Achilles' heel. To counter this, the RBI must remain vigilant in its "higher-for-longer" interest rate stance, while the government accelerates energy diversification and strategic reserve building to buffer against West Asian shocks.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/business/india-retail-inflation-february-2026-cpi-data-nso-new-series-10578368/lite/

3. Indian Fertilizers' Hormuz Choke (BL)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & Agriculture
Topic- Agriculture and allied sectors – inputs, subsidies, and supply chains.
Sub-Topic- Impact of geopolitical events on India's economy

Introduction

India's agriculture sector is highly dependent on fertilizer imports, particularly for key nutrients like phosphatic and potassic fertilizers. The Strait of Hormuz, a critical global chokepoint, plays a vital role in transporting these inputs. Geopolitical tensions affecting this route can disrupt supply chains, leading to price volatility, fiscal stress, and food inflation in India.

1. India's Dependence on Fertilizer Imports

1. India imports a significant share of fertilizer inputs such as urea, DAP, and potash.
2. Domestic production is insufficient to meet agricultural demand, especially for non-urea fertilizers.
3. Import dependence makes India vulnerable to global supply disruptions and price fluctuations.

2. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

1. The Strait of Hormuz is a key maritime route for energy and fertilizer raw material shipments from the Gulf region.
2. Any disruption in this chokepoint affects global energy prices and input costs for fertilizers.
3. Closure or instability in the region can lead to supply shortages and increased import costs.

3. Impact on Indian Economy and Agriculture

Rising Input Costs

1. Disruptions increase fertilizer prices, raising costs for farmers and agricultural production.

Inflationary Pressures

1. Higher input costs can translate into food inflation, affecting overall price stability.

Fiscal Burden

1. The government may need to increase fertilizer subsidies to protect farmers, straining public finances.

Supply Chain Disruptions

1. Delays in imports can affect timely availability of fertilizers, impacting crop yields.

4. Structural Vulnerabilities

1. Heavy reliance on imports exposes India to geopolitical risks and external shocks.
2. Limited diversification of supply sources increases concentration risk.
3. Domestic production constraints reduce self-reliance in critical agricultural inputs.

5. Policy Measures and Way Forward

Diversification of Import Sources

1. Expanding sourcing beyond the Gulf to reduce geopolitical dependency.

Boosting Domestic Production

1. Investing in fertilizer manufacturing capacity and alternative inputs.

Strategic Reserves

1. Maintaining buffer stocks to manage short-term supply disruptions.

Efficient Subsidy Management

1. Rationalising subsidies to ensure fiscal sustainability and targeted support.

Conclusion

India's dependence on fertilizer imports and the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz highlight the intersection of geopolitics, agriculture, and economic stability. Strengthening supply chain resilience, diversifying sources, and enhancing domestic production will be crucial for ensuring long-term fertilizer security and food stability.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indian-fertilizers-hormuz-choke/article70736136.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's dependence on fertilizer imports exposes it to geopolitical risks associated with strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz. Examine the implications of such disruptions and suggest measures to ensure fertilizer security. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's agricultural productivity depends heavily on fertilizers, a significant portion of which is imported. Strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz play a critical role in ensuring the smooth supply of these inputs. Disruptions in these routes can have serious implications for India's economy and food security.

Implications of Chokepoint Disruptions

1. Increase in Fertilizer Prices

1. Supply disruptions raise import costs, increasing input costs for farmers.

2. Food Inflation

1. Higher input costs may lead to rising food prices and inflationary pressures.

3. Fiscal Strain

1. The government may need to increase subsidies to support farmers.

4. Supply Uncertainty

1. Delays in imports can affect agricultural cycles and crop productivity.

Measures for Fertilizer Security

1. Diversification of Imports

1. Expanding sourcing from multiple regions to reduce dependence on specific chokepoints.

2. Enhancing Domestic Production

1. Investing in fertilizer manufacturing and alternative nutrient sources.

3. Strategic Reserves

1. Maintaining buffer stocks to manage short-term disruptions.

Conclusion

Ensuring fertilizer security requires a comprehensive approach combining supply diversification, domestic capacity building, and strategic reserves. These measures are essential for safeguarding India's agricultural productivity and economic stability.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indian-fertilizers-hormuz-choke/article70736136.ece

4. Long Shadow of Public Health's Colonial Legacy (HT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – Governance & Social Sector
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of social sector services relating to health
Sub-Topic- Impact of geopolitical events on India's economy

Introduction

India's public health system has evolved over time but continues to reflect certain structural features inherited from the colonial period. These historical legacies have shaped institutional arrangements, administrative priorities, and patterns of healthcare delivery. Understanding this legacy is essential to address persistent challenges in accessibility, equity, and efficiency in India's health system.

1. Colonial Foundations of Public Health

1. The colonial health system was primarily designed to protect British economic and administrative interests, rather than ensure universal healthcare.
2. Public health measures focused on disease control, sanitation, and protection of urban and military populations.
3. Rural areas and the broader population received limited healthcare attention.

2. Structural Features of the Colonial Legacy

Centralised Administration

1. Health governance was highly centralised and bureaucratic, with limited local participation.

Urban Bias in Healthcare

1. Infrastructure development prioritised urban centres and port cities, neglecting rural healthcare systems.

Disease-Control Approach

1. Focus was on specific epidemics and public sanitation, rather than comprehensive healthcare services.

3. Post-Independence Continuities

1. Despite reforms, many colonial features persisted in the form of centralised governance and fragmented service delivery.
2. Public health remained underfunded and unevenly distributed across regions.
3. Rural healthcare infrastructure continued to face shortages of personnel, facilities, and resources.

4. Consequences for Public Health Outcomes

1. Persistent regional disparities in health indicators such as maternal mortality, infant mortality, and disease burden.
2. Limited access to quality healthcare in rural and underserved areas.
3. Over-reliance on the private healthcare sector, leading to high out-of-pocket expenditure.

5. Institutional and Policy Challenges

1. Fragmentation between preventive, promotive, and curative healthcare services.
2. Weak integration of public health functions with primary healthcare systems.
3. Insufficient focus on public health infrastructure and workforce development.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Primary Healthcare

1. Focus on comprehensive, community-based healthcare systems.

Decentralisation and Local Governance

1. Empower local institutions to improve health service delivery and accountability.

Increased Public Investment

1. Enhance spending on health infrastructure, human resources, and preventive care.

Integration of Services

1. Ensure coordination between public health, clinical services, and social determinants of health.

Conclusion

India's public health system continues to be influenced by its colonial legacy, which has contributed to structural inefficiencies and inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward equitable, decentralised, and integrated healthcare systems that prioritise universal access and improved health outcomes.

Source- https-//www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/long-shadow-of-public-health-s-colonial-legacy-101773329026625.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's public health system continues to reflect features of its colonial legacy. Examine the impact of this legacy on present-day health outcomes and suggest reforms to strengthen the system. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's public health system has its roots in colonial administrative structures that prioritised disease control and urban sanitation over universal healthcare. Many of these structural features continue to influence the functioning of the health system today.

Impact of Colonial Legacy

1. Centralised Governance

1. Limited decentralisation reduces local responsiveness and accountability.

2. Urban Bias

1. Rural areas continue to face inadequate healthcare infrastructure and services.

3. Fragmented Health Services

1. Weak integration between preventive and curative healthcare systems.

4. Inequality in Access

1. Significant disparities exist in health outcomes across regions and socio-economic groups.

Reforms Needed

1. Strengthening Primary Healthcare

1. Focus on community-based and preventive healthcare systems.

2. Increasing Public Investment

1. Improve health infrastructure and workforce capacity.

3. Decentralisation

1. Empower local bodies for better service delivery and accountability.

Conclusion

Addressing the colonial legacy in public health requires comprehensive reforms that prioritise equity, decentralisation, and integration of services. Such measures are essential for achieving universal health coverage and improved public health outcomes in India.

Source- https-//www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/long-shadow-of-public-health-s-colonial-legacy-101773329026625.html

Editorial of the Day – 14.03.2026

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1. Duty of care- On vaccine injury compensation programmes (TH) -01
2. An ancient temple caught in the heart of a modern conflict (IE) -03
3. Geopolitics & India's Fragile Energy Dependence (TT) -05
4. The Paradox of Experience (TS) -07

1. Duty of care- On vaccine injury compensation programmes (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Economic Development)
Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub-Topic- Inflation Dynamics, Monetary Policy, CPI Revision, and Global Geopolitics.

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation witnessed a moderate uptick to 3.21%, up from 2.74% in January. While inflation has remained below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) medium-term target of 4% for over a year, new challenges have emerged. Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia, particularly involving Iran and the strategic Strait of Hormuz, pose a significant risk to global energy prices, which could soon spill over into India's domestic inflation trajectory.

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4. Global Geopolitics and Energy Risks

The primary threat to future stability is external-
The Strait of Hormuz Crisis- Nearly 20% of global oil supply passes through this channel. Tensions involving Iran have pushed crude oil prices toward $120 per barrel.
Transmission Mechanism- High crude prices lead to increased costs for fuel, transport, and fertilizers, eventually causing "cost-push" inflation in the domestic market.
Lagged Effect- Since these tensions intensified in late February, the full impact is expected to manifest in the March and April 2026 inflation data.

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Policy Tools- Management is achieved through repo rate adjustments, liquidity control, and open market operations.
Fiscal Coordination- The government supports the RBI through supply-side measures, such as food subsidies, export restrictions on essentials, and strategic petroleum reserve management.

6. The Way Forward

To maintain price stability amidst global volatility, India must focus on-
Supply-Side Infrastructure- Enhancing agricultural cold chains and logistics to reduce the volatility of food items.
Energy Diversification- Expanding renewables and securing long-term import contracts to reduce "crude-dependence."
Data-Driven Policy- Utilizing real-time price monitoring and the revised CPI basket for quick policy responses.
Diplomatic Engagement- Strengthening trade ties with energy-producing regions to mitigate the economic fallout of West Asian conflicts.

7. Conclusion

India's inflation dynamics in early 2026 reflect a resilient domestic economy that has successfully managed internal pressures. However, the shadow of global geoeconomic rivalry and energy price shocks looms large. Sustaining the current stability will require a delicate balance between prudent monetary policy and aggressive supply-side management to ensure that external shocks do not derail India's growth momentum.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/duty-of-care-on-vaccine-injury-compensation-programmes/article70739990.ece

"India's transition to a revised CPI base year in 2024 reflects an attempt to capture modern consumption patterns. Analyse the current drivers of retail inflation in India and evaluate the risks posed by 'imported inflation' due to West Asian geopolitical volatility." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

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Localised Food Volatility- Current spikes are primarily "item-specific" (e.g., Tomatoes and Cauliflower) rather than a general surge in the food basket.
The 'Precious Metal' Factor- A significant portion of the core inflation uptick is due to the global surge in gold and silver, reflecting global safe-haven buying.
Low Underlying Momentum- Adjusted for precious metals, core inflation remains at a low 2%, indicating that domestic demand is not yet causing "overheating" of the economy.

3. Risks of Imported Inflation

Energy Price Pass-Through- As a net oil importer, a spike to $120/barrel (due to the Strait of Hormuz tensions) directly raises the transport and logistics costs for all commodities.
Fertiliser and Input Costs- High energy prices increase the cost of natural gas—a key input for urea—potentially raising the government's subsidy burden or food prices.
Currency Depreciation- Global uncertainty often leads to capital flight to the US Dollar, weakening the Rupee and making all imports (electronic components, edible oils) more expensive.

4. Conclusion

While India's internal inflation dynamics are currently stable, the "imported" component remains the Achilles' heel. To counter this, the RBI must remain vigilant in its "higher-for-longer" interest rate stance, while the government accelerates energy diversification and strategic reserve building to buffer against West Asian shocks.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/duty-of-care-on-vaccine-injury-compensation-programmes/article70739990.ece

2. An ancient temple caught in the heart of a modern conflict (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS II (International Relations) & GS I (History & Culture)
Topic- India and its neighbourhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.
Sub-Topic- Southeast Asian Geopolitics, Khmer Architecture, ICJ Rulings, and UNESCO Heritage Protection.

1. Introduction

The Preah Vihear Temple, a crowning jewel of Khmer architecture, has once again become a flashpoint of geopolitical tension. Situated atop a cliff in the Danger Mountains, the temple marks the contested border between Cambodia and Thailand. Despite its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (2008), recent military clashes in March 2026 have caused structural damage and civilian displacement, highlighting the fragile intersection of national sovereignty and global heritage conservation.

2. Historical and Architectural Significance

Khmer Empire Masterpiece- Built between the 9th and 12th centuries, it is a premier example of the Khmer Empire's architectural prowess, predating and rivalling many monuments at Angkor Wat.
Unique Topography- Unlike traditional Khmer "temple-mountains" built on plains, Preah Vihear is a mountain temple perched on a 525-meter cliff, designed as a symbolic "stairway to heaven."
Religious Evolution- Originally dedicated to Lord Shiva (Hinduism), the sanctuary later transitioned into a Buddhist site, reflecting the broader religious shifts across Southeast Asia.
Artistic Grandeur- The complex features an 800-meter-long axis consisting of ornate stone causeways, pavilions (*Gopuras*), and intricate carvings that showcase the advanced aesthetic traditions of the Khmer civilization.

3. The Cambodia–Thailand Border Dispute

The conflict is rooted in colonial history and map-making discrepancies-
Colonial Legacy- The dispute stems from a 1907 French colonial map of Indochina. While the natural watershed line favoured Thailand, the French map placed the temple in Cambodia.
1962 ICJ Ruling- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the temple belonged to Cambodia. However, the surrounding 4.6 sq. km of scrubland remained a "grey zone" of dispute.
2008 UNESCO Spark- Tensions flared when Cambodia successfully applied for UNESCO World Heritage status, a move Thailand perceived as an infringement on the disputed territory.
Military Confrontations- Periodic artillery fire and skirmishes have plagued the region, leading to casualties, the mining of the perimeter, and damage to ancient stone structures.

4. Strategic and Geopolitical Dimensions

Military High Ground- The temple's position on a steep cliff overlooking the Thai plains gives it significant tactical military value.
Symbol of Nationalism- For both Phnom Penh and Bangkok, Preah Vihear is an emotive symbol of national identity and pride, making any diplomatic compromise politically difficult.
Internal Security History- The rugged terrain served as a final stronghold for the Khmer Rouge in the late 20th century, complicating demining and safety efforts.

ASEAN Stability- Continued bilateral friction between two key members challenges the ASEAN principle of peaceful dispute resolution and regional cooperation.

5. Threats to Cultural Heritage

Direct Combat Damage- Artillery impacts and small arms fire have damaged original carvings, structural pillars, and ancient causeways.

Landmine Contamination- The site and its surroundings are heavily infested with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), hindering both conservationists and tourists.

Interruption of Restoration- International projects—including those involving India, China, and the USA—have been stalled or slowed due to the unpredictable security environment.

Irreparable Loss- Unlike modern buildings, these 1,000-year-old structures cannot be authentically replaced; their destruction constitutes a permanent loss to human history.

6. Global Protection Frameworks

1954 Hague Convention- This international treaty seeks to protect cultural property during armed conflicts, prohibiting the use of such sites for military purposes.

UNESCO's Monitoring- UNESCO acts as a watchdog, providing technical expertise and mobilizing global support for the stabilization and repair of the site.

Precedent of Loss- The destruction of heritage in Syria (Palmyra) and Afghanistan (Bamiyan Buddhas) serves as a cautionary tale for the international community regarding Preah Vihear.

7. Conclusion

The Preah Vihear tragedy illustrates how ancient heritage can become a casualty of modern nationalism. While the ICJ has provided legal clarity, true peace requires bilateral diplomatic dialogue, joint demining initiatives, and a commitment to demilitarize the heritage zone. Protecting this "stairway to heaven" is not just a regional obligation but a global mandate to preserve the shared legacy of the Khmer civilization for future generations.

Source- https-//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260314/page/12

Question

"The Preah Vihear Temple is not merely a site of territorial dispute but a masterpiece of Khmer architecture that reflects the profound religious and cultural synthesis of Southeast Asia. Elucidate." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Constructed primarily between the 9th and 12th centuries during the Khmer Empire, the Preah Vihear Temple is a quintessential example of the "Indianized" kingdoms of Southeast Asia. Perched atop a 525-metre cliff in the Danger Mountains, it stands as a testament to the architectural ambition and religious devotion of the Khmer monarchs, bridging the gap between earthly governance and divine symbolism.

2. Architectural Grandeur- The "Stairway to Heaven"

Linear Axis Design- Unlike the concentric, flat-plane layout of Angkor Wat, Preah Vihear is built along an 800-metre-long north-south axis. This linear progression through five successive pavilions (Gopuras) signifies the spiritual ascent to the heavens.

Adaptation to Topography- The temple utilizes the natural cliff edge to enhance its majesty, a deviation from the traditional "temple-mountain" structures found in the plains of Cambodia.

Artistic Mastery- The stone carvings, lintels, and pediments showcase the peak of Khmer artistic expression, featuring intricate depictions of Hindu mythology, such as the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk*.

3. Religious Synthesis and Evolution

Shaivite Origins- The temple was originally dedicated to Lord Shiva (known locally as Shikhareshvara). Its location on a mountain peaks mimics the abode of Shiva, Mount Kailash.

Buddhist Transition- Reflecting the broader religious shift in the Khmer Empire toward the 12th and 13th centuries, the temple gradually integrated Buddhist elements. This synthesis demonstrates the fluid nature of Southeast Asian spirituality, where Vedic traditions and Buddhist philosophy coexisted.

4. Colonial Legacy and the Modern Historical Context

Cartographic Conflict- The historical integrity of the site was complicated by the 1907 French-Siamese Treaty. The map created by French geographers diverted from the natural watershed line, placing the temple in Cambodian territory—a move that planted the seeds of the modern-day conflict between Thailand and Cambodia.

Symbol of National Identity- In the 20th century, the temple became a potent symbol of post-colonial identity for Cambodia, leading to the landmark 1962 ICJ ruling that utilized historical maps to affirm Cambodian ownership.

5. Conclusion

The Preah Vihear Temple is a bridge between the ancient and the modern. While its history is currently overshadowed by border tensions, its architectural and religious depth highlights the shared cultural heritage of the Mekong region. Recognizing its value as a masterpiece of human creativity is essential to shifting the narrative from a "zone of conflict" to a "monument of shared history."

Source- https-//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260314/page/12

3. Geopolitics & India's Fragile Energy Dependence (TT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & Agriculture
Topic- Impact of geopolitical developments on India's economy.
Sub-Topic- Sustainable development and renewable energy

Introduction

Energy security is a critical component of India's economic growth and national security. However, India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil and natural gas, making it vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions. Events in regions such as West Asia highlight the risks associated with dependence on strategic chokepoints and external suppliers.

1. India's Energy Import Dependence

1. India imports a large share of its crude oil and natural gas requirements.
2. A significant portion of these imports comes from West Asian countries.
3. High import dependence exposes India to price volatility and supply disruptions.

2. Role of Strategic Chokepoints

1. Critical maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz handle a major share of India's energy imports.
2. Disruptions due to geopolitical conflicts can increase transportation risks and energy prices.
3. Overdependence on specific routes creates strategic vulnerabilities.

3. Impact of Geopolitical Tensions

Energy Price Volatility

1. Conflicts in oil-producing regions can lead to sharp increases in global crude prices.

Supply Disruptions

1. Blockades or conflicts may interrupt energy supply chains and logistics.

Economic Consequences

1. Rising energy costs contribute to inflation, fiscal pressure, and trade imbalances.

4. Strategic and Policy Challenges

1. India must balance energy security with diplomatic relations in geopolitically sensitive regions.
2. Dependence on a limited number of suppliers reduces bargaining power in global energy markets.

3. Transition to cleaner energy sources requires significant investment and technological capacity.

5. Measures for Enhancing Energy Security

Diversification of Energy Sources

1. Expanding imports from multiple regions to reduce geopolitical concentration risk.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves

1. Maintaining reserves to cushion against short-term supply disruptions.

Renewable Energy Expansion

1. Investing in solar, wind, and green hydrogen to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Domestic Production and Infrastructure

1. Enhancing domestic energy production and improving refining and storage capacity.

6. Role of Strategic Autonomy

1. India's policy of multi-alignment allows it to engage with various energy suppliers without overdependence on any single country.
2. Maintaining diplomatic flexibility helps ensure stable energy partnerships and supply continuity.

Conclusion

India's heavy dependence on imported energy and strategic chokepoints underscores the need for a comprehensive energy security strategy. Diversification, renewable energy expansion, and strategic autonomy in foreign policy are essential for ensuring long-term economic stability and resilience.

Source- https-//www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/geopolitics-indias-fragile-energy-dependence/

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's heavy dependence on energy imports exposes it to geopolitical risks. Examine the challenges posed by this dependence and suggest measures to ensure long-term energy security. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Energy security is vital for sustaining economic growth and ensuring national stability. India's dependence on imported crude oil and natural gas makes it vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions, especially in regions such as West Asia.

Challenges of Energy Dependence

Vulnerability to Geopolitical Conflicts

1. Conflicts in oil-producing regions can disrupt supply chains and increase prices.

Dependence on Strategic Chokepoints

1. Routes such as the Strait of Hormuz are critical for energy imports.

Economic Impact

1. Rising energy prices contribute to inflation and fiscal pressures.

Measures for Energy Security

Diversification of Imports

1. Sourcing energy from multiple countries reduces supply risk.

Renewable Energy Development

1. Expanding solar and wind energy reduces dependence on fossil fuels.

Strategic Reserves

1. Maintaining petroleum reserves helps manage short-term disruptions.

Conclusion

Ensuring energy security requires a balanced approach involving diversification, renewable energy expansion, and strategic diplomacy. These measures are essential for safeguarding India's economic stability and long-term growth.

Source- https-//www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/geopolitics-indias-fragile-energy-dependence/

4. The Paradox of Experience (TS)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – Governance & Social Sector
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of education.
Sub-Topic- Institutional governance and reforms

Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping a country's human capital, innovation capacity, and knowledge economy. However, governance practices within universities often face structural challenges. One such issue is the "experience paradox," where reliance on temporary or ad hoc faculty affects academic quality, institutional stability, and long-term educational outcomes.

1. Understanding the "Experience Paradox"

1. Universities increasingly depend on temporary or contractual faculty instead of permanent appointments.
2. While such faculty may gain teaching experience, they often lack job security, institutional integration, and research opportunities.
3. This creates a paradox where experience is accumulated without institutional continuity or career progression.

2. Structural Issues in Higher Education Governance

Over-Reliance on Ad Hoc Faculty

1. Many institutions prefer contractual appointments due to financial constraints and administrative flexibility.
2. This reduces the proportion of permanent, experienced faculty.

Weak Institutional Planning

1. Lack of long-term recruitment strategies leads to staff shortages and instability.

Administrative Constraints

1. Centralised decision-making and bureaucratic processes delay faculty recruitment and promotions.

3. Impact on Academic Quality

Teaching Quality

1. Temporary faculty may face uncertain tenure and limited incentives, affecting teaching effectiveness.

Research Output

1. Lack of institutional support and job security discourages long-term research and innovation.

Student Outcomes

1. Frequent faculty turnover disrupts continuity in learning and mentorship.

4. Broader Implications

Institutional Instability

1. Universities struggle to build academic culture and intellectual leadership.

Brain Drain

1. Talented academics may prefer opportunities abroad or in private institutions.

Inequality in Education

1. Public universities may lag behind private institutions in faculty quality and resources.

5. Policy Measures and Way Forward

Strengthening Permanent Faculty Recruitment

1. Regular and transparent recruitment to ensure institutional stability.

Improving Working Conditions

1. Provide better job security, research funding, and career progression opportunities.

Decentralised Governance

1. Empower institutions to make timely academic and administrative decisions.

Implementation of NEP 2020

1. Promote multidisciplinary education, faculty development, and institutional autonomy.

Conclusion

Addressing the experience paradox in higher education requires strengthening institutional governance and ensuring stable faculty structures. By investing in permanent faculty, improving working conditions, and enhancing institutional autonomy, India can build a robust and high-quality higher education system that supports long-term academic excellence and innovation.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-paradox-of-experience-1503570036.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The increasing reliance on temporary faculty in higher education institutions has led to an "experience paradox." Examine its impact on academic quality and suggest reforms to address this issue. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Higher education institutions play a vital role in developing human capital and fostering innovation. However, increasing reliance on temporary and contractual faculty has created an "experience paradox," where experience is accumulated without institutional stability or long-term academic growth.

Impact on Academic Quality

1. Decline in Teaching Effectiveness

1. Job insecurity and limited institutional support affect teaching quality and continuity.

2. Weak Research Ecosystem

1. Temporary faculty have fewer opportunities for long-term research and innovation.

3. Disruption in Student Learning

1. High faculty turnover affects mentorship and academic consistency.

Reforms Needed

1. Regular Faculty Recruitment

1. Increase permanent appointments to ensure stability and quality.

2. Better Working Conditions

1. Provide job security, research funding, and career progression.

3. Institutional Autonomy

1. Enable universities to make timely recruitment and academic decisions.

Conclusion

Addressing the experience paradox requires strengthening faculty structures and institutional governance. Ensuring stable and well-supported academic staff is essential for improving the quality and effectiveness of higher education in India.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-paradox-of-experience-1503570036.html

Editorial of the Day – 16.03.2026

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1. Building India's climate resilience with water at the core (TH) -01
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1. Building India's climate resilience with water at the core (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Environment & Disaster Management)
Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Disaster and disaster management.
Sub-Topic- Climate Change Adaptation, COP-30 Belém Indicators, Water Security (WASH), and India's Water Governance.

1. Introduction

COP-30, held in Belém, Brazil (November 2025), has been termed the "COP of Implementation." It marked a fundamental shift in global climate discourse by placing water at the centre of climate survival. Recognizing that climate change is primarily experienced through hydrological disruptions—floods, droughts, and erratic monsoons—the summit integrated Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) into global climate accountability frameworks. For India, this provides a structured roadmap to align its vast water missions with international adaptation indicators.

2. Climate Change- A Crisis Experienced Through Water

Water systems act as the primary medium through which climate variability impacts human civilization-
Extreme Weather- Flooding paralyzes urban centres, while prolonged droughts destabilize rural agrarian economies.
Cryosphere Risks- Rapid melting of Himalayan glaciers threatens the perennial nature and stability of major North Indian river systems.
Coastal Vulnerability- Rising sea levels lead to saline intrusion, contaminating freshwater aquifers used for drinking and irrigation.
Agricultural Feedback- Agriculture accounts for 40% of human-induced methane emissions (rice, livestock). Consequently, water-use efficiency and wastewater recycling have become dual-purpose mitigation and adaptation strategies.

3. The Belém Adaptation Indicators (UAE Framework)

The summit introduced 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators to monitor global progress under a structured system-
WASH Integration- For the first time, universal access to safe drinking water and resilient sanitation infrastructure are treated as core climate indicators.
Disaster Risk Governance- Early Warning Systems- Global mandate to implement multi-hazard warning systems by 2027.
Vulnerability Assessments- A requirement for updated national-level vulnerability mapping by 2030.
System Resilience- Moving beyond "building infrastructure" to ensuring that systems (pumps, pipes, and treatment plants) remain functional during climate shocks.

4. India's Foundations in Water Governance

India has already established institutional frameworks that align with the Belém goals-
Institutional Integration- The creation of the Ministry of Jal Shakti (2019) unified fragmented water management under one roof.

Water Vision 2047- A long-term roadmap focusing on sustainability, equity, and resilience.
Scientific Mapping- NAQUIM 2.0 (National Aquifer Mapping) provides hydrogeological data for local-level groundwater management.
River Rejuvenation- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has evolved to integrate biodiversity and digital monitoring, acting as a buffer against climate variability.

5. Key Challenges for India in 2026

Despite a strong foundation, three systemic risks persist-
Water Stress Testing- Most climate disasters in India are water-related. Existing systems need "stress testing" to ensure service delivery during extreme floods or droughts.
The Finance Gap- While global discussions target $1.3 trillion annually by 2035, adaptation finance remains uncertain. Water projects must be rebranded as "Climate Investments" to attract global green capital.
Digital Fragmentation- India possesses vast hydrological data, but it is siloed. There is a need for an integrated AI-driven dashboard linking weather data, crop advisories, and financial flows.

6. The Path Forward- Operationalising Adaptation

Policy Convergence- Unifying diverse programs (Jal Jeevan Mission, Atal Bhujal Yojana, PMKSY) under a single climate-stress indicator framework.
Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)- Leveraging India's DPI to provide real-time, AI-based decision support for water governance.
Global South Leadership- By operationalizing the Belém indicators, India can serve as a laboratory for climate adaptation strategies for other developing nations.

7. Conclusion

The shift at COP-30 from promises to measurable outcomes ensures that climate adaptation is no longer an abstract concept but a measurable system of survival. Resilience must be measured not by the volume of infrastructure created, but by the uninterrupted service of water and sanitation systems during the inevitable climate shocks of the future. By aligning its internal reforms with the Belém Indicators, India can secure its water future and lead the Global South in climate-resilient development.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/building-indias-climate-resilience-with-water-at-the-core/article70747277.ece

Question

"COP-30 at Belém signalled a transition from 'Climate Promises' to 'System-based Adaptation,' with water as its core pillar. Elucidate the significance of the Belém Adaptation Indicators for India and discuss the challenges in converging India's existing water missions with these global accountability frameworks." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

COP-30 in Belém (2025) institutionalized the "UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience," placing water at the heart of climate adaptation. By integrating 59 specific indicators, it demands that countries move beyond symbolic resilience to measurable, functional systems that survive climate stress.

2. Significance of Belém Indicators for India

Framework for Accountability- The indicators provide India with a global benchmark to measure the success of the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission through a "climate lens."
Disaster Preparedness- The mandate for multi-hazard early warning systems by 2027 aligns with India's need to protect its vulnerable coastal and Himalayan populations.
WASH as Adaptation- It legitimizes India's focus on sanitation and hygiene as critical components of climate survival, not just public health.

3. Challenges in Convergence

Institutional Silos- While the Ministry of Jal Shakti exists, convergence with the Ministry of Agriculture and MoEFCC (Environment) for integrated "Water-Food-Climate" action is still in its nascent stages.
Data Harmonization- India's vast hydrological data (from CWC, CGWB, and IMD) is often digitally fragmented, making real-time "climate stress testing" difficult.
Funding and Finance- Shifting from "Routine Sectoral Spending" to "Climate Adaptation Finance" requires a new fiscal vocabulary to tap into international green funds and fulfill the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG).

4. Conclusion

The Belém Indicators act as a "global dashboard for survival." For India, the transition from infrastructure building to system-based resilience is the next frontier. Success will depend on the digital integration of hydrological data and the mobilization of adaptation finance, ensuring that India's growth remains "water-secure" in a warming world.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/building-indias-climate-resilience-with-water-at-the-core/article70747277.ece

2. Renewable Energy Transition and Grid stability challenges (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Economic Development & Environment)
Topic- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.
Sub-Topic- Renewable Energy Transition, Grid Stability, Decarbonization, and Thermal Power Inflexibility.

1. Introduction

In 2025–26, India's energy landscape reached a significant milestone where renewable energy (RE) capacity accounted for over 51% of total installed power. However, this rapid expansion has hit a technological bottleneck- Renewable Energy Curtailment. Despite adding record solar and wind capacity, India is losing terawatts of clean power because the country's coal-fired thermal plants lack the operational flexibility to scale down when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. This imbalance creates fiscal stress for developers and hinders India's path toward its 2030 climate goals.

2. Background & Key Definitions

To understand the crisis, it is essential to define the core technical concepts governing the Indian power sector-
Renewable Energy Curtailment- The deliberate reduction in output from renewable sources (solar/wind) below what could have been produced. This happens when the grid cannot absorb the power or when supply exceeds demand.
Minimum Technical Load (MTL)- The lowest power level at which a thermal unit can operate safely and stably without being shut down entirely.
Grid Frequency- The "heartbeat" of the power system. In India, it must be maintained within a tight band of 49.90–50.05 Hz. If supply exceeds demand, the frequency rises, risking equipment damage and grid collapse.
Ramping- The ability of a power plant to increase (ramp-up) or decrease (ramp-down) its electricity output over a specific period.

3. India's Renewable Energy Expansion (2025–26)

Capacity Milestone- India added over 44 GW of RE in 2025 alone, bringing the total installed RE capacity to 262 GW.
500 GW Target- The current growth is a stride toward the "Panchamrit" target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.

Solar Dominance- Solar energy remains the primary driver due to falling photovoltaic (PV) costs and the success of the National Solar Mission and massive solar parks.

4. The Problem- Operational Inflexibility of Coal Plants

Coal-fired plants currently form the "baseload" of India's grid, but their rigid design conflicts with variable renewables.

The 55% Barrier- Most Indian coal plants cannot operate below 55% of their capacity (MTL). Even when solar power is at its peak during the day, these plants continue to generate high volumes of electricity.

Technical Risks- Operating below the MTL causes boiler instability, turbine stress, and increased wear and tear, making operators reluctant to flex.

Economic Inefficiency- Ramping plants up and down frequently (cycling) reduces fuel efficiency and increases maintenance costs for thermal developers.

5. Consequences of Grid Inflexibility

Feature	Impact of Inflexibility / Curtailment
Energy Loss	2.3 TWh of solar power lost in late 2025—enough to power 14 lakh households.
Financial Cost	₹575–690 crore paid in compensation to RE developers due to "Must-Run" status violations.
Grid Stability	In May 2025, frequency stayed above safe limits 20% of the time, increasing the risk of blackouts.
Climate Goal	Curtailment slows down actual decarbonization as coal continues to burn while clean energy is wasted.

6. Policy Efforts & Technological Solutions

The government and the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) are moving to modernize grid management-

Reducing MTL- There is a strong policy push to lower the Minimum Technical Load from 55% to 40% through technical retrofitting.

Incentive Schemes- The CEA has proposed financial incentives for thermal plants that demonstrate high flexibility and rapid ramping capabilities.

Energy Storage Systems (ESS)-

1. Battery Storage- Capturing mid-day solar peaks for use during evening demand surges.
2. Pumped Hydro Projects (PHP)- Using surplus RE to pump water uphill, acting as a "giant battery" for the grid.

Unified National Grid- Leveraging India's "One Nation, One Grid, One Frequency" to move surplus power from RE-rich states to power-deficit regions instantly.

7. Conclusion

The success of India's green energy transition no longer depends solely on adding more solar panels or wind turbines; it depends on Grid Intelligence. Integrating 262 GW of renewables requires a "flexible" fossil-fuel backbone that acts as a support rather than a barrier. By lowering thermal MTL, investing in storage, and digitizing grid monitoring, India can ensure that every unit of clean energy produced reaches the consumer, securing both the environment and the economy.

Question

"While India has achieved a milestone of over 50% installed capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, the phenomenon of 'Renewable Energy Curtailment' poses a significant threat to the financial and environmental viability of the energy transition. Analyse the factors contributing to this curtailment and suggest measures to enhance grid flexibility." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

By early 2026, India's renewable energy (RE) capacity reached 262 GW, accounting for more than 51% of total installed capacity. However, the lack of operational flexibility in the coal-based thermal fleet—which provides the essential baseload—has led to the curtailment of approximately 2.3 TWh of

solar power in late 2025. This waste of clean energy highlights a growing mismatch between capacity addition and grid modernization.

2. Factors Contributing to RE Curtailment

Thermal Inflexibility (Minimum Technical Load)- Most coal plants in India are designed to run at a steady state and cannot safely operate below 55% of their capacity. During peak solar hours, these plants cannot "ramp down" sufficiently to accommodate surging RE.

Grid Frequency Management- To maintain stability, the grid frequency must stay within 49.90–50.05 Hz. When RE supply exceeds demand and thermal plants remain rigid, frequency rises, forcing grid operators to curtail RE to prevent system failure.

Technological and Maintenance Barriers- Frequent ramping (cycling) of coal units causes boiler instability and increases wear and tear, making thermal operators reluctant to adjust output.

Must-Run Status Violations- Despite RE having "must-run" status, grid security concerns often take precedence, leading to curtailment and subsequent financial compensation burdens of over ₹600 crore on the exchequer.

3. Measures to Enhance Grid Flexibility

Lowering Minimum Technical Load (MTL)- Retrofitting coal plants to operate at 40% MTL (down from 55%) would create more "room" for variable RE during peak generation.

Deployment of Energy Storage- Pumped Hydro Projects (PHP)- Utilizing surplus RE to pump water, which can then generate power during evening peaks.

1. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)- Providing rapid-response frequency regulation and peak-shaving capabilities.

Market-Based Economic Dispatch (MBED)- Moving toward a unified national scheduling system to allow RE to flow from surplus to deficit regions across state boundaries seamlessly.

Incentivizing Flexibility- The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) should implement a tariff structure that rewards thermal plants for "ramping services" rather than just energy volume.

4. Conclusion

The success of India's 2030 target of 500 GW non-fossil capacity depends on transitioning from a rigid grid to an "intelligent" grid. Integrating renewables requires not just more panels and turbines, but a flexible fossil-fuel backbone and robust storage infrastructure. Solving the curtailment crisis is essential to ensure that India's green growth is both technologically stable and economically sustainable.

3. Are We Facing an Ai Nightmare? Scenario Planning Should Begin (MT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Science and Technology
Topic- Developments and applications of Artificial Intelligence
Sub-Topic- Science and technology policy and governance

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming economies by enhancing productivity and automating tasks across sectors. While AI offers significant opportunities for innovation and growth, it also raises concerns about job displacement, inequality, and economic disruption. This has made scenario planning and policy preparedness essential to manage potential risks.

1. AI as a Disruptive Economic Force

1. AI can automate both routine and cognitive tasks, unlike previous technological revolutions.
2. It increases efficiency and productivity but may reduce demand for certain types of labour.
3. Sectors such as finance, manufacturing, services, and administration are particularly affected.

2. Nature of Employment Disruption

Job Displacement

1. Many existing jobs, especially repetitive or rule-based roles, may be replaced by AI systems.

Job Transformation

1. AI will also create new roles requiring advanced digital and analytical skills.

Skill Polarisation

1. Demand may increase for high-skilled jobs, while low- and mid-skilled jobs decline, widening inequality.

3. Economic and Social Implications

Inequality

1. Unequal access to technology and skills can increase income and opportunity gaps.

Labour Market Uncertainty

1. Rapid technological change creates instability in employment patterns.

Geopolitical Competition

1. Countries leading in AI may gain economic and strategic advantages, influencing global power structures.

4. Need for Scenario Planning

1. Governments must anticipate multiple scenarios, including high job displacement or balanced job creation outcomes.
2. Scenario planning helps design adaptive policies for labour markets, education, and social protection.
3. It ensures preparedness for uncertain technological and economic futures.

5. Policy Measures for Managing AI Impact

Skill Development and Reskilling

1. Invest in digital literacy, AI-related skills, and lifelong learning systems.

Strengthening Social Safety Nets

1. Expand social security, unemployment support, and income protection mechanisms.

Encouraging Innovation

1. Promote AI research, startups, and industry–academia collaboration.

Regulation and Ethical Governance

1. Develop frameworks for responsible AI use, data protection, and accountability.

6. Balanced Approach to AI Adoption

1. AI should be viewed as a tool for augmenting human capabilities rather than replacing them entirely.
2. Policies must ensure that technological progress leads to inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion

AI presents both opportunities and risks for economies and societies. Effective scenario planning, skill development, and regulatory frameworks are essential to harness its benefits while mitigating potential disruptions, ensuring that AI contributes to inclusive growth and long-term economic stability.
Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/raghuram-rajan-ai-job-scarcity-policymakers-scenario-planning-artificial-intelligence-employment/amp-11773298566007.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Artificial Intelligence has the potential to transform labour markets and economic structures. Discuss the challenges posed by AI-driven automation and suggest policy measures to manage its impact. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a transformative technology that is reshaping industries and labour markets. While it enhances productivity and innovation, it also raises concerns about job displacement and economic inequality, making policy intervention essential.

Challenges of AI-Driven Automation

1. Job Displacement

1. Automation of routine and cognitive tasks can reduce employment opportunities in certain sectors.

2. Skill Gaps

1. Rapid technological change creates a mismatch between existing skills and new job requirements.

3. Rising Inequality

1. High-skilled workers benefit more, increasing income disparities.

Policy Measures

1. Skill Development

1. Promote reskilling and digital education programs.

2. Social Protection

1. Strengthen safety nets and income support systems.

3. Innovation Ecosystem

1. Encourage AI research and entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Managing the impact of AI requires a balanced approach that combines technological advancement with social protection and skill development. This will ensure that AI contributes to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/raghuram-rajan-ai-job-scarcity-policymakers-scenario-planning-artificial-intelligence-employment/amp-11773298566007.html

4. India And Israel (TS)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- India and its bilateral relations
Sub-Topic- India's foreign policy and strategic autonomy

Introduction

India–Israel relations have evolved significantly since the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992. Over the years, cooperation between the two countries has expanded across defence, agriculture, technology, and trade. At the same time, India has attempted to maintain strategic autonomy and balanced diplomacy in West Asia, given its broader regional interests.

1. Evolution of India–Israel Relations

1. India historically maintained a cautious approach towards Israel due to Cold War politics and support for the Palestinian cause.
2. Full diplomatic relations were established in 1992, marking the beginning of stronger bilateral engagement.
3. High-level visits and diplomatic interactions have deepened strategic cooperation between the two countries.

2. Key Areas of Cooperation

Defence and Security Cooperation

1. Israel is among India's major defence suppliers, providing advanced military technology and equipment.
2. Collaboration includes surveillance systems, missiles, and defence electronics.

Agriculture and Water Management

1. Israel has supported India through agricultural technology, irrigation techniques, and water management practices.

Science and Technology

1. Partnerships exist in areas such as innovation, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and research collaboration.

Trade and Investment

1. Bilateral trade has grown steadily, including cooperation in high-technology sectors and industrial development.

3. Strategic Context in West Asia

1. India must balance relations with Israel, Iran, and Arab Gulf countries simultaneously.
2. The region is crucial for India due to energy security, trade routes, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora.
3. Therefore, India follows a pragmatic and balanced diplomatic approach.

4. Challenges in the Relationship

1. Regional conflicts involving Israel and Palestine create diplomatic sensitivities.
2. India must maintain its traditional support for Palestinian statehood while expanding cooperation with Israel.
3. Domestic political debates sometimes influence perceptions of India's foreign policy choices.

5. Significance for India's Foreign Policy

1. India's engagement with Israel demonstrates its multi-alignment strategy.
2. The relationship strengthens defence capabilities, technological innovation, and agricultural productivity.
3. Balanced diplomacy allows India to pursue national interests without compromising regional partnerships.

Conclusion

India–Israel relations represent an important pillar of India's foreign policy, particularly in defence and technological cooperation. By maintaining strategic autonomy and balancing ties with other West Asian partners, India can continue to deepen this partnership while safeguarding its broader regional and global interests.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/india-and-israel-1503570276.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India–Israel relations have expanded significantly in recent decades while India continues to maintain balanced relations with other West Asian countries. Discuss the significance and challenges of this relationship in the context of India's strategic autonomy. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India and Israel established full diplomatic relations in 1992, and since then their partnership has expanded across defence, agriculture, science, and technology. While strengthening ties with Israel,

India has simultaneously maintained relations with other West Asian countries, reflecting its commitment to strategic autonomy in foreign policy.

Significance of India–Israel Relations

1. Defence and Security Cooperation

1. Israel is a major supplier of advanced defence technology and military equipment to India.

2. Agricultural and Technological Collaboration

1. Cooperation in irrigation, water management, and agricultural innovation has improved productivity.

3. Innovation and Research

1. Partnerships in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and scientific research strengthen India's technological capabilities.

Challenges

1. Regional Political Sensitivities

1. Conflicts in West Asia require India to balance relations with Israel, Palestine, and Arab countries.

2. Domestic Political Debates

1. Public discourse sometimes frames the relationship in ideological or political terms, affecting perceptions.

Conclusion

India–Israel relations highlight India's pragmatic foreign policy approach that prioritises national interests while maintaining balanced regional engagement. Strengthening cooperation with Israel while sustaining ties with other West Asian partners reflects India's commitment to strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.

Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/india-and-israel-1503570276.html

Editorial of the Day – 17.03.2026

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1. From Compensation to Incentivisation- The TFFF Model of Forest Conservation (TH) -01
2. Failure of atomic clock cripples ISRO's NavIC system (IE) -03
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1. From Compensation to Incentivisation- The TFFF Model of Forest Conservation (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Environment & Biodiversity) and GS II (International Relations).
Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; International treaties and agreements.
Sub-Topic- Climate Finance, COP30 Belém Outcomes, Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), and Indigenous Land Rights.

1. Introduction

During COP30 in Belém, Brazil (November 2025), a landmark initiative called the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) was unveiled. Unlike previous models that focused on compensation for "reducing" deforestation (like REDD+), the TFFF is designed as a global finance mechanism to reward countries for maintaining standing tropical forests. This marks a significant evolution in forest finance, positioning conservation as a performance-based economic service while placing the survival of indigenous communities at the heart of the climate agenda.

2. The Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF)- Core Mechanism

Reward for Standing Forests- The facility shifts the focus from penalizing loss to rewarding the preservation of existing tropical ecosystems.
Initial Funding- The TFFF has secured over $5.5 billion in initial pledges, anchored by a significant $3 billion commitment from Norway.
Performance-Based Payments- Funds are disbursed based on measurable conservation outcomes, ensuring that financial returns are tied directly to the health of the forest.
Dual Objective- It aims to provide a competitive financial return for investors while creating a permanent incentive for nations to protect their tropical biodiversity.

3. Role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)

Recognizing that indigenous territories often have the lowest rates of deforestation, the TFFF integrates them into the financial architecture-
Earmarked Funds- At least 20% of all payments are strictly reserved for indigenous peoples and local communities.
Extensive Consultations- More than 400 indigenous and community leaders participated in the design phase of the facility.
Capacity Building- Through the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC), the mechanism seeks to empower local dwellers as primary forest stewards.
Access Platforms- A new digital platform, supported by UNDP, FAO, and WWF, has been launched to help forest-rich countries and communities navigate the fund.

4. Critical Challenges and Civil Society Concerns

Despite its innovative structure, the TFFF faces significant criticism from advocacy groups like the Global Forest Coalition (GFC)-

Market-Driven Logic- Critics argue the fund relies too heavily on financial market principles, which may fail to account for the intrinsic value of biodiversity beyond a "price per hectare."
Structural Drivers- Financial incentives alone may not be enough to counter the massive pressures from-

1. Agribusiness Expansion (soy, cattle, palm oil).
2. Extractive Industries (mining and oil/gas projects).
3. Large-scale Infrastructure (roads and dams).

The "Colonial" Narrative- Some civil society groups fear the fund might benefit international intermediaries and national governments more than the actual forest dwellers.
Inadequate Payment Rates- Earlier proposals suggested a rate of $4 per hectare, which many analysts believe is too low to compete with the profits of extractive industries.

5. Land Rights and Power Dynamics

The success of the TFFF is inextricably linked to the recognition of territorial sovereignty-
Voting Rights Deficit- A major point of contention is that indigenous representatives currently lack voting rights in the facility's main governing bodies.
The Land Tenure Pledge- On the sidelines of COP30, the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP) renewed a pledge of $1.8 billion (2026–2030) to support land tenure for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.
Territorial Security- Protesters at Belém emphasized that without secure land rights, financial aid remains a "top-down" measure that ignores the power imbalances between corporations and local tribes.

6. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Belém model of forest finance is a bold experiment in climate accountability. While the TFFF provides a much-needed financial injection into tropical conservation, its credibility hinges on equitable governance. For the facility to be effective, it must transition from a purely financial tool to a platform for genuine power-sharing. This requires strengthening land rights, ensuring that funds bypass bureaucratic intermediaries to reach the grassroots, and addressing the systemic economic drivers that currently make deforestation more profitable than preservation.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/belem-as-a-test-of-a-new-model-of-forest-finance/article70751022.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The transition from REDD+ to the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) signifies a shift from a 'corrective' to a 'preventive' model of forest finance. Critically analyze the potential of the TFFF to address the shortcomings of previous forest conservation mechanisms." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Introduction

For over a decade, REDD+ was the primary global framework for forest-based climate action. However, its focus on "avoided deforestation" often ignored countries that had already successfully preserved their forests. The Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), launched at COP30 in Belém (2025), seeks to rectify this by rewarding nations for maintaining standing tropical forests as a global ecological asset, shifting the focus from carbon offsets to sovereign conservation services.

Shortcomings of Previous Mechanisms (REDD+)

The "High Forest" Penalty- Under REDD+, countries with historically low deforestation rates (like Gabon or Guyana) received little funding because they had no "destruction" to reduce.
Leakage and Additionality- REDD+ faced criticism because protecting one patch of forest often led to "leakage," where logging simply moved to a neighbouring area.
Complex Carbon Accounting- The reliance on volatile carbon markets made funding unpredictable and administratively burdensome for developing nations.

Marginalization of Indigenous Peoples- Indigenous groups often struggled to access REDD+ funds due to lack of formal land titles and bureaucratic intermediaries.

The TFFF Model- A Preventive Shift (Critical Analysis)

Rewarding Integrity- The TFFF provides a steady, performance-based payment for the *total area* of protected forest, incentivizing the maintenance of biodiversity hotspots before they are threatened.
Performance-Based Accountability- By linking payments to specific conservation outcomes, it ensures transparency. However, the proposed $4 per hectare rate may still be too low to compete with the lucrative "opportunity cost" of soy or cattle ranching.
Indigenous-Centric Finance- The mandatory 20% earmarking for local communities is a structural improvement. Yet, the lack of voting rights for these groups in the TFFF's governing bodies suggests that "power-sharing" remains incomplete.
Addressing Structural Drivers- While TFFF provides a "carrot" for conservation, it does not necessarily provide a "stick" against the extractive industries (mining, oil) that remain the primary drivers of Amazonian and Congolese forest loss.

Conclusion

The TFFF is a bold attempt to provide a "living wage" for tropical forests. While it successfully addresses the equity gap for forest-conserving nations, its ultimate success depends on ensuring that the finance reaches the actual forest stewards at the grassroots. To be truly transformative, the Belém model must move beyond financial incentives and integrate secure land tenure as the non-negotiable foundation of forest survival.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/belem-as-a-test-of-a-new-model-of-forest-finance/article70751022.ece#google_vignette

2. Failure of atomic clock cripples ISRO's NavIC system (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Science and Technology)
Topic- Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, and issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.
Sub-Topic- Satellite Navigation Systems, NavIC/IRNSS, Strategic Autonomy, and Indigenous Space Technology.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, India's regional navigation system, NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), faced a significant technical hurdle following the failure of an atomic clock on the IRNSS-1F satellite. While NavIC was designed to provide independent, precise positioning (with ~10 m accuracy) across India and up to 1500 km beyond its borders, this latest setback underscores the challenges of satellite aging, launch reliability, and the critical nature of ultra-precise timekeeping. Despite these hurdles, the transition to a new generation of satellites equipped with indigenous atomic clocks represents a vital step toward long-term navigation sovereignty.

2. NavIC Architecture and Strategic Importance

NavIC is a specialized regional navigation system tailored to India's unique geographical and strategic needs.
IRNSS Architecture- Consists of a 7-satellite constellation (currently undergoing replenishment) providing coverage over the Indian landmass and extending up to 1500 km from its borders.
Strategic Autonomy- Crucial for reducing dependence on foreign GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite Systems) like the US-based GPS, particularly for defense operations and sensitive strategic activities.
Accuracy in Indian Terrain- NavIC offers superior performance in diverse Indian environments, such as deep valleys, thick forests, and dense urban clusters, outperforming GPS signals in these specific terrains.
Widespread Applications- The system supports critical sectors, including disaster management, transport mapping, precision agriculture, and commercial fisheries.

3. The Role of Atomic Clocks in Satellite Navigation

Atomic clocks are the "heartbeat" of any satellite navigation system.

Precision Timekeeping- They provide extremely accurate time signals, which are used to measure the exact distance between the satellite and the ground receiver.

Triangulation Principle- Navigation systems determine location by measuring the time delay of signals from multiple satellites—a minor error in time can result in kilometres of positional inaccuracy.

Critical Vulnerability- When a clock fails, the satellite essentially becomes a one-way messaging tool, losing its primary ability to contribute to precise navigation calculations.

4. Technical Challenges and Reliability Issues

Despite its niche advantages, NavIC has faced several systemic and technical issues-

Atomic Clock Malfunctions- Multiple early-generation satellites experienced failures in their rubidium atomic clocks, impacting the continuity and reliability of the service.

Aging Constellation- Several satellites (e.g., IRNSS-1A, 1B, 1C) have already exceeded their 10-year design life, leading to reduced operational efficiency.

Launch and Orbital Failures- Setbacks include the failure of the IRNSS-1H mission (2017) and the NVS-02 (2025) mission, which failed to reach its intended orbit.

Ecosystem Gaps- A significant delay remains in the development of mass-market user devices and a widespread commercial ecosystem, as noted in various CAG reports.

5. Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS)- A Comparative Overview

India's NavIC operates in a landscape dominated by a few global and regional giants-

System Name	Country/Region	Type	Coverage
GPS	United States	Global	Worldwide
GLONASS	Russia	Global	Worldwide
Galileo	European Union	Global	Worldwide
BeiDou	China	Global	Worldwide
NavIC	India	Regional	India + 1500 km
QZSS	Japan	Regional	Asia-Oceania

6. Technological Advancements and the New Generation

ISRO is actively working to overcome past failures through significant technological upgrades-

Indigenous Atomic Clocks- New-generation satellites (NVS series) now feature ISRO-developed atomic clocks, drastically reducing the reliance on foreign components.

Introduction of L1 Band- The addition of the L1 frequency band makes NavIC signals compatible with modern smartphones and wearable devices, facilitating mass adoption.

Enhanced Mission Life- New satellites are designed for a 12-year lifespan, providing better long-term sustainability for the constellation.

Interoperability- Improved multi-frequency signals ensure that NavIC can work seamlessly alongside other global navigation systems.

7. Strategic and Economic Significance

The success of NavIC is inextricably linked to India's future as a global space power.

National Security- Provides a "no-fail" navigation capability for the Indian Armed Forces during times of conflict when foreign signals might be denied.

Economic Catalyst- Enhances efficiency in logistics, urban planning, and infrastructure development.

Geopolitical Influence- A robust NavIC system strengthens India's technological leadership and geopolitical standing within the global space community.

Digital India Integration- Embedding NavIC in mobile chipsets is a cornerstone of achieving technological self-reliance in the digital age.

8. Conclusion

The March 2026 clock failure on IRNSS-1F is a stark reminder of the rigorous demands of satellite timekeeping. While technical setbacks are inevitable in the space sector, NavIC remains indispensable for India's strategic autonomy. Addressing the current reliability gaps through indigenous technology, ensuring timely replacement of aging satellites, and fostering a private-sector ecosystem for user devices will be essential to realizing India's goal of true navigation sovereignty.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/navic-satellite-atomic-clock-failure-isro-gps-10583590/

Question

"Despite being a significant milestone in India's quest for 'Space Sovereignty', the NavIC system continues to grapple with technological and structural bottlenecks. Critically analyze the strategic necessity of NavIC and the hurdles in achieving its full operational potential." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) is India's indigenous regional satellite navigation system designed to provide accurate positioning over India and a 1500 km radius. While the system represents a leap toward technological self-reliance, recent setbacks—such as the atomic clock failure on the IRNSS-1F satellite in March 2026—highlight the persistent vulnerabilities in maintaining a sovereign space-based infrastructure.

2. Strategic Necessity of NavIC

Strategic Autonomy- NavIC ensures that India is not dependent on foreign systems like the US-owned GPS, which is critical for defense operations where signal denial during conflicts (as seen during the Kargil War) is a major risk.

Regional Accuracy- Unlike global systems, NavIC is optimized for the Indian subcontinent, providing higher accuracy (~10 m) in difficult terrains like the Himalayas and dense urban clusters.

Disaster Management- Real-time tracking and messaging capabilities are vital for early warning systems, cyclone monitoring, and search-and-rescue operations.

Socio-Economic Utility- NavIC powers essential civilian sectors including terrestrial navigation for transport, precision agriculture, and deep-sea fishing.

3. Hurdles in Achieving Full Operational Potential

Technical Fragility- The "heart" of the system—the atomic clocks—has seen multiple failures. The failure in March 2026 on IRNSS-1F follows a history of rubidium clock malfunctions that reduce satellites to mere messaging units rather than precise positioning tools.

Aging Constellation- Several first-generation satellites (IRNSS-1A, 1B, 1C) have already crossed their 10-year design life. Delay in replenishment launches creates "blind spots" in the constellation's geometry.

Launch and Orbital Setbacks- Recent failures, such as the NVS-02 (2025) glitch, have slowed down the transition to the more robust, second-generation satellites.

Underdeveloped User Ecosystem- There remains a significant lag in the mass adoption of NavIC-compatible hardware in smartphones and commercial vehicles, often due to the initial absence of the L1 frequency band (now being addressed in the NVS series).

4. The Path Forward

To realize its full potential, India must focus on the successful deployment of the NVS-series satellites, which feature indigenous atomic clocks and the L1 band for civilian use. Strengthening the public-private partnership to manufacture NavIC-enabled chipsets is essential for widespread adoption.

5. Conclusion

NavIC is a non-negotiable asset for India's strategic and economic sovereignty. While technical setbacks like clock failures are a reality of complex space systems, the transition toward indigenous

components and a broader user ecosystem is the only way to transform NavIC from a strategic backup into a globally competitive regional utility.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/navic-satellite-atomic-clock-failure-isro-gps-10583590/

3. Anchoring Corporate Governance Responsibility (BL)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- corporate governance and ethical business practices
Sub-Topic- Transparency, accountability, and compliance frameworks

Introduction

Corporate governance refers to the framework of rules, practices, and processes by which companies are directed and controlled. In India, multiple laws and regulators govern corporate conduct, but fragmentation in governance structures often leads to diffused accountability and compliance challenges. Strengthening clarity in governance roles is essential for ensuring transparency and responsible corporate behaviour.

1. Evolution of Corporate Governance Framework

1. India's corporate governance system has evolved through company law reforms, securities regulations, and audit standards.
2. The introduction of independent directors, audit committees, and disclosure norms has strengthened oversight.
3. However, governance responsibilities are often spread across multiple actors and institutions.

2. Issue of Diffused Accountability

1. Multiple regulators and legal frameworks create overlapping roles and responsibilities.
2. Accountability is often dispersed among boards, management, auditors, and compliance officers.
3. This fragmentation can weaken effective monitoring and enforcement.

3. Role of Key Governance Institutions

Board of Directors

1. Responsible for strategic oversight and fiduciary duties.

Management

1. Handles day-to-day operations and implementation of policies.

Auditors and Compliance Officers

1. Ensure financial transparency, regulatory compliance, and risk management.

4. Challenges in Current Governance Structure

Regulatory Overlap

1. Different regulators impose varying requirements, leading to complexity.

Compliance Burden

1. Companies face multiple reporting and disclosure obligations.

Lack of Clear Responsibility

1. Absence of a single point of accountability can reduce effectiveness of governance mechanisms.

5. Need for Harmonisation of Governance Roles

1. Aligning governance structures across laws can reduce duplication and confusion.
2. Establishing a clear "centre of accountability" ensures better responsibility and oversight.
3. Simplification of regulations can improve ease of doing business and compliance efficiency.

6. Policy Measures and Way Forward

Regulatory Coordination

1. Improve coordination among regulators to ensure consistent governance standards.

Clarity in Roles

1. Clearly define responsibilities of boards, management, and compliance officers.

Simplification of Compliance

1. Reduce unnecessary complexity in reporting and regulatory requirements.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

1. Enhance capabilities of regulatory bodies and corporate governance institutions.

Conclusion

Effective corporate governance requires clear accountability, coordinated regulation, and transparent processes. By harmonising governance frameworks and reducing fragmentation, India can strengthen corporate accountability, improve investor confidence, and create a more efficient and trustworthy business environment.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/anchoring-corporate-governance-responsibility/article70751000.ece#-~-text=Anchoring%20governance%20responsibility%20in%20this,strengthen%20the%20attribution%20of%20accountability

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Fragmentation in corporate governance frameworks often leads to diffused accountability in India. Examine the challenges arising from this fragmentation and suggest measures to strengthen corporate governance. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Corporate governance ensures that companies are managed in a transparent, accountable, and responsible manner. In India, multiple regulatory frameworks govern corporate activities, but overlapping roles often lead to diffused accountability and compliance challenges.

Challenges

1. Overlapping Regulatory Frameworks

1. Multiple regulators impose different compliance requirements, creating complexity.

2. Diffused Accountability

1. Responsibility is spread across boards, management, and auditors, weakening oversight.

3. High Compliance Burden

1. Companies face extensive reporting obligations, increasing costs and inefficiencies.

Measures

1. Harmonisation of Regulations

1. Align governance frameworks across laws to reduce duplication.

2. Clear Definition of Roles

1. Establish a single point of accountability within organisations.

3. Simplification of Compliance

1. Streamline reporting requirements to improve efficiency and transparency.

Conclusion

Strengthening corporate governance requires reducing fragmentation and ensuring clear accountability. A coordinated and simplified governance framework will enhance transparency, investor confidence, and overall economic efficiency.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/anchoring-corporate-governance-responsibility/article70751000.ece#-~-text=Anchoring%20governance%20responsibility%20in%20this,strengthen%20the%20attribution%20of%20accountability

4. India In a Disorderly World (BS)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests
Sub-Topic- India's foreign policy and strategic autonomy

Introduction

The global order is undergoing a period of disruption and uncertainty, marked by geopolitical conflicts, weakening multilateral institutions, and increasing protectionism. In this evolving scenario, India must recalibrate its foreign policy to safeguard national interests while contributing to a rules-based international order.

1. Changing Global Order

1. The post-Cold War system based on globalisation and multilateralism is weakening.
2. Rising geopolitical tensions and conflicts have led to fragmentation in global governance.
3. Institutions meant to uphold the rule of law and international norms are facing challenges.

2. Rise of Protectionism and Trade Conflicts

1. Trade tensions and economic nationalism are disrupting global trade flows and supply chains.
2. Countries are increasingly adopting tariffs, export controls, and restrictive policies.
3. This affects developing economies like India, which depend on global trade for growth.

3. Limitations of Existing Multilateral Frameworks

1. Institutions such as global trade and security bodies are struggling to resolve conflicts effectively.
2. Power asymmetry among nations often leads to unequal influence in decision-making.
3. This reduces the effectiveness of rules-based global governance.

4. Need for Middle-Power Coalitions

1. Emerging economies and middle powers can play a key role in stabilising the global order.
2. Informal coalitions among such countries can promote cooperation, trade, and rule-based engagement.
3. These coalitions can act as a counterbalance to dominance by major powers.

5. India's Strategic Role

1. India is well-positioned to act as a bridge between developed and developing countries.
2. It can leverage its economic growth and diplomatic reach to promote global cooperation and stability.
3. India's policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment allows it to engage with diverse partners.

6. Policy Directions for India

Strengthening Trade and Economic Diplomacy

1. Diversify trade partnerships and reduce dependence on specific markets.

Promoting Rule-Based Order

1. Advocate for fair and transparent global governance systems.

Building Coalitions

1. Collaborate with middle powers and developing countries for collective bargaining power.

Enhancing Domestic Capacity

1. Strengthen economic resilience to withstand external shocks and disruptions.

Conclusion

In a disorderly and fragmented global environment, India must adopt a proactive and balanced foreign policy that promotes cooperation, strengthens alliances with middle powers, and supports a rules-based international order. Such an approach will enable India to safeguard its interests while contributing to global stability and governance reform.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/india-should-join-other-middle-powers-to-protect-the-global-rule-of-law-126031601379_1.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. In a rapidly fragmenting global order, India must move beyond traditional diplomacy to build coalitions with middle powers and promote a rules-based international system. Discuss. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

The global order is increasingly characterised by geopolitical tensions, trade conflicts, and weakening multilateral institutions. In this context, India needs to adapt its foreign policy to protect its interests while contributing to a stable and rules-based international system.

Need for New Strategic Approach

1. Weakening Multilateral Institutions

1. Existing global institutions face challenges in enforcing international norms and resolving conflicts.

2. Rise of Protectionism

1. Increasing trade barriers disrupt global trade and economic integration.

3. Importance of Middle Powers

1. Cooperation among middle powers can help promote collective stability and balanced global governance.

India's Role

1. Strategic Autonomy

1. India can engage with multiple partners while maintaining independent decision-making.

2. Coalition Building

1. Collaborating with emerging economies strengthens collective bargaining power.

3. Economic Diplomacy

1. Diversifying trade partnerships enhances resilience and growth.

Conclusion

India must adopt a proactive approach by strengthening partnerships with middle powers and promoting a rules-based global order. This will enhance its role as a responsible and influential global actor in a disorderly world.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/india-should-join-other-middle-powers-to-protect-the-global-rule-of-law-126031601379_1.html

Editorial of the Day – 18.03.2026

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1. A bit of a blur over India's new carbon credit plan (TH) -01
2. India's GDP debate- Right questions, wrong numbers (IE) -04
3. Reform GST- India Should Fix Its Distortive Input Tax Credit Chain (BI) -07
4. Moral Disengagement and the Impact of Power (TH) -09

1. A bit of a blur over India's new carbon credit plan (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Economy, Environment, and Science & Technology)
Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Infrastructure- Energy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
Sub-Topic- Carbon Credit Markets, CCUS Technology, Net Zero 2070, and Climate-Resilient Agriculture.

1. Introduction

The Union Budget 2026 earmarks ₹20,000 crore for a massive "Carbon Credit Programme." However, the policy has encountered a "clarity crisis." On one hand, the official roadmap focuses on high-tech Industrial Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS) for heavy industries. On the other, a powerful media narrative has emerged portraying the fund as a new income stream for Indian farmers through carbon farming. This mismatch highlights the need for a precise policy vocabulary as India builds its domestic carbon market.

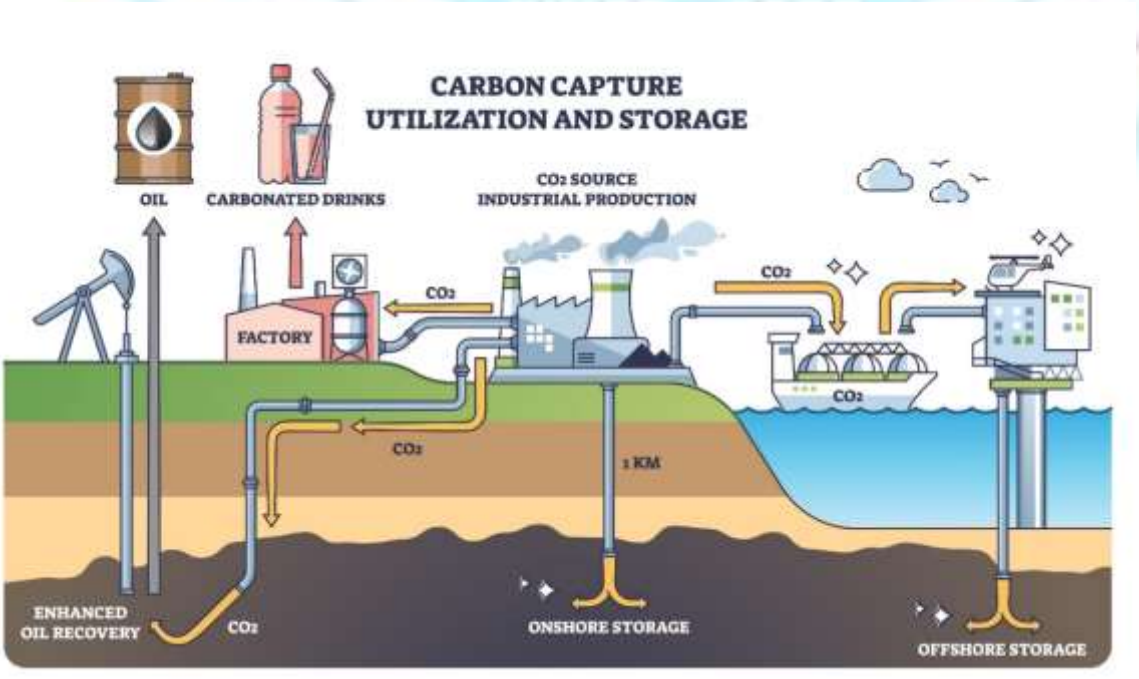
2. The Industrial Core- CCUS Focus (Actual Intent)

The primary objective of the ₹20,000 crore allocation is the decarbonization of the "hard-to-abate" industrial sectors.

Scientific Basis- The programme is rooted in the Department of Science & Technology's (DST) "R&D Roadmap for CCUS" released in December 2025.

Target Sectors- It specifically focuses on point-source emitters-

1. Power & Steel- High-volume coal usage.
2. Cement & Refineries- Process-related CO_2 emissions.
3. Chemicals- Industrial byproduct management.



The Mechanism- Capturing CO_2 directly from smokestacks before it enters the atmosphere, then either utilizing it in industrial processes or storing it deep underground in geological formations.

3. Why Agriculture is Technically Excluded from CCUS

There is a fundamental scientific reason why the Budget's CCUS-focused fund does not currently apply to the agricultural sector-

Point Source vs. Diffuse- CCUS technology requires a concentrated "point source" (like a chimney). Agricultural emissions (Methane from livestock/paddy and Nitrous Oxide from fertilizers) are diffuse and biological, making them physically impossible to "capture" using industrial filters.

Prevention vs. Removal- * **CCUS-** Prevents emissions from *entering* the atmosphere (Industrial).

1. CDR (Carbon Dioxide Removal)- Removes existing CO_2 *from* the atmosphere (Agricultural/Forestry).

The Policy Line- The ₹20,000 crore is intended for *prevention* (Industry), while agriculture currently falls under voluntary *removal* markets.

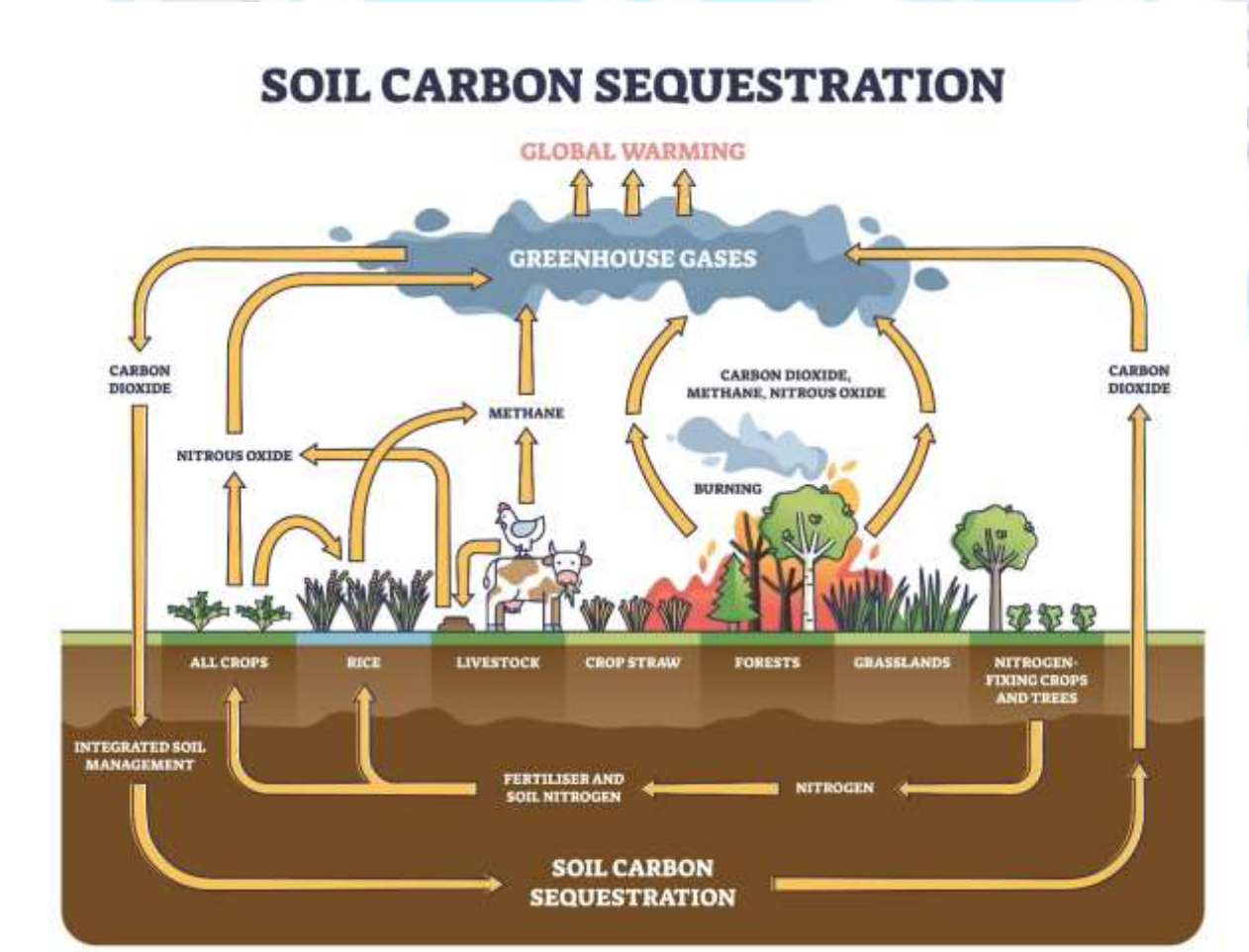
4. The "Farmer Carbon Credit" Narrative (Counter View)

Despite the technical focus on industry, a parallel discourse has gained momentum, suggesting farmers are the primary beneficiaries.

Income Opportunities- Media and public narratives suggest farmers can earn "carbon checks" by adopting Regenerative Agriculture.

Key Practices-

1. Soil Carbon Sequestration- Improving soil health to trap carbon.
2. Agroforestry- Planting trees on farm boundaries.
3. Biochar- Using thermal decomposition of organic material to lock carbon in the soil.



Farms as Sinks- This view treats the 140 million+ hectares of Indian farmland as a massive "carbon sink" rather than an emission source.

5. Root Causes of the Policy Confusion

The "blur" is a result of overlapping concepts and broad terminology-

Feature	Industrial Carbon Credits (Actual Goal)	Agricultural Carbon Credits (Public View)
Technology	CCUS (High-cost, engineering-heavy)	Nature-based (Soil health, planting)
Source	Smokestacks (Point source)	Soil/Biomass (Diffuse source)
Funding	₹20,000 crore Budget Allocation	Voluntary Carbon Markets (Private buyers)
Primary Goal	Industrial Decarbonization	Farmer Income & Climate Resilience

Broad Terminology- By using the generic phrase "Carbon Credit Programme," the Budget inadvertently invited a "catch-all" interpretation.

Private Precedence- Several private startups in India are already paying farmers for carbon credits, leading the public to believe the government fund is a scaling-up of these private ventures.

6. Way Forward- A Dual-Front Strategy

To clear the blur, the government must adopt a transparent, two-pronged strategy that recognizes both the "Smokestack" and the "Soil."

Clarify and Distinguish- Explicitly separate the Industrial CCUS Fund from any upcoming Agricultural Carbon Framework.

Develop a Sovereign "Carbon Farming" Policy- Agriculture needs its own distinct funding and institutional framework (potentially under the Ministry of Agriculture) to standardize soil-carbon measurement.

Digital Integration- Use the Agri stack (digital farm records) to verify agricultural credits, ensuring they are high-integrity and trust-based for the global market.

Science-Policy Communication- Bridging the gap between technical DST roadmaps and public messaging to manage stakeholder expectations.

7. Conclusion

The ₹20,000 crore allocation is a vital investment in India's industrial future, specifically targeting sectors that are hardest to clean up. However, the excitement surrounding farmer-based credits indicates a massive, untapped appetite for a Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) framework. Moving forward, India should not choose between industry and agriculture; it should build dedicated, high-integrity frameworks for both, ensuring the industrial sector captures its waste while the agricultural sector is rewarded for its healing power.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bit-of-a-blur-over-indias-new-carbon-credit-plan/article70754773.ece

Question

"The ₹20,000 crore carbon credit programme announced in the Union Budget 2026 is a significant attempt to balance industrial decarbonization with climate goals. Critically analyze the strategic intent of this allocation and discuss the implications of the existing 'policy blur' between industrial and agricultural carbon credits." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In a major push toward achieving Net Zero by 2070, the Union Budget 2026 allocated ₹20,000 crore for a carbon credit programme. While the financial scale is historic, a "clarity crisis" has emerged regarding whether the funds target high-tech industrial Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS) or nature-based agricultural carbon credits.

2. Strategic Intent- The "Smokestack" Focus

The official roadmap for this fund is rooted in the Department of Science & Technology's (DST) CCUS Roadmap (2025).

Hard-to-Abate Sectors- The primary intent is to provide financial and technical support to sectors like Steel, Cement, Refineries, and Chemicals, which are point-source emitters where electrification is not yet feasible.
Preventive Technology- By investing in CCUS, the government aims to prevent CO_2 from entering the atmosphere, ensuring that India's core industrial growth does not derail its climate commitments.
Industrial Competitiveness- Building a robust domestic carbon market for industry ensures that Indian exports remain competitive in a world increasingly adopting "carbon border taxes" (like the EU's CBAM).

3. The "Policy Blur" and Agricultural Expectations

A parallel narrative has suggested that this fund would directly benefit farmers through carbon farming. This "blur" stems from a mixing of two distinct scientific concepts-
CCUS vs. CDR- CCUS (Industry) prevents new emissions, whereas Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) (Agriculture/Forestry) removes existing CO_2 from the air. The budget currently prioritizes the former, yet public messaging has leaned toward the latter.
Diffuse Emissions- Technically, agricultural emissions are diffuse and biological, making them unsuitable for the industrial point-source capture technologies funded by the ₹20,000 crore.
Market Fragmentation- The confusion risks creating a "trust deficit" in the voluntary carbon market, where private startups are already engaging farmers. Without a clear distinction, farmers may expect direct government payouts that the current industrial-focused fund is not designed to provide.

4. Implications for Climate Policy

Communication Gap- The lack of precision in policy terminology ("carbon credit programme") can lead to misaligned investments and stakeholder disappointment.
Opportunity Cost- While the industrial focus is essential for Net Zero, ignoring a formal, state-backed Agricultural Carbon Framework misses an opportunity to incentivize soil health and create new income streams for 140 million+ farm households.

5. Conclusion

The ₹20,000 crore allocation is a vital investment in India's industrial future. However, to ensure maximum climate impact, the government must adopt a dual-front strategy. This involves explicitly separating the Industrial CCUS Fund from a dedicated Agricultural Carbon Policy. By clarifying the "smokestack" vs. "soil" distinction, India can successfully capture industrial waste while simultaneously rewarding its agricultural sector for restorative climate action.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bit-of-a-blur-over-indias-new-carbon-credit-plan/article70754773.ece

2. India's GDP debate- Right questions, wrong numbers (IE)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Indian Economy)
Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Sub-Topic- National Income Accounting, GDP Calculation Methodology, Inflation (WPI vs. CPI), and the Informal Sector.

1. Introduction

In early 2026, the discourse on India's economic growth was invigorated by a working paper questioning potential overestimation. In response, the government revised its GDP methodology in February 2026, aiming to refine data sources and estimation techniques. This debate is not merely academic; it highlights the friction between traditional statistical models and a rapidly formalizing, service-driven economy.

2. GDP Estimation- Concept and Importance

Measurement Metrics- GDP is calculated primarily through Gross Value Added (GVA) across agriculture, industry, and services. The standard formula used is-

GDP = GVA + (\{Product Taxes} - \{Product Subsidies})

Policy Significance- High-quality GDP data is the bedrock for fiscal policy, central bank monetary decisions (like inflation targeting), and budget allocations for welfare.

Global Compliance- India adheres to the UN System of National Accounts (SNA), ensuring that its data remains globally comparable.

Inherent Limitations- Standard GDP metrics struggle to account for the informal sector, environmental degradation costs, and wealth inequality.

3. The Deflator Debate- WPI vs. CPI

A core technical dispute centres on the "deflator"—the tool used to convert Nominal GDP into Real GDP by removing the effects of inflation.

Feature	Wholesale Price Index (WPI)	Consumer Price Index (CPI)
Current Use	Used as a proxy for the Producer Price Index (PPI).	Preferred by some critics for reflecting cost of living.
Logic	Aligns with global norms for measuring production value.	Reflects consumption patterns, not industrial output.
Sector Fit	Accurately captures bulk goods like steel, cement, and chemicals.	Does not include many industrial goods in its basket.

Key takeaway- While critics argue for CPI, WPI-type indices are often more technically appropriate for GVA, which focuses on production rather than household consumption.

4. Informal Sector Measurement Challenges

Scale of Informality- Historically, the informal sector provides 80–85% of employment, making its omission or miscalculation a significant statistical risk.

The "Proxy" Problem- Due to a lack of real-time data, statisticians often rely on formal sector performance as a proxy for the informal sector, which can be misleading if the two sectors diverge.

Recent Breakthroughs- The integration of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and unincorporated sector surveys has finally begun to fill these data gaps.

Methodological Critique- Some economists claim that current estimates ignore segments like construction and housing, potentially undercounting informal output.

5. Formalization of the Indian Economy

Policy Catalysts- Structural reforms—such as GST, corporate tax overhauls, and the push for digital payments—have pushed previously "shadow" activities into the light.

Turnover vs. Firm Count- Evidence from the 2017–18 Economic Survey suggested that while informal firms are numerous, 80% of economic turnover is already within the formal net.

Digital Expansion- The rise of Fintech, IT services, and Global Capability Centres (GCCs) has created vast value that traditional manufacturing-based indicators often miss.

6. Use of Administrative and Corporate Data

MCA-21 Database- Real-time corporate filings provide a comprehensive view of firm performance, significantly reducing the "lag" associated with older surveys.

Survey vs. Data- Unlike the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), which suffers from sampling errors, administrative data captures actual financial reports.

The "Value Added" Distinction- Critics caution that corporate sales measure turnover, not value added, necessitating complex adjustments to avoid inflating growth figures.

7. Structural Transformation- Why Traditional Proxies Falter

Services Dominance- With services now accounting for over 50–55% of GDP, old barometers like railway freight or steel consumption are no longer perfect mirrors of growth.
Alternative Financing- The explosion of NBFCs and Fintech lending means that "Bank Credit" growth—a classic GDP proxy—now tells only half the story.
Weak Correlation ≠ Mismeasurement- The decoupling of GDP from traditional industrial indicators often reflects a maturing economy rather than flawed math.

8. The 2026 Methodology Revision

New Base Year- The update to the 2022–23 base year integrates the most recent post-pandemic economic structure.
Data Consolidation- Greater reliance on GSTN records and digital footprints has refined the precision of the National Accounts.
Institutional Credibility- The 2026 revisions showed only moderate adjustments, contradicting claims of massive overestimation and suggesting that previous models were largely robust.

9. Conclusion

The GDP debate signifies a healthy evolution in India's statistical journey. While the 2026 revision has addressed several concerns, the long-term goal remains the development of a standalone Producer Price Index (PPI) and even deeper coverage of the unincorporated sector.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-gdp-debate-right-questions-wrong-numbers-10587555/

Question

"The 2026 revision of India's GDP methodology has ignited a debate on the accuracy of national accounts, particularly concerning the choice of deflators and the measurement of the informal sector. Critically analyze the structural and methodological challenges in capturing the true value of a rapidly formalizing and service-driven economy." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

GDP serves as the primary economic compass for policy and investment. In February 2026, the government updated the base year to 2022–23 and integrated new administrative datasets to mirror India's structural shifts. However, critics argue that these changes might lead to an overestimation of growth, primarily due to the selection of inflation deflators and the continued "statistical invisibility" of the massive informal sector.

2. The Deflator Dilemma- Production vs. Consumption

To move from Nominal GDP to Real GDP, a "deflator" must be applied. The choice of this index is at the heart of the 2026 debate-
The Production Side (WPI)- India uses the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a proxy for the Producer Price Index (PPI). This aligns with international norms that suggest GDP should reflect what producers receive.
The Consumption Side (CPI)- Critics argue that using Consumer Price Index (CPI) would be more accurate. However, CPI reflects household consumption (food, rent) rather than industrial output (steel, cement, IT exports), which are better captured by WPI-type indices.
The "Value Added" Gap- If WPI is very low (due to cheap global commodity prices) while CPI is high, the resulting "real growth" can look artificially inflated, leading to the "overestimation" claim.

3. Measuring the Informal Sector through Proxies

India's informal sector (~80% of employment) presents a significant hurdle-
Dependence on Formal Proxies- Since real-time data for millions of small firms is unavailable, statisticians often assume the informal sector grows at the same rate as the formal sector.
The Divergence Risk- In a rapidly formalizing economy, the formal sector might thrive (due to GST, digital payments) while the informal sector struggles. Using the former as a proxy for the latter then results in a upward bias in GDP figures.

Recent Improvements- The 2026 revision has attempted to mitigate this by using the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and unincorporated sector surveys to gather more "ground-level" data.

4. Formalization and the "New Economy"

The structural shift toward a service-driven, digital economy has rendered traditional proxies obsolete-
Services Sector Dominance- With services contributing over 55% to GVA, traditional indicators like railway freight or steel consumption no longer provide a complete picture of growth.
Administrative Data (MCA-21 & GSTN)- The move toward using MCA-21 (corporate filings) and GST records provides real-time, audited data, which is more reliable than periodic surveys, though critics worry about the exclusion of smaller, non-filing firms.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 GDP debate highlights the need for constant methodological refinement rather than a dismissal of existing data. While the use of WPI and MCA-21 remains technically defensible, the long-term solution lies in developing a dedicated Producer Price Index (PPI) and ensuring that the "informal sector" is measured through more frequent, direct surveys rather than mere formal-sector proxies.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-gdp-debate-right-questions-wrong-numbers-10587555/

3. Reform GST- India Should Fix Its Distortive Input Tax Credit Chain (BI)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- Taxation reforms and fiscal policy
Sub-Topic- Manufacturing and export competitiveness

Introduction

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced to create a unified indirect tax system and ensure seamless flow of input tax credit (ITC). However, structural issues in the ITC chain have led to credit blockages, compliance burdens, and inefficiencies, affecting businesses and economic competitiveness. Reforming the GST framework is essential to restore credit neutrality and efficiency.

1. Concept of Input Tax Credit (ITC)

1. ITC allows businesses to offset taxes paid on inputs against taxes payable on outputs.
2. It ensures that taxation is levied only on value addition, avoiding cascading effects.
3. A seamless ITC chain is crucial for efficient taxation and cost reduction.

2. Issues in the Current ITC Framework

Breaks in Credit Chain

1. Restrictions and conditions disrupt the continuous flow of tax credit.

Compliance Burden

1. Complex documentation and verification requirements increase transaction costs.

Working Capital Constraints

1. Delays in credit availability lock up business funds, affecting liquidity.

Inverted Duty Structure

1. Higher taxes on inputs than outputs lead to accumulation of unutilised credits.

3. Impact on Economy and Industry

Higher Production Costs

1. Blocked credits increase cost of production for firms.

Reduced Competitiveness

1. Indian exports become less competitive in global markets due to higher costs.

Impact on MSMEs

1. Smaller firms face greater challenges due to limited financial capacity and compliance resources.

4. Structural Challenges in GST Design

1. Multiple tax rates create classification disputes and complexity.
2. Frequent policy changes increase uncertainty for businesses.
3. Limited coordination between central and state authorities affects implementation efficiency.

5. Measures for GST Reform

Ensuring Seamless ITC Flow

1. Remove unnecessary restrictions and simplify credit eligibility rules.

Simplification of Compliance

1. Streamline return filing and reduce documentation requirements.

Rationalisation of Tax Rates

1. Move towards a simplified and uniform tax structure.

Faster Refund Mechanisms

1. Ensure timely refunds to improve business liquidity and working capital.

6. Benefits of Reform

1. Reduction in cascading taxes and production costs.
2. Improved ease of doing business and investment climate.
3. Enhanced export competitiveness and manufacturing growth.
4. Strengthening of India's overall tax efficiency and economic productivity.

Conclusion

Reforming the GST framework, particularly the ITC chain, is essential to achieve the original objective of a simple, transparent, and efficient tax system. Addressing structural issues will enhance business confidence, improve competitiveness, and support India's long-term economic growth.
Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/gst-reform-india-chain-of-input-tax-credit-economy-goods-and-services-itc-exports-businesses-11773663297807.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The effectiveness of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) depends on a seamless input tax credit (ITC) chain. Examine the challenges in the current ITC system and suggest reforms to improve its efficiency. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) aim to create a unified tax system by ensuring seamless flow of input tax credit (ITC). However, inefficiencies in the ITC chain have affected its effectiveness.

Challenges in ITC System

1. Breaks in Credit Flow

1. Restrictions disrupt the continuous chain of tax credits.

2. Compliance Burden

1. Complex procedures increase costs and administrative burden.

3. Working Capital Issues

1. Delays in refunds lock up business funds.

Reforms

1. Simplifying ITC Rules

1. Ensure seamless credit flow and reduce restrictions.

2. Streamlining Compliance

1. Simplify return filing and documentation.

3. Faster Refunds

1. Improve liquidity for businesses.

Conclusion

Strengthening the ITC mechanism is essential for improving GST efficiency. Reforms that ensure seamless credit flow and reduce compliance burden will enhance economic efficiency and competitiveness.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/gst-reform-india-chain-of-input-tax-credit-economy-goods-and-services-itc-exports-businesses-11773663297807.html

4. Moral Disengagement and the Impact of Power (TH)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper IV – Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude
Topic- Ethics in public and private institutions
Sub-Topic- Accountability and moral responsibility

Introduction

Ethical decision-making is central to responsible governance and public life. However, individuals and institutions often justify unethical actions through psychological mechanisms that reduce feelings of guilt. This phenomenon, known as moral disengagement, becomes particularly significant when exercised by those in positions of power, as it can normalise harmful actions and weaken accountability.

1. Concept of Moral Disengagement

1. Moral disengagement refers to cognitive processes that allow individuals to justify unethical behaviour.
2. It enables people to distance themselves from the consequences of their actions.
3. This leads to a weakening of moral standards and ethical accountability.

2. Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

Moral Justification

1. Harmful actions are presented as serving a greater good or necessary objective.

Euphemistic Labelling

1. Use of mild or indirect language to downplay the severity of actions.

Diffusion of Responsibility

1. Responsibility is spread across groups, reducing individual accountability.

Dehumanisation

1. Victims are portrayed as less deserving, making harm easier to justify.

3. Role of Power in Ethical Dilution

1. Individuals in positions of power can influence narratives, policies, and public perception.
2. Power enables the normalisation of questionable actions through authority and control over communication.
3. Lack of accountability mechanisms may reinforce unethical decision-making.

4. Impact on Society and Governance

Erosion of Ethical Standards

1. Repeated justification of unethical actions weakens societal moral norms.

Distortion of Public Discourse

1. Media narratives and language can influence how events are perceived and interpreted.

Reduced Accountability

1. Institutional failures may occur when responsibility is unclear or diffused.

5. Importance of Ethical Communication

1. Language and framing play a crucial role in shaping public understanding and ethical judgment.
2. Transparent and accurate communication is necessary to ensure informed and responsible discourse.
3. Ethical media practices can help prevent misrepresentation and manipulation of narratives.

6. Measures to Address Moral Disengagement

Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

1. Clear responsibility and oversight in governance and institutions.

Ethical Education and Awareness

1. Promoting values such as integrity, empathy, and responsibility.

Responsible Media Practices

1. Ensuring accurate and unbiased reporting.

Institutional Transparency

1. Encouraging openness to reduce misuse of power and manipulation.

Conclusion

Moral disengagement poses a significant challenge to ethical governance and public accountability, especially when combined with power. Strengthening ethical awareness, accountability mechanisms, and responsible communication is essential to ensure that decisions are guided by integrity, transparency, and respect for human values.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/moral-disengagement-and-the-impact-of-power/article70755445.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Explain the concept of moral disengagement. How does it influence decision-making in positions of power? Suggest measures to ensure ethical accountability in governance. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Moral disengagement refers to psychological mechanisms that allow individuals to justify unethical actions by minimising their moral consequences. It plays a significant role in influencing decision-making, particularly among those in positions of power.

Influence on Decision-Making

1. Justification of Unethical Actions

1. Actions are framed as serving a greater good, reducing moral guilt.

2. Diffusion of Responsibility

1. Responsibility is shared among groups, weakening individual accountability.

3. Manipulation of Narratives

1. Language and communication are used to reshape public perception.

Measures to Ensure Ethical Accountability

1. Strong Institutional Oversight

1. Clear accountability mechanisms in governance.

2. Ethical Education

1. Promoting values such as integrity and responsibility.

3. Transparent Communication

1. Ensuring accurate and unbiased dissemination of information.

Conclusion

Addressing moral disengagement requires strengthening ethical frameworks and accountability systems. Ensuring transparency and responsibility in decision-making is essential for maintaining ethical governance and public trust.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/news/moral-disengagement-and-the-impact-of-power/article70755445.ece

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 19.03.2026

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1. The Opportunity in Cameroon to Rebalance The WTO(TH)

GS Paper II- INTERNATIONAL RELATION

SUB TOPIC- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Important International institutions, agencies and fora—their structure, mandate.

GS Paper III- ECONOMY

SUBTOPIC- Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Topic- WTO Reforms and Global Trade Governance.

1. Introduction

As we approach MC14 (March 26–29, 2026), the global trade landscape has shifted from the optimistic "trade-for-peace" era of the 1990s to a cynical era of geoeconomic leverage. Yaoundé presents a rare opportunity for the 166 member nations to determine whether the WTO will remain a rule-maker or become a mere bystander in a world of "wrecking-ball politics." With the dispute settlement system paralyzed and rules designed for the 20th century, the stakes for developing nations like India have never been higher.

2. Trade as a Geopolitical Tool

1. **Weaponization of Trade-** Trade is no longer just about comparative advantage; it is a strategic instrument. Tariffs and economic pressure are increasingly used as political "tactics" rather than economic safeguards.
2. **Strategic Levers-** Countries are leveraging economic dependence to gain upper hands in territorial or security disputes, moving away from the "Doux Commerce" (gentle trade) philosophy.
3. **The Yaoundé Test-** MC14 will test if the WTO can pivot fast enough to regulate this power-driven environment or if "might will remain right."

3. The WTO Institutional Crisis

1. **Paralysis of the Appellate Body-** The dispute settlement system—once the WTO's "crown jewel"—remains broken due to stalled appointments. This has led to a lack of enforcement and a "law of the jungle" where powerful nations ignore rulings.
2. **Outdated Rulebook-** Existing rules fail to address 21st-century realities like the Digital Economy, Global Capability Centres (GCCs), and climate-aligned trade measures.
3. **Erosion of Trust-** Weak enforcement has decimated the credibility of multilateralism, pushing nations toward unilateral actions and bilateral deals.

4. Challenges in Decision-Making & Global Order

1. **Consensus vs. Progress-** The consensus-based system, while democratic, has become a "veto-trap," making reforms agonizingly slow.
2. **"Wrecking-ball Politics"-** As noted in the *Munich Security Report 2026*, nations now prefer short-term disruptive gains over the long-term stability of a rules-based system.

3. **Vulnerability of Developing Nations-** Without a strong WTO, smaller and developing economies lose the protection of collective rules and become prey to economic coercion by trade giants.

5. Changing Nature of Global Production

1. **Technological Leap-** Emerging economies are no longer just raw material exporters; they are hubs for advanced, tech-driven manufacturing.
2. **The Climate Nexus-** New trade measures linked to carbon footprints (like CBAM) are creating fresh friction between the Global North and South.
3. **Digital Networks-** The rapid expansion of digital production networks requires a new "digital trade architecture" that the current WTO framework lacks.

6. Rebalancing Predictability and Fairness

1. **The Justice Gap-** Developing nations argue that the WTO ensures the Rule of Law but often fails the Rule of Justice.
2. **Key Friction Points-**
    1. **Agricultural Subsidies-** Persistent disputes over the "Peace Clause" and public stockholding for food security.
    2. **Market Distortions-** Concerns over unequal trade openness and non-transparent subsidies.
3. **Reform Agenda-** MC14 must address "Special and Differential Treatment" (S&DT) to ensure it remains a tool for development, not a loophole.

7. Institutional Adaptability- The Way Forward

1. **Plurilateral Initiatives-** Smaller group negotiations (e.g., on e-commerce) are emerging as a workaround for the consensus deadlock. These must remain transparent and inclusive.
2. **Normative Rebirth-** WTO reform isn't just about technicalities; it's about reaffirming that shared rules protect sovereignty, especially for nations that cannot win a trade war.
3. **MC14 Choice-** The conference must decide- Strengthen the core or watch the fragmentation of the global market into exclusive trade blocs.

Conclusion

MC14 in Cameroon is not just another meeting; it is a battle for the soul of multilateralism. To survive, the WTO must restore its Dispute Settlement Body, modernize its rules for the digital and green age, and bridge the trust gap between developed and developing nations. Without these reforms, global trade risks descending into a chaotic "transactional" world where fairness is sacrificed at the altar of power.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-opportunity-in-cameroon-to-rebalance-the-wto/article70759074.ece**

QUESTION

"The 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé occurs against a backdrop of 'geoeconomic weaponization' and a paralyzed dispute settlement mechanism. Evaluate the economic implications of this crisis for developing nations, with specific reference to India's interests in food security and the digital economy." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in March 2026 is being held at a time when the World Trade Organization (WTO) faces an existential crisis. The shift toward "wrecking-ball politics," where trade is used as a tool for economic coercion rather than cooperation, threatens the stability of global markets. For developing nations like India, the erosion of multilateralism risks a return to a "transactional" trade order that favors capital-rich economies.

2. Economic Implications of the WTO Crisis

1. **Paralysis of Enforcement-** The stalled Appellate Body means that trade disputes remain in a legal vacuum. This allows powerful nations to impose unilateral tariffs or subsidies without fear of effective legal challenge, undermining the "predictability" essential for global supply chains.
2. **Rise of Protectionism-** As global production becomes more tech-driven and climate-aligned, developed nations are increasingly using "green" or "security" labels to justify trade barriers, disproportionately affecting exports from the Global South.
3. **Consensus Deadlock-** The inability to reach a consensus on 21st-century rules for digital services and investment means that global trade is governed by 20th-century frameworks, leading to a "Rule of Law" without "Rule of Justice."

3. India's Core Economic Interests at MC14

India's stance at Yaoundé is defined by two critical pillars-

1. **Food Security & Agricultural Subsidies-** India seeks a "permanent solution" for Public Stockholding (PSH) for food security. The current "Peace Clause" is legally precarious; India demands the right to provide Minimum Support Price (MSP) and buffer stocks for its 800 million+ citizens without being dragged into trade disputes by agricultural exporters.
2. **Digital Economy & E-commerce-** A major point of friction is the E-commerce Moratorium (the ban on customs duties on electronic transmissions). India argue that the moratorium leads to significant revenue loss and hinders the development of domestic digital public infrastructure (DPI). India seeks the policy space to regulate digital trade in a way that protects data sovereignty and local startups.

4. The Way Forward for Developing Nations

1. **Restoring the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)-** Developing nations must collectively push for the restoration of a binding, two-tier dispute system to prevent "economic coercion."
2. **Reforming S&DT Provisions-** "Special and Differential Treatment" (S&DT) must be preserved as a fundamental right for developing nations to ensure that trade liberalization does not lead to domestic de-industrialization.

5. Conclusion

The outcome of MC14 will determine whether global trade returns to a "law of the jungle" or evolves into a more equitable, rules-based system. For India, the priority is to bridge the gap between "predictability" for global markets and "fairness" for its domestic agricultural and digital sectors. A "rebalanced" WTO is not just a diplomatic goal but an economic necessity for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-opportunity-in-cameroon-to-rebalance-the-wto/article70759074.ece**

2. HC Raps ASI For Delay in Surveying Tughlakabad Fort Area to Free It from Encroachments (IE)

GS Paper I- History

Topic- Indian Culture – Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, the Delhi High Court expressed strong displeasure over the six-month delay by the ASI in initiating a court-ordered survey of encroachments around the 14th-century Tughlakabad Fort. The survey is intended to identify illegal jhuggi clusters, residential, and commercial structures that have mushroomed within protected zones. This case has become a focal point for discussing administrative accountability and the systemic failures in safeguarding India's medieval architectural heritage.

2. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)- Mandate & Role

1. **Nodal Agency-** Functions under the Ministry of Culture; it is the premier organization for archaeological research and scientific protection of over 3,600 centrally protected monuments.
2. **Legal Power (AMASR Act, 1958)-** The *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act* empowers the ASI to regulate construction and prohibit any encroachment within a specified radius of a monument.
3. **Technical Breadth-** Beyond simple masonry repair, its roles include epigraphy (study of inscriptions), archaeological excavations, and managing site museums.
4. **Capacity Gap-** Despite its massive responsibility (including UNESCO sites), the ASI often struggles with a shortage of technical manpower and adequate financial resources.

3. Tughlakabad Fort- Historical & Cultural Significance

1. **Founder-** Built in the 14th century (c. 1321–1325) by Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, the founder of the Tughlaq Dynasty.
2. **Architectural Style-** It is a masterpiece of Tughlaq architecture, known for its massive stone bastions, sloping walls (*talus*), and a "fortified city" layout that combined military defense with urban living.
3. **Urban Heritage-** The fort reflects early medieval urban planning and the strategic military mindset of the Delhi Sultanate.
4. **Legal Status-** As a Centrally Protected Monument, any construction within its prohibited zone is a criminal offense, yet it remains one of the most encroached sites in the capital.

4. The Issue of Encroachments- Causes and Impacts

1. **Urbanization Pressure-** Cities like Delhi face extreme land scarcity, leading to informal settlements and commercial hubs encroaching upon "vacant" heritage lands.
2. **Socio-Economic Complexity-** Many encroachers belong to economically weaker sections (EWS). This makes eviction a sensitive political and human rights issue, often leading to prolonged litigation.
3. **Heritage Degradation-** Illegal structures lead to structural instability, block the visual "breathing space" (aesthetic value) of the monument, and destroy potential archaeological layers buried underground.
4. **Systemic Precedent-** Similar challenges are observed at the Red Fort, Qutub Minar surroundings, and Purana Qila, suggesting that Tughlakabad is part of a larger, systemic failure.

5. Governance & Legal Framework

1. **The 2010 Amendment-** The AMASR (Amendment) Act, 2010 strictly defined zones-
    1. **Prohibited Area-** 100 meters around the monument (No construction allowed).
    2. **Regulated Area-** Further 200 meters (Construction allowed only with permission).
2. **National Monuments Authority (NMA)-** A statutory body created to manage these zones and grant permissions, attempting to balance modern development with conservation.
3. **Administrative Inertia-** The Delhi High Court highlighted that the delay in issuing "work orders" for a simple survey reflects a lack of accountability and bureaucratic "red-tapism" within the executive branch.
4. **Judicial Overreach?** The frequent intervention by courts indicates that the executive (ASI and Ministry) is failing to perform its statutory duties, forcing the judiciary to act as a "heritage guardian."

6. Broader Implications of Neglect

1. **Threat to Identity-** Allowing monuments to be swallowed by illegal colonies erodes India's historical continuity and cultural identity.
2. **Economic Consequences-** Poorly maintained and encroached sites discourage international and domestic tourism, leading to a loss of potential revenue and jobs.
3. **Weakening Rule of Law-** When illegal occupations persist for decades despite clear laws, it undermines the credibility of the entire governance system.

7. Way Forward

1. **Technology Integration-** Use of GIS mapping, LiDAR, and drones can provide a non-refutable, digital record of encroachments without the delays of manual surveys.
2. **Inter-Agency Coordination-** Establish a single-window task force comprising the ASI, Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Municipal Corporation, and Police for time-bound action.
3. **Community Stewardship-** Transition from "policing" to "participation" by involving local communities in heritage awareness.
4. **Rehabilitation Policy-** For EWS clusters, the government must provide clear rehabilitation plans to ensure that heritage protection doesn't lead to homelessness.

Conclusion

The Tughlakabad Fort case is a wake-up call for the ASI to modernize its administrative machinery. Preservation of the past cannot be seen as an obstacle to the present; rather, it must be integrated into the Master Plan of the city. Heritage conservation in 2026 requires a blend of legal rigor, technological efficiency, and social empathy.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/hc-raps-asi-for-delay-in-surveying-tughlakabad-fort-area-to-free-it-from-encroachments-10589471/**

QUESTION

"The Tughlaq era architecture was characterized by a shift from 'delicacy' to 'durability,' reflecting the socio-political realities of the 14th century. In the light of the recent preservation challenges at Tughlakabad Fort, discuss the salient features of Tughlaq architecture and evaluate how urban encroachment threatens the civilizational continuity of such medieval sites." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414 AD) introduced a transformative phase in Indo-Islamic architecture. Unlike the preceding Khalji style, which was marked by the use of red sandstone and intricate carvings (e.g., Alai Darwaza), the Tughlaqs favored a more somber, massive, and "austere" aesthetic. Tughlakabad Fort, built by Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, epitomizes this transition. However, as highlighted by recent judicial concerns, this heritage is currently under siege by rapid urban encroachment.

2. Salient Features of Tughlaq Architecture

1. **Sloping Walls (The 'Talus' effect)-** A defining feature was the "battered" or sloping wall, which gave the buildings an appearance of immense strength and durability. This was a departure from the vertical walls of earlier dynasties.
2. **Use of Local Material-** Due to economic constraints and the speed of construction, the Tughlaqs used cheap, locally available grey quartzite stone instead of expensive red sandstone, often covering it with thick layers of lime plaster.
3. **Functional and Military Focus-** The architecture was "puritanical" and defensive. Tughlakabad was designed as a fortified city with massive circular bastions, narrow loopholes for archers, and underground granaries.
4. **The Tomb-Fort Complex-** The tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, connected to the fort by a causeway, introduced the concept of an enclosed, fortified funerary complex, reflecting the unstable political climate of the 14th century.

3. Impact of Urban Encroachment on Medieval Heritage

The encroachment issues at Tughlakabad Fort serve as a case study for the threats facing India's medieval sites-

1. **Loss of Archaeological Context-** A monument is not an isolated building; it is part of an integrated landscape. Encroachment destroys the "buffer zones" and unexcavated archaeological layers that hold clues to 14th-century urban life.

2. **Structural Damage-** Illegal residential constructions often use the fort's ancient stones as building material or lean modern structures against ancient walls, causing structural stress and chemical weathering.
3. **Aesthetic Degradation-** The "visual breathing space" of the monument is lost. When a 14th-century fort is surrounded by 21st-century concrete slums, its historical narrative is drowned out, affecting its value as a site of civilizational continuity.
4. **Administrative Paralysis-** As noted by the Delhi High Court, delays in surveying and clearing encroachments lead to "normalization" of illegal occupations, making eventual conservation nearly impossible.

4. Conclusion

Tughlaq architecture is a vital link in India's architectural evolution, representing a unique blend of military necessity and religious sobriety. The neglect and encroachment at Tughlakabad are not merely administrative failures but a loss of historical memory. Preservation must move beyond "protection" to "integration," where heritage sites are treated as lungs of the city and centers of cultural education, rather than obstacles to urban expansion.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/hc-raps-asi-for-delay-in-surveying-tughlakabad-fort-area-to-free-it-from-encroachments-10589471/

3. PPP- Reimagining National Resource Management (THE PIONEER)

General Studies Paper III – Environment & Economy
Topic- Conservation, environmental protection, and sustainable development
Sub-Topic- Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

Introduction

India's approach to development is increasingly recognising the importance of nature-based solutions (NBS) and community participation. Reimagining Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) as People-Public-Private Partnerships (PPP 2.0) can help integrate environmental sustainability with livelihood generation, ensuring inclusive and long-term development outcomes.

1. Concept of PPP 2.0

1. Moves beyond traditional PPP by placing people and communities at the centre.
2. Integrates government, private sector, and local communities as equal stakeholders.
3. Focuses on sustainable resource management and equitable benefit-sharing.

2. Role of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)

1. Utilises ecosystem services such as afforestation, biodiversity conservation, and water management.
2. Provides solutions that address both climate change mitigation and adaptation.
3. Enhances resilience of vulnerable communities dependent on natural resources.

3. Benefits of PPP 2.0 Approach

Environmental Sustainability

1. Promotes conservation of forests, biodiversity, and natural ecosystems.

Livelihood Generation

2. Creates income opportunities through plantation, eco-restoration, and allied activities.

Inclusive Development

3. Ensures participation of local communities, especially marginalised groups.

Climate Action

4. Contributes to carbon sequestration and ecological balance.

4. Challenges in Implementation

Institutional Coordination-Aligning interests of government, private sector, and communities is complex.

Long Gestation Period-Environmental projects require sustained investment and time.

Monitoring and Accountability-Ensuring transparency and equitable benefit-sharing can be difficult.

Capacity Constraints-Local communities may lack technical and institutional capacity.

5. Policy Measures and Way Forward

Strengthening Community Participation-Empower local institutions for decision-making and implementation.

Clear Legal and Institutional Frameworks-Define roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Financial Incentives-Use mechanisms like carbon credits and performance-based payments.

Capacity Building-Provide training and support for sustainable practices and resource management.

Conclusion

Reimagining PPP through a community-centric approach and integrating nature-based solutions can transform resource management in India. By aligning environmental sustainability with livelihood generation, PPP 2.0 offers a pathway for inclusive growth and long-term ecological resilience.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Discuss how People-Public-Private Partnerships (PPP 2.0) combined with nature-based solutions can address environmental challenges while promoting inclusive development in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Traditional Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) often focus on infrastructure and economic outcomes. The concept of PPP 2.0, which includes community participation, integrates nature-based solutions (NBS) to address environmental and socio-economic challenges.

Role of PPP 2.0 with NBS

1. Environmental Sustainability-Promotes conservation through ecosystem-based approaches.

2. Livelihood Generation-Creates employment opportunities in afforestation and resource management.

3. Inclusive Governance-Ensures participation of local communities in decision-making.

Challenges

1. Coordination Issues-Aligning multiple stakeholders is complex.

2. Long-Term Investment Needs-Environmental projects require sustained funding.

Conclusion

PPP 2.0 with nature-based solutions offers a holistic approach to sustainable development. By combining environmental conservation with community participation, it can ensure inclusive growth and ecological resilience.

4. Time For a Law on Passive Euthanasia (HINDUSTAN TIMES)

General Studies Paper IV- Ethics in public life, end-of-life decision-making
Topic- Health policy, governance, and legal frameworks
Sub-Topic- autonomy and dignity

Introduction

The issue of passive euthanasia lies at the intersection of law, ethics, and healthcare governance. While the Supreme Court has recognised the right to die with dignity under certain conditions, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework creates ambiguity. There is a growing need for a clear law

with safeguards, institutional mechanisms, and awareness to ensure ethical and consistent implementation.

1. Legal Status in India

1. The Supreme Court, through landmark judgments, has permitted passive euthanasia and recognised Advance Medical Directives (AMDs).
2. Individuals can refuse life-sustaining treatment under specific conditions.
3. However, implementation remains complex due to procedural safeguards and lack of clarity.

2. Ethical Dimensions

Autonomy-Individuals have the right to make decisions regarding their own medical treatment and end-of-life care.
Dignity-Ensuring a dignified death is linked to human rights and compassion in healthcare.
Beneficence vs Non-Maleficence-Balancing between relieving suffering and avoiding harm creates ethical dilemmas for doctors.

3. Challenges in Current Framework

Procedural Complexity-Legal processes for implementing AMDs are lengthy and difficult to operationalise.
Low Awareness-Limited awareness among patients and healthcare providers about end-of-life rights.
Weak Palliative Care Infrastructure-Inadequate access to palliative care services, especially in rural areas.
Medical Hesitation-Doctors may fear legal consequences, leading to reluctance in implementing decisions.

4. Need for a Comprehensive Law

1. A clear law can provide uniform guidelines and reduce ambiguity.
2. It can ensure standardised procedures across healthcare institutions.
3. Legal backing would enhance confidence among patients, families, and medical professionals.

5. Way Forward

Strengthening Palliative Care-Expand access to end-of-life care services and pain management.
Simplifying Procedures-Streamline processes related to Advance Medical Directives.
Capacity Building-Train healthcare professionals in ethical decision-making and end-of-life care.
Public Awareness-Promote awareness about patients' rights and legal provisions.

Conclusion

Passive euthanasia raises complex ethical and legal questions that require a balanced approach. A comprehensive legal framework, combined with improved palliative care and awareness, can ensure that end-of-life decisions uphold dignity, autonomy, and ethical responsibility in India's healthcare system.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Passive euthanasia in India operates within a judicial framework but lacks a comprehensive legislative backing. Examine the ethical and legal challenges involved and suggest measures for a balanced policy approach.* (250 words)

Introduction

Passive euthanasia, involving the withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment, has been permitted by the Supreme Court under specific conditions. However, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework creates challenges in its implementation.

Ethical and Legal Challenges

1. Procedural Complexity-Complex safeguards make implementation difficult.

2. Ethical Dilemmas-Conflict between patient autonomy and medical responsibility.

3. Lack of Awareness-Patients and doctors are often unaware of legal provisions and rights.

Measures

1. Enacting Comprehensive Legislation-Provide clear and uniform guidelines.

2. Strengthening Palliative Care-Ensure better end-of-life support.

3. Awareness and Training-Educate stakeholders on ethical and legal aspects.

Conclusion

A balanced approach combining legal clarity, ethical safeguards, and improved healthcare infrastructure is essential to ensure that passive euthanasia is implemented with dignity and accountability.

Editorial of the Day – 20.03.2026

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1. Losing the way- On ISRO and issues with its NavIC constellation (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS III (Science and Technology)
Topic- Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
Sub-Topic- Space Technology, IRNSS/NavIC, Satellite Navigation Systems, and Strategic Autonomy.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, India's indigenous regional navigation system, NavIC, entered a state of operational crisis. Despite a decade of launches starting in 2013, the constellation has seen a rapid decline in its functional capacity. With the recent failure of the atomic clock on IRNSS-1F, the system has fallen below the minimum threshold required to provide reliable Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) services. This decline highlights a growing gap between India's space ambitions and its execution capabilities.

2. The Operational Crisis- Falling Below the Threshold

For a satellite navigation system to work, "the power of four" is the absolute minimum requirement.

1. **Minimum Functional Requirement-** At least four operational satellites are needed to calculate a 3D position (latitude, longitude, altitude, and time).
2. **Current Status (2026)-** Only three satellites remain fully functional for PNT services. This makes the entire constellation technically ineffective for real-time user applications.
3. **Constellation Attrition-** Since 2013, 11 satellites have been launched, but the combined impact of decommissioning, orbital failures, and clock malfunctions has hollowed out the system.

3. Technical Failures- The Atomic Clock Crisis

The "heart" of a navigation satellite is its atomic clock; if the clock fails, the satellite is essentially "blind."

1. **Rubidium Clock Failures-** First-generation satellites utilized rubidium atomic clocks from *SpectraTime* (Europe), which have shown a recurring pattern of failure.
2. **The IRNSS-1F Setback-** On March 13, 2026, the clock onboard IRNSS-1F failed. Although the satellite had completed its design life, its failure was the "tipping point" that broke the minimum constellation requirement.
3. **Launch Setbacks-** The transition to the second-generation was hampered by the NVS-02 launch failure (2025), which failed to reach its intended orbit, further delaying the replenishment cycle.

4. Institutional and Structural Bottlenecks

The crisis is not just technical; it is deeply rooted in how India manages its space assets.

1. **The "Dual-Role" Burden-** ISRO currently handles both the design/R&D and the day-to-day operations of the navigation system. This overburdens the agency and dilutes its focus.
2. **Lack of Dedicated Agency-** Unlike the U.S. (GPS Directorate) or the EU (EUSPA), India lacks a dedicated civilian authority to manage navigation services, user adoption, and international coordination.

3. **Policy Gaps-** The absence of a comprehensive National Space Law creates uncertainty in governance, private sector integration, and long-term funding commitments.
4. **Strategic Origins-** NavIC was born from the denial of GPS during the Kargil War (1999). Its heavy defense focus has arguably slowed down its mass-market civilian adoption compared to systems like China's *BeiDou*.

5. Recovery Roadmap and Constraints

ISRO is attempting to steer the system back to health, but the path is cluttered with obstacles.

1. **Indigenous Advancement-** Since 2018, ISRO has shifted to indigenous atomic clocks, successfully deployed in NVS-01 (2023).
2. **Redundancy Plan-** New satellites are planned to carry five clocks each (up from three) to increase reliability and system lifespan.
3. **Feasibility Concerns-** Low Launch Frequency**-** Current PSLV launch rates are insufficient to replace aging satellites faster than they fail.
    1. **Budgetary Pressure-** Competing priorities (Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan missions) put a strain on the capital available for routine navigation maintenance.
    2. **Confidence Gap-** Repeated technical glitches have reduced commercial confidence in NavIC for integration into smartphones and logistics.

Conclusion

The current distress of NavIC is a sobering reminder that strategic autonomy requires more than just successful initial launches—it requires sustained infrastructure management. While the shift to indigenous clocks and the planned 2026 launches offer a path forward, they must be accompanied by institutional reforms. Establishing a dedicated navigation authority and passing a Space Act are no longer optional; they are essential for ensuring that India's "wayfinder" doesn't lose its own way.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/losing-the-way-on-isro-and-issues-with-its-navic-constellation/article70758366.ece**

QUESTION

"The current operational crisis of the NavIC constellation highlights that technological 'indigenization' alone is insufficient without a robust institutional framework and a sustained replenishment cycle. Critically analyze the factors behind the declining efficiency of NavIC and suggest measures to secure India's navigation sovereignty." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), established to ensure independent regional navigation, is currently facing its most severe operational crisis. As of March 2026, the constellation has fallen below the minimum threshold of four functional satellites required for accurate 3D Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) services. This decline from its original 7-satellite design reflects a mismatch between ambitious strategic goals and the practicalities of space-asset management.

2. Factors Behind Declining Efficiency

1. **Technical Attrition (The Atomic Clock Crisis)-** The primary failure point has been the rubidium atomic clocks. While early satellites used imported clocks that suffered repeated malfunctions, even the transition to indigenous clocks has been slowed by the aging of the initial constellation. The failure of IRNSS-1F in March 2026 was the tipping point that broke the functional minimum.
2. **Replacement and Launch Lag-** The "replenishment cycle" has not kept pace with satellite mortality. The failure of the NVS-02 mission in 2025 further delayed the deployment of second-generation satellites, creating a gap in service continuity.
3. **ISRO's Dual-Role Burden-** Unlike global peers (GPS or Galileo), India lacks a dedicated agency for navigation. ISRO currently manages both research and development (R&D) and daily operations.

This dual burden dilutes focus and delays the transition from a "defense-only" system to a "mass-market" civilian utility.

4. **Lack of Legislative Framework-** The absence of a comprehensive National Space Law hinders private sector participation and long-term budgetary predictability, leaving NavIC dependent on ad-hoc mission allocations.

3. Strategic and Economic Implications

1. **Strategic Vulnerability-** A non-functional NavIC forces India to rely back on foreign GNSS (like GPS or BeiDou), posing a risk during regional conflicts—the very scenario NavIC was designed to mitigate after the 1999 Kargil War.
2. **Economic Stagnation-** The lack of a stable signal reduces commercial confidence, hindering the integration of NavIC into the domestic logistics, drone, and smartphone industries.

4. Measures to Secure Navigation Sovereignty

1. **Establishment of a Dedicated Authority-** India should create a National Navigation Agency (on the lines of EUSPA) to handle operations, user-segment development, and international standard-setting, leaving ISRO to focus on core R&D.
2. **Accelerated Replenishment-** Increasing the launch frequency of GSLV/PSLV missions to deploy the remaining NVS-series satellites is non-negotiable to restore the 7-satellite baseline.
3. **Redundancy and Reliability-** New satellites should move toward a 5-clock redundancy (currently planned) and prioritize the L1 frequency band to ensure immediate compatibility with consumer electronics.
4. **Legislative Action-** Expediting the Space Act to provide a clear legal framework for satellite-based services and liability management.

5. Conclusion

NavIC is a cornerstone of India's Atmanirbhar Bharat in space. However, its current "distress" signals that technical success is not a one-time event but a continuous process of replenishment and institutional evolution. Restoring NavIC's operational health is essential to ensure that India's strategic "eyes in the sky" do not lose their way in an increasingly contested geopolitical landscape.

Source- **https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/losing-the-way-on-isro-and-issues-with-its-navic-constellation/article70758366.ece**

2. Why Supreme Court struck down the 3-month cap on maternity leave for adoptive mothers (IE)

General Studies Paper II- Governance, Constitution, Polity, and Social Justice.
Topic- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections (Women and Children).
Sub-Topic- Fundamental Rights (Article 14, 21), Directive Principles (Article 42), Judiciary, and Gender Justice.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, the Supreme Court of India struck down a restrictive provision that denied maternity leave to mothers adopting children older than three months. The Court declared this age limit arbitrary and unconstitutional, citing a violation of the Right to Equality (Article 14). This judgment mandates that all adoptive mothers are entitled to 12 weeks of maternity leave from the date of adoption, regardless of the child's age.

2. Legal Framework- Maternity Benefits in India

India's legal landscape for maternity protection is built on welfare principles aimed at protecting women's employment and health-

1. **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961-** The foundational law providing paid leave to women workers, reflecting the state's commitment to humane working conditions.
2. **Code on Social Security, 2020-** While this code expanded coverage to adoptive and commissioning (surrogacy) mothers, it retained a three-month age cap for the child, which effectively barred many from accessing benefits.
3. **Directive Principles (Article 42)-** The Constitution mandates the State to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

3. The SC Judgment- Constitutional Pillars

The Court's reasoning was anchored in several key constitutional doctrines-

1. **Article 14 (Equality)-** The Court ruled that the age-based classification lacked a "rational nexus." Since all adoptive mothers perform identical caregiving and bonding roles, there was no logical reason to discriminate based on the child's age.
2. **Article 21 (Life and Dignity)-** The judgment linked maternity leave to reproductive autonomy and the right to live with dignity, recognizing that motherhood is as much a social and emotional state as a biological one.
3. **Substantive Equality-** The Court moved beyond "formal equality" (treating everyone the same) to "substantive equality"—recognizing the specific hurdles adoptive mothers face and correcting them.
4. **Judicial Activism-** This ruling exemplifies the judiciary's role as a corrective force for legislative gaps in social justice.

4. Adoption Realities vs. Restrictive Caps

The Court noted that the three-month limit was practically impossible to meet due to the following-

1. **Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015-** Legal adoption is a rigorous process involving declaring a child "legally free" for adoption.
2. **Procedural Delays-** Biological parents are given a mandatory two-month reconsideration period, and tracing biological families takes time.
3. **Ineffectiveness of the Cap-** By the time the legalities are finalized, the vast majority of children are older than three months, rendering the previous law's "benefit" a nullity.
4. **Institutional Care Needs-** Children coming from institutional care often face higher stress and developmental needs, requiring more, not less, intensive bonding time with their new mothers.

5. Redefining Motherhood- Beyond Biology

The judgment pushed the boundaries of how the state perceives the family unit-

1. **Expanded Definition-** Maternity is now legally defined by the role of caregiving and bonding, not just the biological act of childbirth.
2. **Child Development-** The Court emphasized that early bonding is critical for a child's cognitive and emotional security, regardless of how they entered the family.
3. **The Wollstonecraft Dilemma-** The ruling addressed the persistent conflict women face between their caregiving roles and their participation in the workforce, seeking to alleviate the "double burden."

6. The Road to Social Security Reform

The judgment serves as a catalyst for broader discussions on parental rights in India-

Issue	Current Status	Proposed Reform / Goal
Paternity Leave	Lacks comprehensive national policy.	Recognize parenting as a joint responsibility.
Gender-Neutral Leave	Focus is almost exclusively on women.	Adopt global models (e.g., Sweden/Norway) for parental leave.

Workplace Barriers	Women face career setbacks due to caregiving.	Implement workplace flexibility and supportive infrastructure.

7. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention is a milestone for gender justice and inclusive social security. By removing the arbitrary age cap, the Court has reinforced that the dignity of a mother and the welfare of a child cannot be limited by biological timelines. It signals a shift toward a more empathetic and equitable legal system where family structures are recognized in all their diversity.

Source- **https-//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/sc-maternity-leave-adoptive-mothers-3-month-rule-struck-down-10589099/**

3. Energy security and renewable energy (THE PIONEER)

General Studies Paper III – Environment & Economy
Topic- Energy security and renewable energy
Sub-Topic- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Introduction

India is undergoing a major transformation in its energy sector, aiming to balance economic growth, energy security, and climate commitments. With ambitious targets in renewable energy and electric mobility, the country is transitioning from fossil fuels towards a sustainable and decarbonised energy system.

1. India's Energy Transition Pathway

1. India has significantly expanded its renewable energy capacity, especially solar and wind.
2. The transition is aligned with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and climate goals.
3. Focus is on reducing dependence on fossil fuel imports and improving energy efficiency.

2. Key Pillars of Energy Transition

Renewable Energy Expansion-Large-scale deployment of solar parks, wind energy, and hybrid systems.
Electric Mobility-Promotion of electric vehicles (EVs) to reduce oil consumption and emissions.
Green Hydrogen-Development of green hydrogen ecosystem for industrial decarbonisation.
Energy Efficiency-Improving efficiency across sectors to reduce overall energy demand.

3. Policy and Institutional Support

Government Schemes-Initiatives such as PLI schemes, solar missions, and EV incentives.
Distribution Sector Reforms-Strengthening power distribution through financial and operational reforms.
Infrastructure Development-Investment in grid expansion, storage systems, and transmission networks.

4. Socio-Economic Benefits

Energy Security-Reduced dependence on imports enhances strategic autonomy.
Economic Growth-Renewable energy sector creates jobs and investment opportunities.
Environmental Sustainability-Lower emissions contribute to climate change mitigation.
Inclusive Development-Expanding access to clean energy improves quality of life and rural development.

5. Challenges in Energy Transition

Grid Integration-Managing variability of renewable energy requires advanced grid systems and storage.
Financial Constraints-High initial investment costs for infrastructure and technology.

Dependence on Imports-Reliance on imported components for solar panels and batteries.
Policy and Regulatory Issues-Need for consistent policies and coordination across states.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Grid Infrastructure-Invest in smart grids and energy storage technologies.
Domestic Manufacturing-Promote local production of renewable energy components.
Policy Stability-Ensure long-term policy consistency to attract investment.
International Cooperation-Collaborate globally for technology transfer and climate finance.

Conclusion

India's energy transition represents a critical step towards sustainable development and climate resilience. By strengthening infrastructure, promoting innovation, and ensuring policy coherence, India can achieve a secure, affordable, and clean energy future.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/towards-sustainable-energy-transition

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *India's energy transition is essential for achieving sustainable development and climate goals. Discuss the key challenges in this transition and suggest measures to ensure a balanced and effective energy transition.* (250 words)

Introduction

India's energy transition aims to reduce dependence on fossil fuels while promoting renewable energy and sustainability. This transition is essential for addressing climate change and ensuring long-term energy security.

Challenges

1. Grid Integration Issues-Renewable energy variability creates challenges in power management.
2. Financial Constraints-High costs of infrastructure and technology.
3. Import Dependence-Reliance on imported components for renewable energy systems.

Measures

1. Strengthening Infrastructure-Invest in smart grids and storage systems.
2. Promoting Domestic Manufacturing-Encourage local production of renewable technologies.
3. Policy Stability-Ensure consistent and long-term policy support.

Conclusion

A balanced approach combining infrastructure development, domestic capacity building, and policy support is essential for a successful energy transition. This will help India achieve sustainable growth and energy security.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/towards-sustainable-energy-transition

4. Merge state oil firms to absorb price shocks (THE PIONEER)

General Studies Paper III – Economy
Topic- Energy economics and pricing
Sub-Topic- Public sector enterprises and reforms

Introduction

Volatility in global crude oil prices has significant implications for India's economy, affecting inflation, fiscal stability, and energy security. Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) play a key role in cushioning such shocks. The idea of merging state-owned oil firms and reforming subsidy mechanisms aims to improve efficiency and better absorb price fluctuations.

1. Structure of India's Oil Sector

1. India's oil sector includes major public sector companies engaged in exploration, refining, and marketing.
2. Key entities operate across different segments, often functioning independently.
3. This fragmented structure limits coordinated response to global price shocks.

2. Rationale for Merging Oil Companies

Economies of Scale-Mergers can create larger entities capable of better financial resilience.
Integrated Operations-Combining upstream and downstream activities improves operational efficiency.
Better Risk Management-Integrated firms can balance losses in one segment with gains in another.
Global Competitiveness-Larger firms can compete more effectively with international oil majors.

3. Price Shock Absorption Mechanism

1. Oil price fluctuations directly affect fuel prices and inflation.
2. Stronger, integrated firms can absorb short-term shocks without passing full costs to consumers.
3. This helps maintain price stability and economic balance.

4. Issues with Current Subsidy Framework

Inefficient Targeting-Subsidies such as LPG support are often not well-targeted, leading to leakages.
Fiscal Burden-High subsidy expenditure strains government finances.
Market Distortions-Subsidies can distort pricing signals and consumption patterns.

5. Proposed Reforms

Targeted Subsidy Delivery-Link subsidies to income criteria and direct benefit transfer mechanisms.
Gradual Subsidy Rationalisation-Phase out universal subsidies while protecting vulnerable sections.
Pricing Reforms-Allow fuel prices to reflect market conditions with limited intervention.

6. Challenges in Implementation

Market Competition Concerns-Mergers may reduce competition and create monopolistic tendencies.
Operational Integration Issues-Aligning different organisational structures can be complex.
Political Sensitivity-Fuel pricing and subsidy reforms have significant socio-political implications.

Conclusion

Merging public sector oil companies and rationalising subsidies can enhance India's ability to manage global oil price volatility. However, reforms must balance efficiency, competition, and social welfare to ensure sustainable and equitable outcomes.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/merge-state-oil-firms-to-absorb-price-shocks

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Discuss the role of public sector oil companies in managing fuel price volatility in India. Evaluate the proposal to merge such companies and rationalise subsidies.* (250 words)

Introduction

Global crude oil price volatility significantly impacts India's economy. Public sector oil companies play a crucial role in stabilising fuel prices and ensuring energy security.

Role of Oil Companies

1. Price Stabilisation-Absorb fluctuations to prevent sharp increases in fuel prices.
2. Supply Security-Ensure continuous availability of petroleum products.
3. Fiscal Support-Help manage subsidy burdens through operational adjustments.

Evaluation of Merger Proposal

Advantages

1. Economies of scale and improved efficiency.
2. Better ability to absorb price shocks.

Concerns-Reduced competition and operational complexities.

Conclusion

Merging oil companies and reforming subsidies can improve efficiency and resilience. However, careful implementation is necessary to balance market efficiency with consumer welfare.

Source- https-//dailypioneer.com/news/merge-state-oil-firms-to-absorb-price-shocks

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Editorial of the Day – 21.03.2026

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1. Duty of care- On vaccine injury compensation programmes (TH) -01
2. An ancient temple caught in the heart of a modern conflict (IE) -03
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1. India's Iran stance does fuel a foreign policy debate(TH)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- India and West Asia relations.
Sub-Topic India's foreign policy and strategic autonomy

Introduction

India's approach towards Iran reflects the broader principles of its foreign policy—strategic autonomy, pragmatism, and national interest. In the context of evolving geopolitical tensions in West Asia, India's stance has sparked debate on balancing values, interests, and global alignments.

1. Nature of the Debate

1. One view supports aligning with Western partners for strategic and economic benefits.
2. Another advocates maintaining an independent stance to safeguard long-term interests.
3. The debate highlights tensions between normative values and realpolitik.

2. Principles of India's Foreign Policy

Strategic Autonomy-India avoids rigid alliances, maintaining independent decision-making.
Pragmatism-Foreign policy decisions are guided by national interest rather than ideology.
Multi-alignment-India engages with diverse partners, including the US, Iran, Israel, and Gulf countries.

3. Importance of Iran for India

Energy Security-Iran has historically been a key supplier of crude oil to India.
Connectivity-Projects like Chabahar Port enhance access to Central Asia and Afghanistan.
Geopolitical Balance-Engagement with Iran helps India maintain strategic balance in West Asia.

4. Role of the United States and Global Dynamics

1. The US is a major partner in trade, defence, and technology cooperation.
2. US sanctions on Iran complicate India's engagement with Tehran.
3. India must balance relations without compromising strategic interests.

5. Role of Gulf Countries

1. Gulf nations are crucial for energy supplies and Indian diaspora welfare.
2. They contribute significantly through remittances and economic ties.
3. India's policy must account for regional sensitivities and partnerships.

6. Challenges in India's Iran Policy

Geopolitical Pressures-Balancing relations between competing global and regional powers.
Energy and Trade Constraints-Sanctions and conflicts affect energy imports and connectivity projects.
Domestic and International Perceptions-Foreign policy decisions are often subject to public and political scrutiny.

7. Way Forward

Balanced Diplomacy-Continue multi-alignment while prioritising national interest.
Clear Communication-Explain policy decisions to ensure public understanding and support.

Strengthening Strategic Partnerships-Maintain relations with all key actors to ensure economic and security stability.

8. Conclusion

India's Iran policy exemplifies the complexity of modern diplomacy, where competing interests and global pressures must be carefully managed. By adhering to strategic autonomy and pragmatic decision-making, India can navigate these challenges while safeguarding its long-term national interests.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-iran-stance-does-fuel-a-foreign-policy-debate/article70766711.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *India's approach towards Iran reflects the broader principles of strategic autonomy in its foreign policy. Discuss the challenges and significance of this approach in the context of West Asian geopolitics.* (250 words)

1. Introduction

India's foreign policy is guided by the principle of strategic autonomy, allowing it to engage with multiple global and regional actors. Its approach towards Iran reflects this balance between national interest and geopolitical realities.

2. Significance

1. Energy Security-Iran has been an important source of crude oil.

2. Strategic Connectivity-Projects like Chabahar enhance regional access.

3. Diplomatic Balance-Engagement with Iran helps maintain equilibrium in West Asia.

3. Challenges

1. US Sanctions-Limits economic and energy engagement with Iran.

2. Regional Tensions-Conflicts in West Asia complicate diplomatic balancing.

4. Conclusion

India's Iran policy demonstrates the importance of strategic autonomy in navigating complex geopolitics. A balanced and pragmatic approach is essential to protect India's long-term interests.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-iran-stance-does-fuel-a-foreign-policy-debate/article70766711.ece

2. Our water challenge is stark. Here are four ways to reimagine the solution(IE)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Environment & Economy
Topic- Water resources and conservation.
Sub-Topic Sustainable development and climate change

1. Introduction

India is facing an increasingly severe water crisis driven by rising demand, declining groundwater, pollution, and climate variability. With per capita water availability declining and water stress intensifying, there is an urgent need to shift from crisis management to systemic, sustainable water governance.

2. Nature of India's Water Crisis

1. India has a disproportionately low share of global freshwater resources relative to its population.
2. Rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and agricultural demand are increasing water stress.
3. Groundwater depletion and pollution have reduced water quality and availability.

3. Structural Challenges

Inefficient Water Use-Agriculture consumes the majority of water, often through inefficient irrigation practices.
Fragmented Governance-Multiple institutions manage water, leading to lack of coordination.
Pollution and Mismanagement-Rivers and water bodies are affected by industrial discharge and untreated sewage.
Climate Change Impact-Variability in rainfall increases risks of droughts and floods.

4. Need for Reimagining Water Governance

1. Water must be treated as a strategic and economic resource, not just a public good.
2. Policies should focus on efficiency, sustainability, and resilience.
3. Integrated water management is essential to balance supply and demand.

5. Key Solutions

Demand-Side Management

1. Promote water-efficient agriculture and cropping patterns.
2. Encourage efficient use through pricing and incentives.

Water Reuse and Recycling-Expand treatment and reuse of wastewater for industrial and urban purposes.
Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)-Coordinate across sectors and regions for holistic water governance.
Urban Water Reforms-Improve infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, wastewater treatment, and distribution systems.

6. Role of Technology and Innovation

1. Use of digital monitoring, smart irrigation systems, and data analytics.
2. Adoption of climate-resilient water management practices.
3. Investment in infrastructure for efficient water storage and distribution.

7. Way Forward

Policy Reforms-Rationalise water pricing and strengthen regulatory frameworks.
Institutional Strengthening-Improve coordination among central, state, and local agencies.
Public Participation-Encourage community involvement in water conservation and management.
Sustainable Practices-Promote conservation through education and awareness.

8. Conclusion

India's water crisis requires a paradigm shift from fragmented and supply-driven approaches to integrated, demand-driven, and sustainable water management. By combining policy reforms, technological innovation, and community participation, India can ensure long-term water security and resilience.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/our-water-challenge-is-stark-here-are-four-ways-to-reimagine-the-solution-10593116/

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *India's water crisis is both a resource management issue and a governance challenge. Discuss the key problems and suggest comprehensive measures for sustainable water management.* (250 words)

1. Introduction

India is facing increasing water stress due to rising demand, declining availability, and climate change. Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive approach to water management and governance.

2. Challenges

1. Overuse in Agriculture-Inefficient irrigation leads to excessive water consumption.
2. Groundwater Depletion-Over-extraction reduces long-term availability.
3. Pollution-Contamination of water sources affects quality.

3. Measures

1. Demand Management-Promote efficient irrigation and water pricing.
2. Water Recycling-Expand wastewater treatment and reuse.
3. Institutional Reforms-Improve coordination among agencies.

4. Conclusion

Sustainable water management requires integrated policies, technological solutions, and public participation. This will ensure long-term water security and resilience in India.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/our-water-challenge-is-stark-here-are-four-ways-to-reimagine-the-solution-10593116/

3. Resilient Digital Childhood(THE STATESMAN)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper IV- Ethics in technology, responsibility towards vulnerable groups
Topic- Digital Infrastructure and its impacts.
Sub-Topic Education, child protection, and governance

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed children's lives, offering new opportunities for learning, creativity, and connectivity. However, it has also exposed them to risks such as addiction, harmful content, and reduced well-being. Building a resilient digital childhood requires a balanced approach combining regulation, education, and parental responsibility.

2. Changing Digital Environment for Children

1. Children increasingly access smartphones, online platforms, and digital learning tools.
2. Digital exposure begins at an early age, influencing cognitive and social development.
3. Technology has become integral to education and daily life.

3. Key Risks and Challenges

Digital Addiction-Excessive screen time affects mental health, attention span, and physical well-being.
Exposure to Harmful Content-Children may encounter inappropriate or unsafe online material.
Cyberbullying and Online Safety-Increased risk of harassment, privacy violations, and exploitation.
Impact on Learning-Overuse of digital platforms can reduce focus and academic performance.

4. Limitations of Regulatory Approach

1. Legislation alone cannot fully address the issue due to rapid technological evolution.
2. Enforcement challenges and lack of awareness reduce effectiveness of legal frameworks.
3. Digital platforms often operate across borders, complicating regulation.

5. Role of Key Stakeholders

Parents and Families-Monitor and guide children's digital usage and behaviour.
Educational Institutions-Promote digital literacy and responsible technology use.
Government-Develop policies for child safety, data protection, and platform accountability.
Technology Platforms-Ensure safer design with content moderation and age-appropriate features.

6. Need for a Holistic Approach

Digital Literacy-Educate children about safe and responsible online behaviour.

Balanced Usage-Encourage moderation and healthy offline–online balance.
Institutional Mechanisms-Establish systems for monitoring, reporting, and addressing online risks.
Ethical Technology Design-Promote platforms that prioritise child safety and well-being.

7. Way Forward

Comprehensive Policy Framework-Integrate child protection with education and digital governance policies.
Capacity Building-Train teachers and parents to handle digital risks effectively.
Public Awareness-Promote awareness campaigns on safe digital practices.

8. Conclusion

Ensuring a resilient digital childhood requires a multi-stakeholder approach that balances technological benefits with safeguards. By combining regulation, education, and responsible use, India can create a safe, inclusive, and empowering digital environment for children.
Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/resilient-digital-childhood-1503572442.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *The increasing digital exposure of children presents both opportunities and risks. Discuss the challenges in ensuring a resilient digital childhood and suggest a comprehensive approach to address them.* (250 words)

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have become an integral part of children's lives, offering educational and developmental opportunities. However, excessive and unregulated use poses risks to their well-being.

2. Challenges

1. Digital Addiction-Excessive screen time affects health and learning.
2. Online Safety Risks-Exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying.
3. Regulatory Limitations-Rapid technological changes outpace legal frameworks.

3. Measures

1. Digital Literacy-Educate children on safe online practices.
2. Parental and Institutional Role-Monitor and guide digital usage.
3. Strong Policy Framework-Ensure platform accountability and child protection.

4. Conclusion

A balanced approach combining regulation, education, and responsible usage is essential to ensure a safe and resilient digital environment for children.
Source- https-//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/resilient-digital-childhood-1503572442.html

4. WHO REALLY RUNS THE INDIA'S DIGITAL MARKET? (FINANCIAL EXPRESS)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Science & Technology / Economy
Topic- Digital economy and emerging technologies.
Sub-Topic Data governance and platform economy

1. Introduction

Digital markets in India are expanding rapidly, driven by platforms, data, and algorithms. While technology promised to eliminate intermediaries, it has instead created new forms of control and influence. Increasingly, algorithms, platforms, and data ownership shape market outcomes, raising critical questions about fairness, accountability, and digital sovereignty.

2. Transformation of Market Structures

1. Digital platforms act as intermediaries connecting producers and consumers.

2. Algorithms determine visibility, pricing, and access to markets.
3. This has shifted power from traditional actors to platform owners and system designers.

3. Role of Algorithms in Digital Markets

Decision-Making Power-Algorithms influence who gets visibility, credit, or opportunities.
Data-Driven Control-Platforms use large datasets to predict behaviour and optimise outcomes.
Opacity and Complexity-Algorithmic decisions are often non-transparent and difficult to audit.

4. Emergence of New Intermediaries

1. Contrary to expectations, digital systems have created new intermediaries such as platforms, consultants, and data analysts.
2. These actors shape market access and decision-making processes.
3. This leads to concentration of power in a few entities.

5. Risks and Challenges

Lack of Transparency-Users often do not understand how decisions are made.
Market Concentration-Dominance of large platforms reduces competition and fairness.
Data Asymmetry-Unequal access to data creates power imbalances.
Erosion of Sovereignty-Control over digital systems can shift economic and strategic power away from the state.

6. Implications for Governance

Regulatory Challenges-Traditional regulatory frameworks struggle to address algorithm-driven markets.
Need for Accountability-Ensuring responsibility in automated decision-making is critical.
Digital Sovereignty-Countries must ensure control over data, infrastructure, and digital ecosystems.

7. Way Forward

Algorithmic Transparency-Promote explainability and auditing of AI and algorithmic systems.
Strengthening Regulation-Develop frameworks for platform accountability and fair competition.
Data Governance-Ensure equitable access and protection of data resources.
Building Domestic Capabilities-Invest in indigenous digital infrastructure and technologies.

8. Conclusion

Digital markets are reshaping economic and governance structures by concentrating power in algorithms and platforms. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and digital sovereignty is essential to create a fair, inclusive, and resilient digital economy.

Source- https-//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/who-really-runs-indias-digital-markets/4179226/

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Digital markets are increasingly governed by algorithms rather than traditional institutions. Discuss the implications of this shift for market fairness and digital sovereignty, and suggest regulatory measures.* (250 words)

1. Introduction

Digital markets are increasingly driven by algorithms and data, which determine market access and outcomes. This shift has transformed traditional economic structures and raised concerns about fairness and sovereignty.

2. Implications

1. Market Concentration-Large platforms dominate, reducing competition.
2. Lack of Transparency-Algorithmic decisions are opaque and difficult to regulate.
3. Data Asymmetry-Unequal access to data creates power imbalances.

3. Measures

1. Regulatory Frameworks-Strengthen rules for platform accountability.

2. Algorithmic Transparency-Ensure explainability of automated decisions.

Promote equitable access and protection of data.

4. Conclusion

Balancing innovation with regulation is essential to ensure fair and sovereign digital markets. Effective governance will help create a transparent and inclusive digital economy.

Source- https-//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/who-really-runs-indias-digital-markets/4179226/

Editorial of the Day – 23.03.2026

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1. 'Double Engine' — Cute Slogan, A Serious Federal Question (TH) -01
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1. 'Double Engine' — Cute Slogan, A Serious Federal Question (TH)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – Polity & Governance
Topic- Federal structure of India.
Sub-Topic- Fiscal federalism and constitutional bodies

Introduction

India's federal structure is based on the principle of cooperative federalism, where both Union and States function within their constitutional domains. The political slogan of "double engine government" raises deeper constitutional concerns about whether development and governance are being linked to political alignment, potentially affecting the balance of federalism.

1. Concept of "Double Engine"

1. Refers to governance when the same political party rules at both Centre and State.
2. It is projected as enabling better coordination and faster development.
3. However, it raises concerns about political conditionality in governance.

2. Constitutional Basis of Federalism

1. The Constitution establishes a system of division of powers between Union and States.
2. States are not subordinate to the Centre but function within defined domains.
3. Fiscal transfers and governance are meant to be neutral and rule-based, not politically driven.

3. Issues and Concerns

Political Conditionality

1. Linking development benefits to political alignment undermines constitutional equality among states.

Fiscal Federalism Distortion

1. Use of financial transfers and grants may become biased or discretionary.

Role of Governor

1. Delays in assent to bills and political interference can weaken state autonomy.

Centralisation Tendencies

1. Increasing use of central authority reduces functional independence of states.

4. Impact on Governance

Erosion of Cooperative Federalism

1. Weakens trust between Centre and States.

Reduced Accountability

1. Governance decisions may be influenced by political considerations rather than public interest.

Regional Inequality

1. Uneven distribution of resources can widen development disparities.

5. Judicial and Institutional Dimensions

1. Courts have intervened in cases involving delays in gubernatorial assent and misuse of powers.
2. Institutions like the Finance Commission are meant to ensure fairness in resource allocation.
3. Strengthening institutional mechanisms is key to preserving federal balance.

6. Way Forward

Ensuring Political Neutrality

1. Development policies must remain independent of political alignment.

Strengthening Fiscal Federalism

1. Enhance transparency and objectivity in resource distribution.

Reforming Role of Governor

1. Clearly define limits to prevent political misuse of office.

Institutional Reforms

1. Empower constitutional bodies to maintain checks and balances.

Conclusion

India's federal system must be guided by constitutional principles rather than political slogans. Ensuring fairness, autonomy, and cooperation between Centre and States is essential for maintaining democratic balance and inclusive development.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/double-engine-cute-slogan-a-serious-federal-question/article70773045.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The idea of "double engine government" raises important questions about the nature of Indian federalism. Examine its implications for Centre–State relations and suggest measures to strengthen cooperative federalism. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's federal structure is based on the principle of cooperative governance between the Centre and States. The concept of "double engine government" highlights the role of political alignment in governance but raises concerns about federal balance.

Implications

1. Political Conditionality

1. Development may be linked to party alignment, undermining equality.

2. Fiscal Imbalance

1. Resource allocation may become biased.

3. Centralisation

1. Increased control of Centre over states.

Measures

1. Strengthening Institutions

1. Ensure objective functioning of Finance Commission.

2. Reforming Governor's Role

1. Prevent misuse of constitutional authority.

3. Promoting Cooperative Federalism

1. Encourage collaboration beyond political lines.

Conclusion

Maintaining federal balance requires adherence to constitutional principles. A neutral and cooperative approach is essential for ensuring equitable development and democratic stability.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/double-engine-cute-slogan-a-serious-federal-question/article70773045.ece

2. India's Foreign Policy Has Held a Difficult Balance. Now, It's Abandoning Its Voice (IE)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- India's foreign policy and strategic autonomy.
Sub-Topic- Role of India in global governance

Introduction

India's foreign policy has historically balanced strategic autonomy with moral positioning, combining pragmatism with a principled voice on global issues. However, in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, debates have emerged on whether India is prioritising strategic restraint over ethical articulation, raising questions about its global role.

1. Tradition of Balanced Foreign Policy

1. India has followed a policy of non-alignment and strategic autonomy.
2. It has historically taken positions on issues like anti-colonialism, apartheid, and global justice.
3. This approach combined national interest with moral leadership.

2. Shift Towards Strategic Restraint

Pragmatic Engagement

1. Increasing focus on economic growth, security, and partnerships.

Avoidance of Direct Criticism

1. India often adopts neutral or cautious positions in global conflicts.

Multi-alignment Strategy

1. Engagement with multiple global powers without firm alignment.

3. Arguments in Favour of Restraint

Protection of National Interests

1. Ensures access to energy, trade, and strategic partnerships.

Geopolitical Complexity

1. Avoids entanglement in major power conflicts.

Diplomatic Flexibility

1. Maintains room for negotiation and cooperation.

4. Concerns Regarding Loss of Voice

Erosion of Moral Leadership

1. Reduced articulation of values may weaken India's global normative influence.

Perception of Ambiguity

1. Silence may be interpreted as lack of clarity or commitment.

Impact on Global Standing

1. Limits India's role as a leader among developing nations.

5. Ethical Dimension in Foreign Policy

1. Foreign policy is not only about interests but also about values such as justice, human rights, and equity.
2. A balance is needed between realpolitik and ethical responsibility.
3. India's historical identity includes being a voice for the Global South.

6. Way Forward

Balanced Approach

1. Combine strategic interests with principled positions.

Clear Communication

1. Articulate India's stance transparently to maintain credibility.

Strengthening Global Role

1. Engage actively in multilateral forums and global governance debates.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy must continue to balance pragmatism with principle. While strategic restraint is necessary in a complex world, maintaining a clear and consistent voice on global issues is essential for sustaining India's credibility, leadership, and long-term influence.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-wrong-india-west-asia-war-iran-israel-10590697/

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's foreign policy has traditionally balanced strategic autonomy with moral positioning. Examine whether recent trends indicate a shift towards excessive restraint at the cost of ethical articulation. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's foreign policy has historically combined strategic autonomy with a principled voice on global issues. However, recent developments suggest a greater emphasis on strategic restraint.

Arguments for Restraint

1. National Interest

1. Protects economic and security priorities.

2. Diplomatic Flexibility

1. Allows engagement with multiple global powers.

Concerns

1. Loss of Moral Leadership

1. Reduced articulation of values weakens global influence.

2. Ambiguity in Position

1. Neutral stance may create uncertainty in international perception.

Conclusion

India must strike a balance between pragmatism and principle. A calibrated approach that safeguards national interests while maintaining ethical credibility will strengthen its global role.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-wrong-india-west-asia-war-iran-israel-10590697/

3. Multilateralism Is More Relevant Than Ever as Power Games Shift (MT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic- Global governance and international institutions.
Sub-Topic- India and multilateral groupings (WTO, UN, etc.)

Introduction

The global order is undergoing significant transformation due to geopolitical rivalries, protectionism, and weakening international institutions. In this context, multilateralism—cooperation

through global institutions—remains crucial, especially for developing countries seeking stability, fairness, and representation.

1. Changing Nature of Global Order

1. Rise of power politics and strategic competition among major powers.
2. Increasing fragmentation of global trade and economic systems.
3. Weakening effectiveness of institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO).

2. Importance of Multilateralism

Rule-Based Order

1. Provides a framework for predictability and fairness in international relations.

Voice for Developing Countries

1. Ensures representation and participation of emerging economies.

Conflict Resolution

1. Facilitates peaceful resolution of trade and political disputes.

Global Cooperation

1. Essential for addressing challenges like climate change, pandemics, and trade disruptions.

3. Challenges to Multilateralism

Protectionism

1. Countries adopting unilateral trade measures and tariffs.

Institutional Weakness

1. Bodies like WTO face decision-making paralysis and enforcement issues.

Power Asymmetry

1. Dominance of major powers reduces equity in global governance.

Rise of Bilateralism

1. Preference for regional and bilateral agreements over multilateral frameworks.

4. Role of Emerging Economies

1. Countries like India can act as bridges between developed and developing nations.
2. They can promote inclusive reforms in global institutions.
3. Collective action among emerging economies strengthens multilateral frameworks.

5. India's Approach to Multilateralism

Support for Rule-Based Order

1. Advocates for fair and transparent global systems.

Leadership in Global South

1. Promotes interests of developing countries in international forums.

Strategic Engagement

1. Participates in both multilateral and regional groupings.

6. Way Forward

Reforming Global Institutions

1. Improve representation and decision-making in institutions like WTO.

Strengthening Cooperation

1. Promote collaboration on global issues such as climate change and trade.

Balancing Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches

1. Use both frameworks strategically to advance national interests.

Conclusion

In an era of shifting power dynamics, multilateralism remains essential for maintaining global stability and fairness. Strengthening international institutions and ensuring inclusive participation will enable countries like India to play a constructive role in shaping a balanced global order.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/wto-power-exertion-multilateralism-more-relevant-world-trade-organization-tariffs-india/amp-11773914032066.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. "Multilateralism is more relevant than ever in a world marked by shifting power dynamics." Discuss the challenges faced by multilateral institutions and evaluate India's role in strengthening them. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Multilateralism provides a framework for cooperation among nations in addressing global challenges. However, rising geopolitical tensions and protectionism have weakened international institutions.

Challenges

1. Institutional Weakness

1. Decision-making paralysis in bodies like WTO.

2. Protectionism

1. Rise of unilateral trade measures.

3. Power Asymmetry

1. Dominance of major powers affects fairness.

India's Role

1. Advocating Reforms

1. Support restructuring of global institutions.

2. Voice of Global South

1. Promote interests of developing countries.

3. Strategic Engagement

1. Participate in multilateral and regional forums.

Conclusion

Strengthening multilateralism is essential for global stability. India can play a key role by promoting inclusive reforms and cooperation in international institutions.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/wto-power-exertion-multilateralism-more-relevant-world-trade-organization-tariffs-india/amp-11773914032066.html

4. Alien Mercenaries & Revival of Conspiracies In N-E India (MT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic- Internal security challenges in North-East India.
Sub-Topic- Role of external state and non-state actors

Introduction

The North-East region of India has historically faced insurgency and ethnic conflicts, shaped by internal grievances and external influences. In recent times, concerns have emerged regarding the role of foreign mercenaries, cross-border linkages, and revived conspiracy narratives, which complicate the region's security environment.

1. Nature of Insurgency in North-East India

1. Insurgencies in the region are rooted in ethnic identity, autonomy demands, and socio-economic grievances.
2. Several groups have historically operated with varying objectives and intensity.
3. Over time, many insurgencies have weakened due to peace accords and security measures.

2. External Linkages and Foreign Influence

Cross-Border Support

1. Insurgent groups have used neighbouring countries as safe havens and transit routes.

Foreign Mercenaries

1. Reports suggest involvement of foreign fighters or trained operatives in insurgent activities.

Geopolitical Interests

1. External actors may exploit local conflicts to destabilise the region or influence India's security environment.

3. Revival of Conspiracy Narratives

1. Conspiracy theories linking insurgency to external intelligence agencies or geopolitical agendas are resurfacing.
2. Such narratives can polarise communities and create mistrust.
3. They may also distract from addressing genuine local grievances.

4. Challenges for Internal Security

Complex Threat Environment

1. Combination of local insurgency and external interference increases security risks.

Border Management Issues

1. Porous borders facilitate movement of arms, militants, and illegal networks.

Information Warfare

1. Spread of misinformation and conspiracy narratives can affect public perception and stability.

5. Government Response

Security Measures

1. Strengthening counter-insurgency operations and intelligence coordination.

Peace Agreements

1. Engaging with insurgent groups through dialogue and accords.

Development Initiatives

1. Promoting economic development to address root causes of unrest.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Border Management

1. Improve surveillance and cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Countering Misinformation

1. Promote accurate information to reduce spread of conspiracy narratives.

Inclusive Development

1. Address socio-economic grievances to ensure long-term peace and stability.

Regional Cooperation

1. Enhance collaboration with neighbouring countries on security and intelligence sharing.

Conclusion

The security situation in North-East India is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Addressing insurgency requires a comprehensive approach combining security,

development, and effective management of external influences, while countering misinformation and strengthening regional cooperation.

Source- https-//www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/bharat-bhushan-alien-mercenaries-revival-of-conspiracies-in-n-e-india-1945598

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the role of external factors and conspiracy narratives in shaping insurgency dynamics in North-East India. Suggest measures to address these challenges effectively. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Insurgency in North-East India has evolved over time, influenced by internal socio-political factors and external linkages. Recently, the role of foreign actors and conspiracy narratives has added complexity to the security environment.

Role of External Factors

1. Cross-Border Support

1. Insurgent groups exploit porous borders for safe havens.

2. Foreign Influence

1. External actors may provide training or logistical support.

Impact of Conspiracy Narratives

1. Misinformation

1. Creates mistrust and confusion among communities.

2. Distraction from Core Issues

1. Diverts attention from socio-economic grievances.

Measures

1. Strengthening Border Security

1. Improve surveillance and coordination.

2. Countering Misinformation

1. Promote awareness and factual communication.

3. Development Initiatives

1. Address root causes of insurgency.

Conclusion

A balanced approach combining security, development, and information management is essential to address insurgency challenges in North-East India and ensure long-term stability.

Source- https-//www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/bharat-bhushan-alien-mercenaries-revival-of-conspiracies-in-n-e-india-1945598

Editorial of the Day – 24.03.2026

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1. The need to integrate nutrition in TB care (TH)

GS Paper II - Social Justice & Governance (Health)
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub-Topic- National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), Nikshay Poshan Yojana, and the role of Community-led Health Interventions.

1. Introduction

India continues to bear a high TB burden, recording over 25 lakh cases annually. While the medical infrastructure has improved, the journey to recovery is often hindered by deep-rooted social stigma and the physical toll of malnutrition. The current strategy marks a pivotal shift from a purely biomedical approach (focusing on drugs) to a community-centric model. This evolution recognizes that clinical success is inextricably linked to nutritional security and the psychological support provided by "TB Champions"—survivors who lead the charge in advocacy and care.

2. Lived Experiences and the Barrier of Stigma

The recovery process is as much an emotional struggle as it is a biological one-
Psychosocial Impact- Patients frequently endure isolation, loneliness, and active discrimination within their communities and families.
Vulnerable Demographics- Stigma disproportionately affects women, children, and the elderly, often leading to hidden cases or treatment non-compliance.
Social Exclusion- Discrimination remains a primary barrier, preventing individuals from accessing early diagnosis and community support systems.

3. Paradigm Shift- From Biomedical to Community Approach

The Indian TB response has undergone a fundamental transformation in its philosophy-
Historical Context- Earlier responses were strictly medical, focusing on clinical outcomes while ignoring the patient's socio-economic environment.
Inclusion of Lived Experiences- Moving beyond the "patient" label to acknowledge the individual's experience has improved treatment satisfaction and adherence.
The "TB Champion" Assumption- Initial skepticism that survivors would not re-engage with the system post-recovery has been disproved by the massive success of survivor-led advocacy.

4. The Strategic Role of "TB Champions"

TB Champions are survivors who leverage their personal journeys to transform care-
Survivor Advocates- They act as bridges between the formal healthcare system and the community, speaking a language of empathy that doctors often cannot.
Stigma Reduction- By speaking openly about their journey, they humanize the disease and encourage testing among the marginalized.
Peer Support- They provide motivation and behavioural coaching, ensuring that new patients do not lose hope during the long and often difficult drug regimens.

5. Programmatic Innovations (NTEP)

The National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) has introduced high-tech and patient-centric tools to improve outcomes-

AI-Enabled Screening- Utilizing Artificial Intelligence for rapid X-ray screening to detect TB in high-risk zones.

Improved Drug Regimens- Introduction of shorter, more effective drug combinations to reduce the pill burden on patients.

Nutrition Integration (Nikshay Poshan Yojana)- Financial support through Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) helps patients afford the high-protein diet necessary for recovery.

6. Community Networks and Future Sustainability

While community-led networks have gained momentum, their future depends on structural support-

Peer Counselling- These networks help reduce "self-stigma" (internalized shame) and provide a support system for mental well-being.

Sustainability Issues- A major hurdle is the financial sustainability of survivor-led networks, which often lack steady funding.

Socio-Economic Models- There is an urgent need for self-sustaining models that can integrate these networks into the permanent primary healthcare framework.

7. Conclusion

The fight against TB in India is transitioning into a "People's Movement." Medical treatment is the engine of recovery, but nutrition and community support are the fuel. By empowering TB Champions and ensuring nutritional security through programs like Nikshay Poshan Yojana, India can move closer to its elimination targets while restoring the dignity and well-being of millions of survivors.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-need-to-integrate-nutrition-in-tb-care/article70776979.ece

Question

"The fight against Tuberculosis in India is transitioning from a 'clinical challenge' to a 'socio-economic movement.' Analyse the significance of integrating nutritional support and community-led advocacy in achieving the goals of the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India reports over 25 lakh TB cases annually, bearing the highest global burden. While the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) has historically focused on a biomedical approach (diagnosis and drugs), the persistent challenges of stigma and malnutrition have necessitated a paradigm shift. The current strategy treats TB not just as a bacterial infection, but as a socio-economic condition requiring a holistic "people-powered" response.

2. Significance of Nutritional Integration

Tuberculosis and malnutrition exist in a vicious cycle—malnutrition weakens the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to TB, while TB leads to severe wasting and further nutritional depletion.

Immunity and Recovery- Proper nutrition is essential for the efficacy of anti-TB drugs. Without adequate protein and micro-nutrients, the body cannot repair tissue damage caused by the bacteria.

Nikshay Poshan Yojana- By providing financial support through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), the government recognizes that nutritional security reduces the risk of treatment default and mortality.

Economic Resilience- Nutritional support prevents the "catastrophic costs" associated with the disease, ensuring that the patient has the physical strength to eventually reintegrate into the workforce.

3. Role of Community-Led Advocacy- The "TB Champions"

The emergence of TB Champions (survivors who become advocates) has disproved the notion that TB is a "silent" disease of shame.

Stigma Reduction- Champions use their lived experiences to humanize the disease, encouraging early testing and reducing the social isolation of newly diagnosed patients.
Bridging the Systemic Gap- They act as empathetic intermediaries between the formal healthcare system and marginalized communities, ensuring that the "last mile" of care is reached.
Improving Adherence- Peer counselling by survivors significantly improves treatment compliance, which is critical in preventing the rise of Multi-Drug-Resistant TB (MDR-TB).

4. Critical Analysis of the "Socio-Economic Movement"

While the shift is promising, several challenges remain-
Digital and Financial Gaps- Issues with DBT payments and digital literacy among the most marginalized can hinder nutritional support.
Sustainability- Survivor-led networks often lack a self-sustaining financial model, relying heavily on intermittent grants.
Deep-Rooted Stigma- Despite advocacy, gender-based and caste-based discrimination in TB care persists in rural hinterlands.

5. Conclusion

To achieve the goal of a "TB-Mukt Bharat," India must ensure that the "clinical engine" of the NTEP is fuelled by nutritional security and steered by community leadership. Integrating science with social empathy ensures that patients do not just survive the infection, but recover their dignity and socio-economic standing. The transition to a "People's Movement" is the only path toward a sustainable victory over this ancient scourge.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-need-to-integrate-nutrition-in-tb-care/article70776979.ece

2. UGC needs reform. But the new higher education bill is not the answer (IE)

GS Paper II - Governance & Social Justice
Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic- Higher Education Regulatory Reforms, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the VBSA Bill.

1. Introduction

In line with the reformative spirit of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the proposed VBSA Bill seeks to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) with a new centralized umbrella body. While the intent is to move toward independent and transparent regulation, the bill is currently under intense scrutiny by a Parliamentary Standing Committee due to fears of over-centralization, the erosion of institutional autonomy, and the potential commercialization of higher learning.

2. Structural Issues in the UGC (The Legacy Challenges)

The move to replace the UGC stems from several long-standing institutional failures-
Bureaucratic Inefficiency- The UGC is often viewed as a monolith characterized by red tape and significant delays in approvals, which stifles timely decision-making.
Conflict of Interest- In its current form, the UGC manages funding, regulation, and accreditation. This overlap reduces transparency, as the "funder" and the "regulator" are the same entity.
Limited Capacity- Managing over 1,000 universities and 40,000+ colleges has proven difficult, with the commission lacking the specific domain expertise required for modern, diverse disciplines.
Weak Autonomy- Despite being a statutory body, the UGC has frequently been criticized for functioning as an extension of the government, limiting the academic independence of universities.

3. Reform Vision under NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 provided the blueprint that the VBSA Bill attempts to operationalize-
Separation of Functions- A move toward creating four independent verticals to handle regulation, funding, accreditation, and standard-setting to ensure internal checks and balances.
"Light but Tight" Regulation- The goal is to minimize day-to-day bureaucratic interference while maintaining strict, transparent norms for accountability.
Promotion of Autonomy- Granting institutions the freedom to innovate in curriculum design, research, and administration.
Ending 'Inspection Raj'- Shifting from a system based on prior physical inspections to one based on self-disclosure and outcome-based evaluation.

4. Key Features of the VBSA Bill

The contemporary bill introduces several structural changes that differ from the legacy UGC model-
Umbrella Regulatory Structure- The VBSA acts as a supreme body supervising various councils, though critics argue these councils may lack individual functional autonomy.
Centralised Appointment Mechanism- The Union government retains significant power over the appointment and removal of VBSA members, leading to concerns about political influence.
Expanded Regulatory Powers- The VBSA possesses coercive authority, including the power to penalize institutions, derecognize degrees, and recommend the closure of non-compliant universities.
Delinking Funding from Regulation- In a major departure from the UGC, the VBSA will not handle grants. However, the bill currently lacks clarity on what the alternative funding mechanism will be.

5. Critical Analysis- Issues with the Proposed Bill

The bill has faced backlash on four primary fronts-
Centralisation of Power- Critics argue that despite the "multi-body" structure, effective control is concentrated in the Union government, contradicting the principle of decentralization.
Threat to Federalism- Education is on the Concurrent List. Since states manage over 80% of higher education institutions, their minimal representation in the VBSA structure is seen as a violation of cooperative federalism.
Erosion of Academic Autonomy- Increased regulatory intervention and the threat of penalties may stifle faculty recruitment, curriculum innovation, and institutional risk-taking.
Commercialisation Concerns- By delinking public funding from regulation and failing to emphasize state support, the bill may force institutions to adopt market-driven models, potentially making education unaffordable for the marginalized.

6. Federalism and Public Purpose

Cooperative Governance- For the VBSA to succeed, it must include consultative mechanisms with state governments to reflect regional diversity.
Social Justice- Publicly funded higher education is a primary vehicle for social mobility. Any shift toward commercial models' risks excluding first-generation learners and undermining reservation policies.
Human Capital- Universities are not just "degree factories" but centres for skilled workforce development and innovation; their regulation must be balanced with their role in economic growth.

7. Way Forward

Reforming the regulatory landscape is necessary, but the VBSA must not be "old wine in a new bottle." A balanced approach should-

1. Ensure independent and transparent appointments to the VBSA to guard against political interference.
2. Formalize State representation within the umbrella body to respect the constitutional spirit of the Concurrent List.
3. Provide a clear and robust public funding framework to prevent forced commercialization.

4. Uphold Academic Freedom as the core principle of any educational reform.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ugc-needs-reform-but-the-new-higher-education-bill-is-not-the-answer-10597334/

Question

1. Introduction

The VBSA Bill 2026 marks a paradigm shift in India's higher education governance, operationalizing the "light but tight" regulatory vision of the NEP 2020. By replacing the nearly 70-year-old UGC, the Bill seeks to create a modern, vertically-aligned regulator. However, while it promises to end the "Inspection Raj," it simultaneously faces intense scrutiny for potentially concentrating power in the Union government at the expense of regional and academic independence.

2. The Case for a "Structural Reboot"

The Bill addresses several systemic flaws that had turned the UGC into a bureaucratic bottleneck-

Ending Overlapping Mandates- Unlike the UGC, which managed funding, regulation, and accreditation simultaneously, the VBSA proposes a separation of functions into independent verticals.

Outcome-Based Evaluation- It moves away from physical "inspections" toward transparent self-disclosure, aiming to reduce corruption and administrative delays.

Modernizing Capacity- The UGC was designed for an era with fewer than 100 universities; the VBSA is built to manage the complex needs of over 1,000 universities in a digital-first economy.

3. Critical Concerns- Centralization and Federalism

Despite its modern facade, the Bill has triggered a "federalism alarm"-

Erosion of State Role- Education is a Concurrent List subject. Since State-run institutions cater to over 80% of students, the lack of institutionalized State representation in the VBSA's decision-making bodies is seen as a blow to cooperative federalism.

Concentrated Appointment Powers- The Central government's control over the appointment and removal of VBSA members raises fears of a "loyalty-based" rather than "merit-based" regulatory environment.

Threat to Autonomy- The VBSA's power to penalize, derecognize, or close institutions acts as a "Sword of Damocles," potentially stifling academic dissent or innovative but unconventional curricula.

4. The Commercialization and Funding Gap

Delinking Funding- By removing the "Grants" function from the regulator without clarifying the alternative funding mechanism, the Bill risks leaving public universities in a financial vacuum.

Market Push- There is a legitimate concern that institutions will be forced to adopt market-driven models, which may prioritize "employability" over "equity," making higher education a luxury rather than a public right.

5. Conclusion

The VBSA Bill is a bold attempt to bring Indian higher education into the 21st century. However, a "Viksit Bharat" cannot be built on a centralized model alone. To succeed, the Bill must evolve from a "coercive regulator" into a "facilitative partner." This requires strengthening state participation, ensuring academic freedom, and guaranteeing that the transition from UGC does not lead to a "Commercialization Raj" that excludes the marginalized sections of society.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ugc-needs-reform-but-the-new-higher-education-bill-is-not-the-answer-10597334/

3. Private Credit Markets and Emerging Financial Stability Concerns (BL)

General Studies Paper III- Economic development.

Topic- Indian Economy & Financial Markets.

Sub-Topic- Banking, NBFCs, and Shadow Banking

Introduction

Private credit has emerged as a rapidly growing segment of global finance, filling the gap left by traditional banks. However, its expansion—characterised by low transparency, high leverage, and regulatory arbitrage—raises concerns about whether the current boom may lead to systemic stress.

1. Nature of Private Credit Expansion

1. Growth driven by post-2008 banking regulations that constrained traditional lending.
2. Private credit funds lend directly to firms, often through non-bank financial intermediaries.
3. Increasing reliance on institutional investors (pension funds, insurers).

2. Structural Characteristics

Opacity and Limited Transparency

1. Deals are privately negotiated with limited public disclosure.

High Leverage

1. Multiple layers of borrowing and self-dealing within affiliated entities.

Regulatory Arbitrage

1. Activities shift to less-regulated jurisdictions (offshore centres).

3. Emerging Signs of Stress

Liquidity Risks

1. Illiquid assets funded by investors expecting stable returns.

Sectoral Vulnerabilities

1. Exposure to high-risk sectors like software, leveraged buyouts, and mid-sized firms.

Rising Defaults

1. Increasing loan restructuring and credit stress indicators.

4. Systemic Risk Concerns

Shadow Banking Risks

1. Similar to pre-2008 dynamics, with risks outside formal regulatory oversight.

Contagion Channels

1. Links with banks, insurers, and pension funds can transmit shocks.

Valuation Uncertainty

1. Lack of market pricing makes it difficult to assess true asset quality.

5. Limitations of Regulation

Fragmented Oversight

1. Private credit operates across jurisdictions with inconsistent regulation.

Delayed Risk Recognition

1. Losses may remain hidden due to opaque accounting practices.

Investor Exposure

1. Retail investors indirectly exposed via pension and insurance funds.

6. Way Forward

Enhanced Transparency

1. Mandate disclosures on loan structures, leverage, and risk exposure.

Stronger Regulation

1. Extend prudential norms to non-bank lenders and private funds.

Stress Testing

1. Regular assessment of systemic risks in shadow banking segments.

Investor Protection

1. Safeguard long-term savings through better risk assessment frameworks.

Conclusion

While private credit has improved access to finance, its opaque structure and rising leverage pose potential systemic risks. A balanced regulatory approach is essential to ensure financial stability without stifling innovation.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/is-the-private-credit-boom-going-bust/article70776563.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The rapid growth of private credit markets has introduced new risks to financial stability. Examine the structural vulnerabilities associated with private credit and suggest regulatory measures. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Private credit markets have expanded significantly as non-bank lenders fill gaps left by traditional banking. However, their opaque and leveraged nature raises concerns about financial stability.

Structural Vulnerabilities

1. Lack of Transparency

1. Limited disclosure makes risk assessment difficult.

2. High Leverage

1. Multiple layers of borrowing increase default risk.

3. Regulatory Gaps

1. Operates in less-regulated environments.

Measures

1. Strengthening Regulation

1. Extend oversight to private credit funds.

2. Enhancing Transparency

1. Mandatory disclosure norms.

3. Risk Monitoring

1. Conduct stress tests and monitor systemic exposure.

Conclusion

Private credit can support economic growth, but unchecked expansion may pose systemic risks. Effective regulation and transparency are essential to ensure stability.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/is-the-private-credit-boom-going-bust/article70776563.ece

4. Time Of Great Global Demographic U-Turn (HT)

General Studies Paper III- Economic development.
Topic- Human resources and social sector.
Sub-Topic- Population and associated issues

Introduction

The world is undergoing a major demographic transition, shifting from high fertility and mortality to ageing populations and declining birth rates. This "demographic U-turn" presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring countries to rethink population policies, labour markets, and social welfare systems.

1. Nature of the Demographic U-Turn

1. Earlier concerns focused on overpopulation and resource pressure.
2. Today, many countries face declining fertility rates and ageing populations.
3. The transition is uneven, with developing countries still experiencing population growth.

2. Historical Evolution of Population Policies

Malthusian Concerns

1. Early theories warned of population growth outpacing resources.

Population Control Measures

1. Countries adopted policies to reduce fertility rates, sometimes coercively.

Shift to Development Approach

1. Emphasis moved to education, healthcare, and women's empowerment as drivers of fertility decline.

3. Emerging Trends

Declining Fertility Rates

1. Many countries now have fertility rates below replacement level.

Ageing Populations

1. Increasing proportion of elderly population creates dependency challenges.

Regional Variations

1. Some regions, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, still have high population growth.

4. Economic and Social Implications

Labour Market Impact

1. Shrinking workforce may reduce economic growth potential.

Rising Dependency Ratio

1. Higher burden on working population to support elderly citizens.

Fiscal Pressure

1. Increased demand for pensions, healthcare, and social security.

5. Policy Challenges

Balancing Growth and Sustainability

1. Need to manage both population decline and resource use.

Avoiding Coercive Measures

1. Past experiences highlight risks of forced population control policies.

Ensuring Gender Equity

1. Policies must respect women's rights and reproductive choices.

6. Way Forward

Human Capital Development

1. Invest in education, healthcare, and skills to maximise productivity.

Supportive Family Policies

1. Encourage balanced fertility through incentives and social support.

Active Ageing Strategies

1. Promote participation of elderly in economic and social activities.

Evidence-Based Policies

1. Design policies based on demographic realities and regional differences.

Conclusion

The global demographic shift requires a nuanced and balanced policy approach that recognises both the risks of population decline and the opportunities for human development. Sustainable solutions must prioritise rights-based, inclusive, and evidence-driven strategies.

Source-
https-//www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/time-of-great-global-demographic-uturn-101774281027865-amp.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The world is witnessing a demographic transition from population explosion to population decline. Discuss the implications of this shift and suggest policy measures to address emerging challenges. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

The global demographic transition is characterised by declining fertility rates and ageing populations. This shift marks a move from concerns of overpopulation to challenges of population decline.

Implications

1. Labour Shortages

1. Declining workforce affects economic productivity.

2. Ageing Population

1. Increased dependency ratio and social security burden.

3. Economic Impact

1. Slower growth due to reduced labour supply.

Measures

1. Human Capital Development

1. Invest in education and skills.

2. Supportive Policies

1. Encourage balanced fertility rates.

3. Active Ageing

1. Promote elderly participation in workforce.

Conclusion

A balanced and rights-based approach is essential to manage demographic changes. Effective policies can turn demographic challenges into opportunities for sustainable development.

Source-
https-//www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/time-of-great-global-demographic-uturn-101774281027865-amp.html

Editorial of the Day – 25.03.2026

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1. The judicial push for environmental CSR (TH)

GS Paper III- Economy & Environment
Topic- Statutory Provisions for CSR, Judicial Activism, and Environmental Accountability.
Sub-Topic- Companies Act 2013, Article 51A(g), and Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

1. Introduction

In early 2026, the intersection of governance, economic efficiency, and environmental ethics has taken centre stage. While digital reforms like GST and DBT have improved transparency, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025 highlights a decade-long stagnation in India's governance quality. Simultaneously, the Supreme Court has made a landmark push to reorient Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) toward ecological restoration, linking corporate rights with the constitutional duty to protect the environment.

2. The Governance Backdrop- CPI 2025 & Economic Reality

The quality of a country's governance directly dictates its investment climate and productivity.
Global Trends- Corruption is worsening globally; the average score has dropped to 42, with most nations scoring below 50.
India's Performance- India holds a stagnant score of 39 (Rank 91). This plateau, despite high economic growth, raises concerns about long-term sustainability.
The Cost of Corruption- * Increases economic uncertainty and operational costs.
1. Reduces overall productivity and discourages foreign direct investment (FDI).

Regulatory Complexity- India's massive compliance burden—comprising over 26,000 legal provisions—creates excessive discretion for officials, leading to "rent-seeking" behaviour.
Digital Silver Linings- Reforms such as Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), GST, and digital payments have successfully plugged leakages and increased transparency

3. The CSR Framework- A History of Environmental Neglect

Since the Companies Act, 2013, India has been a global leader in mandated CSR, yet the "green" aspect of this mandate has been historically overlooked.
Climate Commitment Paradox- India aims for Net-Zero by 2070, yet corporate spending does not reflect this urgency.
Social vs. Ecological- CSR funds are traditionally funnelled into immediate social needs (poverty, education), treating the environment as a "secondary" concern.
Rising Threats- Issues like acute water scarcity, air pollution, and waste mismanagement are reaching critical levels, necessitating a move beyond social-only CSR.

4. The Judicial Pivot- From Charity to Accountability

The Supreme Court has redefined the legal nature of CSR, elevating it to a constitutional level.
Constitutional Grounding- The Court linked environmental CSR to Article 51A(g), which states it is a fundamental duty of every citizen (and by extension, corporate entities) to protect and improve the natural environment.
The Catalyst- Habitat destruction of the Great Indian Bustard served as a trigger point for the judiciary to demand higher corporate accountability.

Rights-Duty Linkage- The judiciary now holds that the right to conduct business is fundamentally linked to the obligation of environmental restoration.

5. Skewed CSR Spending Patterns

Current data reveals a massive imbalance in how corporates allocate their social funds-

Sector	Spending Percentage	Focus Type
Education	38%	Long-term social
Healthcare	22%	Immediate social
Rural Development	10%	Infrastructure
Environment	7–9%	Ecological (Underfunded)

Short-termism- Firms prefer "quick win" projects with high visibility (like building a school wing) over long-term, invisible ecological work like soil rejuvenation.
Positive Outliers- Some firms (Mahindra, ITC, Tata) have led massive afforestation and water conservation drives, but they remain exceptions to the general trend.

6. Challenges in Environmental Restoration

India aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030, but the private sector currently contributes only ~2% to this goal.
Gestation Period- Ecological restoration takes years to show results, making it unattractive for annual CSR reporting.
Scientific Gaps- Restoration requires expertise in native biodiversity. Techniques like Miyawaki plantations are often misused, sometimes harming local ecosystems by introducing non-native species.
Policy Barriers- There is weak collaboration between corporate houses and state forest authorities, coupled with a lack of policy support for using degraded lands.

7. The Way Forward- Ecosystem-Centric CSR

To meet national and global goals, CSR must evolve into a precision tool for ecosystem recovery.
Measurable Outcomes- Shift focus to hard metrics like soil carbon storage, biodiversity indices, and groundwater recharge levels.
Partnership Models- Foster deep collaborations between corporates, forest departments, and local community committees to ensure projects are scientifically sound.
Financial Innovation- Create Restoration Funds or escrow mechanisms to ensure financing lasts the full length of an ecological project's life cycle.
Governance Shift- Move from "shareholder-centric" models to "environment-centric" governance, where sustainability is a core business KPI.

Conclusion

The CPI 2025 serves as a warning that economic growth without institutional integrity and environmental accountability is fragile. While digital reforms have laid the groundwork for transparency, the future of Indian governance depends on simplifying compliance and enforcing a "Judicial Push" for environmental CSR. By transforming CSR from a ledger entry into a constitutional act of restoration, India can support its long-term economic ambitions while securing its ecological future.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-judicial-push-for-environmental-csr/article70781275.ece

Question

"Evaluate the effectiveness of reframing Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a 'Constitutional Duty' in addressing India's ecological challenges. To what extent can this judicial push compensate for the governance gaps highlighted by the Corruption Perceptions Index 2025?" (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 judicial shift reframing CSR under Article 51A(g) transforms it from a corporate "choice" into a mandatory "constitutional duty." While the Companies Act, 2013 provided the legal skeleton, the Supreme Court has provided the "moral soul" by linking business rights to environmental restoration. However, the effectiveness of this move must be evaluated against a backdrop of stagnant governance and complex regulatory hurdles.

2. The Constitutional Strength of the Shift

Legal Weight- By anchoring CSR in Fundamental Duties, the judiciary makes environmental neglect a constitutional failure, not just a regulatory lapse.
Restoration Focus- It moves the needle from "avoiding harm" to "active restoration," essential for meeting India's goal of restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
Accountability- It empowers citizens and NGOs to hold corporates accountable in courts for failing their "Ecological Duty," regardless of their profit margins.

3. Evaluating the "Governance Gap" (CPI 2025 Context)

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025 (India Rank- 91, Score- 39) reveals deep structural "governance gaps" that judicial pushes alone may struggle to fix-
The Compliance Paradox- With over 26,000 legal provisions, the "discretionary power" of officials often leads to rent-seeking. A judicial mandate might simply add another layer of paperwork that corporates "bypass" through transactional corruption.
The "Greenwashing" Risk- In a stagnant governance environment, companies often spend the mandatory 2% on "visible but shallow" projects (like urban Miyawaki forests) to satisfy inspectors, while their core industrial processes continue to degrade remote ecosystems.
Implementation Lag- While GST and DBT have improved fund tracking, the "field-level" monitoring of a forest restoration project remains weak, prone to the same leakages highlighted by the CPI.

4. Limitations in Corporate Capacity

Lack of Expertise- Most corporate boards lack the scientific depth to manage biodiversity restoration. Evaluating success based on "money spent" rather than "carbon sequestered" remains a fundamental flaw.
Short-termism- CSR is annual; ecology is decadal. The evaluation of environmental CSR is often mismatched with corporate financial cycles.

5. The Way Forward- Enhancing Effectiveness

To ensure this judicial push isn't lost in administrative corruption-
Outcome-Based Audits- Move from "Financial Audits" to "Ecological Audits" verified by independent third-party scientists, not just government officials.
Restoration Escrow Accounts- Ensure CSR funds for the environment are placed in long-term funds to survive the 5–10-year gestation period of a forest.
Simplification- Reducing the 26,000+ compliance points would reduce the "rent-seeking" opportunities that currently drain CSR efficiency.

6. Conclusion

Reframing CSR as a constitutional duty is a powerful normative shift, but its practical effectiveness is currently tethered to India's stagnant governance quality. While the judiciary has set the "standard," the executive must provide the "transparency." Only by simplifying regulations and adopting an ecosystem-centric audit model can India ensure that corporate "duty" translates into genuine planetary "restoration."
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-judicial-push-for-environmental-csr/article70781275.ece

2. We need a national mission for negotiated justice (IE)

GS Paper II- Polity & Governance
Topic- Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.
Sub-Topic- Judicial Reforms, Criminal Justice System, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

1. Introduction

With the number of pending cases in India crossing the 5-crore mark, the judicial infrastructure is under unprecedented strain. Despite the introduction of Plea Bargaining in 2005, its adoption remains a negligible <1%. Experts and policymakers are now advocating for a structural shift through the "Sahmati Samadhan Nyaya Mission" to institutionalize negotiated settlements and restore the efficiency of the criminal justice system.

2. The Judicial Pendency Crisis

The Scale of Backlog- Out of the 5 crore total cases, approximately 4.7 crore are concentrated in subordinate (district) courts.
Systemic Overload- The crisis is not merely a matter of "too many cases" but reflects structural deficiencies-

1. Judge Shortages- Chronic vacancies in the lower judiciary.
2. Procedural Bottlenecks- Complexities in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) that allow for frequent adjournments.
3. Litigation Explosion- A rising awareness of rights without a corresponding increase in disposal capacity.

Impact of the Pandemic- While virtual hearings and the e-Courts Mission Mode Project provided a digital bridge, the physical lockdowns of previous years added a massive "COVID-backlog" that the system is still struggling to clear.

3. Plea Bargaining- The Legal Framework

Introduced via the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005, Plea Bargaining (Chapter XXI-A of CrPC) was meant to be a game-changer.
Core Concept- It allows an accused to plead guilty in exchange for a concessional sentence or a reduction in the severity of charges.
Applicability- Limited to offenses punishable by up to 7 years.
Exclusions- It cannot be used for offenses affecting the socio-economic condition of the country, or crimes against women and children.
Objective- To prioritize the certainty and speed of justice over the severity of punishment, ensuring a "win-win" for the state (reduced burden) and the accused (early closure).

4. Global Comparative Perspective

India's low adoption rate stands in stark contrast to global leaders in judicial efficiency-

Country	Use of Negotiated Justice	Key Feature
United States	90% +	Heavily relies on plea deals to prevent the collapse of the trial system.
UK & Europe	High	Widespread use of "Settled Procedures" for minor and administrative offenses.
China	High	Uses "Administrative Disposal" at the early stages to maintain low court pendency.
India	< 1%	Remains stuck in an adversarial "Trial-or-Nothing" mindset.

5. Barriers to Adoption in India

Why has a 20-year-old law failed to gain traction?

Awareness Gap- Most litigants view a "plea" as a sign of weakness or an admission of guilt that carries social stigma, rather than a strategic legal exit.
The Lawyer's Dilemma- Traditional fee structures often incentivize prolonged trials. There are few financial or professional rewards for a lawyer who settles a case quickly.
Institutional Hesitation- Judges and prosecutors often fear "vigilance inquiries" or accusations of corruption if they agree to a plea deal.
Trust Deficit- A pervasive fear among the poor that "negotiated justice" will lead to coercion or extortion by the police.

6. The Multidimensional Impact of Delays

On Individual Liberty- Thousands of undertrials languish in jail for periods exceeding their potential maximum sentence, a direct violation of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).
On the Economy- Delayed justice is a "hidden tax." It weakens contract enforcement, deters Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and significantly lowers India's Ease of Doing Business rankings.
On Governance- Persistent delays lead to a "Crisis of Legitimacy." When people lose faith in courts, they may turn to extra-judicial or "mafia-style" settlements, undermining the Rule of Law.

7. The "Sahmati Samadhan Nyaya Mission"

To bridge the gap, a dedicated national mission is required-
Institutional Focus- Creating a structured environment where plea bargaining is the default option for minor offenses.
Capacity Building- Specialized training for prosecutors to act as "negotiators" rather than just "prosecutors."
Judicial Encouragement- Judges should be mandated to identify "plea-fit" cases during the first hearing.
Safeguards- To prevent coercion, negotiations must be conducted in the presence of a judicial officer with transparent, video-recorded consent.

8. Conclusion

The shift from an adversarial to a collaborative model of justice is no longer a choice but a necessity. The proposed Sahmati Samadhan Nyaya Mission represents a bold step toward making justice "certain" rather than just "severe." By institutionalizing plea bargaining, India can move toward a judicial system that aligns with the constitutional ideal of "Justice- Social, Economic, and Political."
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/we-need-a-national-mission-for-negotiated-justice-10599578/

Question

"The persistent crisis of judicial pendency in India necessitates a paradigm shift from 'adversarial litigation' to 'negotiated justice.' In this context, critically analyze the potential of plea bargaining in decongesting the Indian judiciary and the institutional challenges hindering its effective implementation." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

With over 5 crore cases currently pending in Indian courts—80% of which are in district courts—the "Right to a Speedy Trial" under Article 21 is under severe threat. Plea bargaining, introduced in 2005 through Chapter XXI-A of the CrPC, was envisioned as a primary tool to mitigate this backlog. However, despite its potential, its usage remains at a negligible <1%, highlighting a significant gap between legislative intent and ground reality.

2. Potential of Plea Bargaining in Decongesting Judiciary

Faster Case Disposal- By allowing the accused to plead guilty for a concessional sentence, the system bypasses the lengthy trial stage, which can otherwise take decades.

Relief for Undertrials- It offers an "exit route" for thousands of undertrials languishing in jails for minor offenses (punishable up to 7 years), thereby reducing prison overcrowding.
Certainty over Severity- It shifts the focus to the certainty of punishment, which acts as a better deterrent than severe punishments that are rarely delivered on time.
Resource Optimization- Decongesting the lower courts allows judges to dedicate more time to complex, serious crimes that require full adversarial trials.

3. Institutional Challenges in Implementation

Trust Deficit and Coercion- There is a pervasive fear among litigants that plea bargaining might be used by the police for coerced confessions or extortion, especially against vulnerable sections with low legal literacy.
Adversarial Mindset- The Indian legal culture is deeply rooted in "contesting" every case. Lawyers often perceive a plea deal as a professional failure rather than a strategic resolution.
Lack of Incentives- Unlike the U.S. (where 90% of cases are settled via pleas), the Indian system offers no professional or financial incentives for lawyers to opt for early settlements.
Judicial Hesitation- Judges often avoid promoting plea deals due to a lack of clear guidelines and the fear of "vigilance scrutiny" regarding the transparency of the negotiation.
The "Admission of Guilt" Stigma- Social stigma attached to a criminal record often discourages the accused from pleading guilty, even for a lighter sentence.

4. The Way Forward- Sahmati Samadhan Nyaya Mission

To unlock the potential of negotiated justice, a structured mission-mode approach is required-
Institutionalization- Creating a dedicated mission to provide a safe, transparent environment for negotiations, presided over by judicial officers.
Capacity Building- Training prosecutors to act as "mediators" and "negotiators" rather than just "accusers."
Safeguards- Implementing mandatory video recording of plea proceedings to ensure consent is voluntary and informed.
Legal Aid Integration- Empowering NALSA and SLSA to educate undertrials about their rights regarding plea bargaining.

5. Conclusion

The shift to negotiated justice is not a dilution of the Rule of Law but an evolution toward pragmatic justice. While plea bargaining is not a "silver bullet" for all crimes, its successful implementation through a National Mission is essential to ensure that the Indian judiciary does not collapse under its own weight. Only by making justice "timely" can we make it "meaningful."
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/we-need-a-national-mission-for-negotiated-justice-10599578/

3. An Opportunity in a Crisis (BS)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & Energy Security
Topic- Energy security and resource management
Sub-Topic- Import dependence and balance of payments

Introduction

India's rising oil import dependence reflects structural weaknesses in its energy and industrial policies. While global oil price volatility exposes economic vulnerabilities, the current situation also presents an opportunity to reform domestic energy systems and enhance self-reliance.

1. Extent of Oil Import Dependence

1. India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirements.
2. Imports have risen steadily due to increasing energy demand and stagnant domestic output.

3. LPG and petroleum product consumption have also expanded significantly.

2. Causes of Rising Dependence

Declining Domestic Production

1. Limited exploration success and policy bottlenecks.

Growing Energy Demand

1. Expansion in transport, industry, and urbanisation.

Policy Constraints

1. Delays in implementing reforms like Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP).

Shift in Consumption Patterns

1. Increased reliance on cleaner fuels like LPG.

3. Economic Implications

External Vulnerability

1. Exposure to global price shocks and geopolitical risks.

Fiscal Pressure

1. Impact on subsidies and current account deficit.

Inflationary Effects

1. Rising fuel prices affect cost of living and production.

4. Structural Issues Highlighted

Mismatch Between Demand and Supply

1. Consumption rising faster than domestic output capacity.

Underdeveloped Domestic Ecosystem

1. Limited investment in exploration, refining, and storage.

Policy Gaps

1. Inadequate incentives for private sector participation.

5. Opportunity for Reform

Boost Domestic Production

1. Encourage exploration through policy stability and incentives.

Diversify Energy Sources

1. Promote renewables, biofuels, and alternative energy.

Enhance Strategic Reserves

1. Build buffers to manage price volatility.

Improve Energy Efficiency

1. Reduce demand through technological and behavioural changes.

6. Way Forward

Policy Reforms

1. Streamline regulatory frameworks to attract investment in oil and gas sector.

Self-Reliance Strategy

1. Focus on Atmanirbhar Bharat in energy.

Transition to Clean Energy

1. Accelerate shift towards sustainable energy systems.

Conclusion

India's oil import dependence is both a vulnerability and an opportunity. By addressing structural policy gaps and investing in domestic capacity and alternative energy, India can strengthen its energy security and economic resilience.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/an-opportunity-in-a-crisis-oil-import-dependence-needs-urgent-policy-fix-126032401405_1.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's growing dependence on oil imports reflects structural challenges in its energy policy. Analyse the causes and suggest measures to enhance energy security. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's heavy reliance on oil imports exposes it to global price volatility and geopolitical risks. This dependence highlights structural issues in domestic energy policy.

Causes

1. Declining Domestic Production

1. Limited exploration and policy constraints.

2. Rising Demand

1. Growth in transport and industrial sectors.

Measures

1. Boost Domestic Production

1. Encourage investment in exploration.

2. Diversify Energy Mix

1. Promote renewable and alternative fuels.

3. Improve Efficiency

1. Reduce energy consumption through innovation.

Conclusion

Reducing oil import dependence requires comprehensive reforms in energy policy. A balanced approach focusing on domestic capacity and diversification will enhance India's energy security.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/an-opportunity-in-a-crisis-oil-import-dependence-needs-urgent-policy-fix-126032401405_1.html

4. Modern Warfare Is Shaping Up to Be More Complex Than Imagined (MT)

General Studies Paper III – Internal Security & Defence
Topic- Security challenges and their management
Sub-Topic- Defence preparedness and modernisation

Introduction

Modern warfare is undergoing a transformation from short, decisive battles to prolonged, complex conflicts. Recent wars such as Russia–Ukraine and West Asia conflicts illustrate how technology, hybrid strategies, and attrition-based approaches are redefining military outcomes.

1. Shift in Nature of Warfare

From Decisive Victory to Attrition

1. Earlier wars aimed at quick, decisive outcomes.
2. Modern conflicts focus on endurance, resilience, and sustained engagement.

Prolonged Conflicts

1. Wars are becoming long-drawn with uncertain outcomes.

2. Role of Technology

Advanced Military Technologies

1. Use of drones, cyber warfare, AI, and electronic warfare.

Information Warfare

1. Social media and digital platforms shape narratives and perceptions.

Precision and Surveillance

1. Satellites and real-time intelligence enhance battlefield awareness.

3. Hybrid Warfare

Combination of Conventional and Non-Conventional Methods

1. Integration of military, economic, cyber, and informational tools.

Non-State and Asymmetric Actors

1. Increased role of proxy groups and irregular forces.

4. Key Features of Modern Conflicts

Resilience Over Speed

1. Success depends on sustained capacity and adaptability.

Economic Dimension

1. Sanctions and economic warfare play a critical role.

Globalisation of Conflict

1. Wars have international spillovers and global consequences.

5. Strategic Implications

Uncertainty in Outcomes

1. Difficulty in predicting clear winners and losers.

Increased Costs

1. High economic and human costs due to prolonged engagement.

Need for Multi-Domain Capabilities

1. Integration of land, air, sea, cyber, and space domains.

6. Implications for India

Defence Modernisation

1. Invest in advanced technologies and indigenous capabilities.

Hybrid Warfare Preparedness

1. Strengthen capabilities in cyber and information domains.

Strategic Autonomy

1. Maintain flexibility in a multipolar and uncertain world.

7. Way Forward

Technological Integration

1. Adopt emerging technologies in defence strategy.

Doctrinal Reforms

1. Shift from conventional warfare doctrines to multi-domain operations.

Capacity Building

1. Enhance resilience and long-term military preparedness.

Conclusion

Modern warfare is no longer defined by rapid victories but by sustained resilience and adaptability. Countries must recalibrate their strategies to address the evolving nature of conflict, focusing on technology, endurance, and multi-domain capabilities.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/lessons-from-ukraine-and-iran-modern-warfare-is-proving-more-complex-and-unpredictable-than-we-imagined-11774267651606.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Modern warfare is increasingly characterised by attrition, hybrid strategies, and technological integration. Analyse the changing nature of warfare and its implications for India's defence preparedness. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

The nature of warfare has evolved from conventional, decisive battles to prolonged and complex conflicts involving multiple domains and actors.

Changing Nature

1. Attrition-Based Warfare

1. Emphasis on endurance rather than quick victory.

2. Technological Integration

1. Use of drones, cyber tools, and AI.

3. Hybrid Warfare

1. Combination of conventional and unconventional methods.

Implications for India

1. Defence Modernisation

1. Need for advanced technology adoption.

2. Multi-Domain Preparedness

1. Integration across various domains.

3. Strategic Flexibility

1. Adapt to uncertain and evolving threats.

Conclusion

India must adapt to the changing nature of warfare by strengthening technological capabilities and adopting a comprehensive defence strategy.

Source- https-//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/lessons-from-ukraine-and-iran-modern-warfare-is-proving-more-complex-and-unpredictable-than-we-imagined-11774267651606.html

Editorial of the Day – 26.03.2026

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1. An energy transition driven by ethics (TH)

GS Paper IV- Ethics
Topic- Environmental Ethics.
Sub-Topic- Environmental Ethics.

1. Introduction

India's energy strategy is at a crossroads. While the nation aims for a green transition, the immediate reality is a heavy reliance on fossil fuel imports, which exposes the economy to volatile geopolitical shocks. The 2026 West Asia conflict has highlighted that an energy transition is not merely a technical or economic shift but a strategic and ethical imperative to ensure long-term sovereignty and climate justice.

2. Fossil Fuel Dependence & Geopolitical Risks

The recent disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have demonstrated the fragility of the "Old Energy Order"-
National Security Threat- Heavy reliance on external fossil fuels undermines India's economic sovereignty and national security.
Import Vulnerability- India currently imports approximately 60% of its crude oil from the West Asian region.
The Hormuz Factor- The closure of key maritime routes like the Strait of Hormuz has triggered force majeure declarations, leading to supply shortages and emergency fiscal responses.
The Transition Risk- An abrupt move away from fossil fuels without a robust alternative could destabilize industrial growth and cause economic "shocks."

3. The Ethics of Global Energy Inequality

A transition "driven by ethics" must acknowledge the historical divide between the Global North and South-
Historical Privilege- Developed nations utilized cheap fossil fuels for decades to build their economic might.
The Developing Dilemma- Developing nations like India are now pressured to transition at an accelerated pace, often despite limited financial and technological readiness.
Climate Frustration- Growing dissatisfaction with global climate forums (like recent COPs) stems from the lack of "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities" (CBDR).
Sustainability vs. Growth- India must solve the "Trilemma" of balancing immediate economic growth with long-term sustainability and energy affordability.

4. The Renewables Paradox- Critical Mineral Dependency

Transitioning to solar and wind does not eliminate dependency; it changes its nature-
From Molecules to Minerals- While renewables rely on free sources (sun/wind), the infrastructure requires Critical Minerals like Lithium, Cobalt, and Rare Earth Elements (REE).
Supply Chain Concentration- Unlike oil, which is found in many regions, the processing of critical minerals is highly concentrated.

The China Factor- China dominates the processing of Lithium and Cobalt, posing a new strategic challenge for India's renewable expansion.
Manufacturing Risks- Any disruption in the supply of components like magnets or turbines can halt the entire green energy trajectory.

5. Economic Trade-offs & Strategic Choices

The transition is often dictated by the price at the pump rather than the health of the planet-
Investment Barriers- Renewable energy requires massive upfront capital investment, making it less attractive when fossil fuel prices are artificially low.
The Volatility Incentive- Ironically, geopolitical crises and high oil prices make renewables economically viable much faster.
Fiscal Priorities- In times of peace, governments often prioritize short-term fiscal stability (subsidizing fuel) over the long-term investment needed for a transition.
Strategic De-risking- There is an urgent need to shift focus from "importing energy" to "domestic production and supply chain security."

6. India's Path- Ethics over Fear

For a truly sustainable transition, the motivation must move beyond "energy insecurity"-
Fear vs. Responsibility- Policies driven solely by the fear of supply disruptions (energy insecurity) may not sustain long-term systemic change.
Ethical Mining- A transition is only "green" if it addresses the environmental damage and human rights violations often associated with critical mineral mining.
Calibrated Approach- India must utilize a mix of domestic resources (including coal and gas in the interim) while aggressively diversifying its mineral import sources to avoid "replacing one dependency with another."

Conclusion

India's energy future must be anchored in a Dual-Front Strategy- reducing fossil fuel risk while securing the mineral pipelines of the future. The transition should be viewed not just as a reaction to geopolitical shocks in West Asia, but as a proactive commitment to Environmental Ethics and resilient economic planning. Only a calibrated, multi-source approach will ensure that India's path to 2070 is both secure and just.
Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-energy-transition-driven-by-ethics/article70785393.ece

Question

"The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy is often framed as a technical necessity, yet it is profoundly an ethical choice. Discuss the ethical dilemmas India faces in balancing immediate energy security with long-term environmental responsibilities and global climate justice." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Energy is the lifeblood of modern civilization, but its source defines the ethical character of a nation. As India faces disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, the urge to transition to renewables is high. However, this transition is not just about changing "fuels"; it is about navigating the ethical tensions between utilitarianism (the greatest good for the greatest number now) and deontological duties (the obligation to protect the planet for future generations).

2. Ethical Dilemmas in India's Energy Path

The "Right to Development" vs. "Ecological Duty"- India has millions of citizens still rising out of energy poverty. Is it ethical to sacrifice their immediate need for cheap (fossil-fuel-based) electricity at the altar of global green goals that were largely necessitated by the historical emissions of the Global North? This represents a conflict between Inter-generational Equity and Intra-generational Justice.

National Security vs. New Dependencies- Relying on West Asian oil is a risk, but moving toward Critical Minerals (Lithium, Cobalt) processed by a single dominant power (China) creates a new ethical vulnerability. A state's primary ethical duty is to protect its citizens' Sovereignty, which may be compromised by a hasty, ill-planned transition.

The "Dirty" Side of Green Tech- Renewable infrastructure requires minerals often mined in conditions involving human rights violations (e.g., child labour in cobalt mines) or severe local ecological destruction. Using "clean" energy produced through "unethical" mining practices presents a classic ethical inconsistency.

3. The Concept of "Climate Justice" (Ethics of Equality)

Historical Responsibility- Ethical energy transition must be grounded in the principle of "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities" (CBDR). It is ethically unfair to expect a developing nation to bear the same burden as nations that achieved prosperity through two centuries of carbon-heavy growth.

Equity in Access- An ethical transition ensures that green technology is not just for the wealthy. If the shift to renewables makes power unaffordable for the poor, it fails the "Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance" test—where the most vulnerable should be the primary consideration in policy design.

4. A Framework for an Ethically Driven Transition

Calibrated Decarbonization- Ethics requires a "Middle Path" (Madhyamaka). India should utilize domestic coal as a bridge while building green capacity, ensuring the economy doesn't collapse during the transition.

Diversified and Ethical Sourcing- India must ensure its supply chains for minerals are transparent and free from human rights abuses, moving beyond "lowest cost" to "highest ethical standard" in procurement.

Global Solidarity- Developed nations have an ethical debt to provide technology transfer and green finance to developing nations, transforming the transition from a competition into a collaborative moral act.

5. Conclusion

An energy transition driven purely by geopolitical fear is fragile; one driven by ethics is sustainable. India's journey to 2070 must be a moral one, where the search for energy security does not come at the cost of human dignity or planetary integrity. Ultimately, the transition should be viewed as an act of Stewardship, where we hold the earth's resources in trust for the future while meeting the urgent needs of the present.

Source- https-//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-energy-transition-driven-by-ethics/article70785393.ece

2. FCRA Amendment Bill introduced in Lok Sabha, Opposition calls it 'draconian', 'dangerous' (IE)

GS Paper II - Governance & Constitution

Topic- Development processes and the development industry — the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Sub-Topic- Statutory/Regulatory Bodies (FCRA), Fundamental Rights (Article 14, 19), and Executive vs. Legislative Powers.

1. Introduction

In March 2026, the Union Government moved to further tighten the screws on foreign funding through the FCRA Amendment Bill. While the state aims to "sanitize" the flow of foreign capital into the social sector to prevent anti-national activities, the move has faced stiff resistance. Critics argue the Bill creates a "draconian" level of executive discretion, potentially transforming the regulatory "watchdog" into a "gatekeeper" that could stifle dissent and grassroots advocacy.

2. The FCRA Framework- Origins and Evolution

Understanding the current Bill requires looking at the legislative trajectory of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act-

Historical Roots- Originally enacted in 1976 during the Emergency to prevent foreign interference in domestic politics.

The 2010 Pivot- Replaced by the FCRA 2010 to consolidate the law on utilizing foreign funds for activities detrimental to national interest.

Tightening the Reins- Subsequent amendments in 2016, 2018, and 2020 introduced mandatory Aadhaar for key functionaries, restricted administrative expenses, and barred the sub-granting of funds.

Economic Scale- Today, approximately 16,000 registered associations receive nearly ₹22,000 crore annually, highlighting why the state views this sector as a significant regulatory domain.

3. Key Features of the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026

The 2026 Bill introduces several "high-intensity" regulatory shifts-

Designated Authority for Asset Control- Proposes a central authority empowered to seize, manage, and dispose of assets created via foreign funds if a license is cancelled or surrendered.

Vesting of Contributions- In cases of registration cessation, foreign contributions and related assets may be transferred directly to government control.

Expanded Executive Discretion- Many core procedural aspects—timelines, management methods, and exemptions—are left to executive rule-making, rather than being explicitly defined in the statute.

Prior Investigation Approval- Mandatory prior approval from the Central Government is required before enforcement agencies can initiate probes against an NGO.

4. The Government's Rationale- Security & Accountability

The state justifies these stringent measures on four primary grounds-

National Security- Concerns that foreign funds might be funnelled into activities that incite internal unrest, religious conversions, or biased political lobbying.

Financial Integrity- Preventing the diversion of non-profit funds for the personal gain of office-bearers.

Transparency- Ensuring a granular, real-time "paper trail" for every rupee entering the country from abroad.

Sovereignty- Aligning with global trends where nations (including Western democracies) are increasingly wary of "foreign influence" in their domestic social and political fabric.

5. Critical Concerns- The Civil Liberties Perspective

Critics and opposition parties have flagged several constitutional and functional risks-

Doctrine of Excessive Delegation- By leaving essential legislative functions to "rules" decided by bureaucrats, the Bill may violate the constitutional principle that the legislature cannot abdicate its core functions.

Article 14 (Arbitrariness)- Broad discretionary powers could lead to selective targeting of NGOs that are critical of government policies, undermining the right to equality.

Shrinking Democratic Space- NGOs often fill gaps in health, education, and environmental advocacy; excessive compliance may force smaller, grassroots organizations to shut down.

Trust Deficit- The requirement for prior government approval for investigations might actually shield "favoured" organizations while allowing the state to stall or initiate probes based on political convenience.

6. Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

The Bill will likely be tested against established legal doctrines-

Article 19(1)(c)- While citizens have the freedom to form associations, the state can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of sovereignty and public order.

Doctrine of Proportionality- The Supreme Court has consistently held that any state restriction must be the "least intrusive" method to achieve a legitimate goal.
Judicial Balance- While courts generally defer to the state on "national security" matters, they emphasize that procedural fairness and non-arbitrariness are non-negotiable.

7. Implications for Governance and Development

Impact on Social Sectors- A potential drop in foreign funding could hit "hard-to-reach" areas where NGOs are primary service providers in health and disaster relief.
Ease of Doing "Social Work"- The rising compliance burden may deter young professionals and philanthropists from entering the non-profit sector.
Global Perception- India's regulatory stance on NGOs is often cited in international indices regarding civic space and democratic health, impacting the nation's "soft power."

8. Conclusion

The FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026, is a classic example of the tension between a "protective state" and a "participatory democracy." While preventing the misuse of foreign funds is a legitimate state interest, the path to transparency should not lead to the permanent "statization" of civil society assets. A balanced approach—where regulation is rule-based rather than discretion-based—is essential to ensure that national security and civil liberties can coexist.
Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/fcra-amendment-bill-introduced-in-lok-sabha-opposition-calls-it-draconian-dangerous-10601544/

3. Pn3, Amidst Fragile Capital Flows (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- Investment models (FDI)
Sub-Topic- Economic reforms and liberalisation

Introduction

India's FDI policy has undergone a calibrated shift with the easing of Press Note 3 (PN3) norms, particularly for countries sharing land borders. This move reflects an attempt to attract long-term capital amid fragile global investment flows, but it raises concerns regarding strategic, economic, and regulatory implications.

1. What is PN3 Policy?

1. Introduced in 2020 to regulate FDI from countries sharing land borders with India.
2. Mandates government approval route for such investments.
3. Aimed to prevent opportunistic takeovers during economic stress (COVID-19).

2. Recent Policy Shift

1. Partial easing allows limited automatic route investments (up to 10%) in certain sectors.
2. Signals a pragmatic approach to attract capital, especially from China.
3. Reflects need to balance economic growth with national security concerns.

3. Context- Fragile Capital Flows

Declining FDI Inflows

1. FDI inflows have slowed compared to previous years.

Rising Outward FDI

1. Indian firms increasingly investing abroad.

Global Uncertainty

1. Geopolitical tensions and economic slowdown affecting investment sentiment.

4. Key Concerns

National Security Risks

1. Investments from neighbouring countries may raise strategic vulnerabilities.

Dependence on Foreign Capital

1. Over-reliance may weaken domestic investment capacity.

Outward Investment Puzzle

1. Indian firms investing abroad despite domestic capital needs.

5. Economic Implications

Boost to Investment

1. Easing norms can increase capital inflows and economic activity.

Technology Transfer

1. Potential gains in innovation and manufacturing capacity.

Balance of Payments Impact

1. Influences external sector stability.

6. Structural Issues Highlighted

Weak Domestic Investment

1. Private sector investment remains subdued.

Policy Uncertainty

1. Frequent regulatory changes affect investor confidence.

Capital Allocation Inefficiency

1. Outward FDI suggests better opportunities abroad than domestically.

7. Way Forward

Balanced FDI Policy

1. Combine openness with strategic safeguards.

Strengthening Domestic Investment

1. Improve ease of doing business and infrastructure development.

Regulatory Stability

1. Ensure predictable policies to enhance investor confidence.

Monitoring Strategic Sectors

1. Safeguard critical sectors from unwanted foreign control.

Conclusion

India's easing of PN3 norms reflects a pragmatic response to global capital flow challenges. However, sustaining growth requires a balanced approach that promotes domestic investment, ensures national security, and leverages foreign capital effectively.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/pn3-amidst-fragile-capital-flows/article70784807.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the rationale behind India's Press Note 3 (PN3) policy and analyse the implications of its recent easing in the context of fragile global capital flows. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Press Note 3 (PN3), introduced in 2020, aimed to regulate FDI from neighbouring countries to prevent opportunistic takeovers. Recent easing reflects changing economic priorities.

Rationale

1. National Security

1. Prevent strategic acquisitions during economic vulnerability.

2. Economic Stability

1. Ensure controlled foreign investments.

Implications of Easing

1. Increased Capital Inflows

1. Boost investment and growth.

2. Strategic Concerns

1. Risk of foreign control in sensitive sectors.

Conclusion

A balanced FDI policy is essential to harness foreign investment while safeguarding national interests. Stability and transparency will be key to long-term economic growth.

Source- https-//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/pn3-amidst-fragile-capital-flows/article70784807.ece

4. Economic Interdependence and War (BS)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic- Economic development, globalisation, energy security
Sub-Topic- International relations, global order

Introduction

Economic interdependence was long believed to reduce the likelihood of conflict by creating mutual dependence among nations. However, recent geopolitical crises reveal that interdependence can also become a source of vulnerability and leverage, reshaping the dynamics of modern warfare.

1. Concept of Economic Interdependence

1. Refers to mutual reliance between countries for trade, energy, and supply chains.
2. Based on the idea that economic ties promote peace and cooperation.
3. Strengthened through globalisation and integration of markets.

2. Changing Reality- Interdependence as a Weapon

Weaponisation of Trade and Energy

1. Countries use sanctions, trade restrictions, and energy supplies as strategic tools.

Supply Chain Disruptions

1. Conflicts disrupt global flows of oil, gas, semiconductors, and food.

Geoeconomic Competition

1. Economic tools increasingly used to achieve strategic objectives.

3. Case Study Insights (West Asia Conflict Context)

Energy Markets

1. Disruptions in key chokepoints impact global oil and gas prices.

Regional Spillovers

1. Smaller economies face inflation, trade shocks, and instability.

Industrial Impact

1. Sectors like electronics and manufacturing suffer due to supply constraints.

4. Limitations of Interdependence

Failure to Prevent Conflict

1. Economic ties do not necessarily deter strategic or ideological conflicts.

Asymmetric Dependence

1. Countries dependent on specific resources are more vulnerable to coercion.

Global Inequality

1. Benefits of interdependence are uneven, increasing economic disparities.

5. Strategic Implications

Shift to Resilience

1. Countries prioritise self-reliance and diversification of supply chains.

Fragmentation of Global Order

1. Emergence of regional blocs and protectionist policies.

Increased Uncertainty

1. Global economy becomes more volatile and unpredictable.

6. Implications for India

Energy Security

1. Need to reduce dependence on imported oil and gas.

Supply Chain Diversification

1. Strengthen domestic manufacturing and alternative trade routes.

Strategic Autonomy

1. Balance economic engagement with national security priorities.

7. Way Forward

Diversification Strategies

1. Reduce reliance on single sources for critical resources.

Strengthening Domestic Capacity

1. Promote Atmanirbhar Bharat in key sectors.

Multilateral Cooperation

1. Work with global partners to ensure stable supply chains.

Conclusion

Economic interdependence is no longer a guarantee of peace but a double-edged sword. Countries must balance integration with resilience to navigate a world where economic ties can both connect and constrain.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/in-an-interconnected-world-war-s-costs-spiral-far-beyond-just-borders-126032501349_1.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. "Economic interdependence does not necessarily prevent conflict but can become a tool of strategic leverage." Discuss with examples and examine its implications for India. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Economic interdependence refers to mutual reliance among nations for trade and resources. While it was expected to promote peace, recent conflicts show it can also be used as a strategic tool.

Analysis

1. Weaponisation of Interdependence

1. Use of sanctions and supply restrictions.

2. Supply Chain Vulnerability

1. Disruptions in energy and critical sectors.

3. Asymmetric Dependence

1. Unequal reliance creates strategic leverage.

Implications for India

1. Energy Security

1. Need for diversification of imports.

2. Supply Chain Resilience

1. Strengthen domestic production.

Conclusion

Economic interdependence must be balanced with resilience strategies. India should adopt a diversified and self-reliant approach to safeguard its interests.

Source- https-//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/in-an-interconnected-world-war-s-costs-spiral-far-beyond-just-borders-126032501349_1.html

Editorial of the Day – 27.03.2026

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1. The key to India's multi-domain deterrence, capabilities(TH)

GS Paper III: Internal Security
Topic: Challenges to internal security; Defense Indigenization; Various Security forces and their mandate.
Sub-Topic: India-China Military Dynamics, C4ISR, and Defense-Industrial Strategy.

1. Introduction

In 2026, the military-technological gap between India and China remains a central concern for national security. China's "intelligentized" warfare—utilizing AI, hypersonic systems, and advanced cyber capabilities—demands that India moves beyond mere troop increments toward a robust defense-industrial strategy. Closing this capability gap requires a synchronization of technological investment, industrial scaling, and a modernized military doctrine.

2. Strategic Approaches to Military Modernization

India is evaluating three distinct pathways to modernize its fighting force:

Bold Technological Investment:

The "Big Bet": Investing heavily in "frontier" technologies like quantum computing, directed energy weapons, and autonomous swarms to leapfrog existing generations.
The Risk: High implementation risk; if the domestic industrial base cannot sustain these technologies, it creates "vulnerabilities of dependence" on foreign OEMs or operational failures.

Conservative Strategy:

Hybrid Integration: Focusing on "low-risk" upgrades by integrating emerging technologies (like commercial drones or basic AI) into legacy platforms (T-90 tanks or Su-30 aircraft).
Limitation: While cost-effective for short-duration skirmishes, it is insufficient to alter the overarching regional power balance in India's Favor.

Middle Path Strategy:

Foundation First: Prioritizing the "enabling layers" of warfare: Command and Control (C2) and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR**)**.
Objective: Creating a "sensor-to-shooter" link that enhances deterrence and builds the framework for Multi-Domain Operations (MDO).

3. Challenges in Military Industrialization

The transition from a "buyer's navy/army" to a "builder's navy/army" faces structural hurdles:

Industrial Scale and Speed:

Base Structure: The current defense-industrial base (including DPSUs) often lacks the agility to deliver advanced systems at the speed required by modern conflict cycles.
Private Integration: There is an urgent need to treat private defense players as strategic partners rather than just vendors, especially for high-end C2 and ISR networks.

The Procurement Paradigm:

Adaptable Systems: Moving away from "one-size-fits-all" hardware toward software-defined, adaptable systems.

Political Consensus: Sustainable military growth requires a multi-year budget commitment and political consensus to prioritize "deterrence-based spending" over "legacy-based spending."

4. Strategic Priorities for Deterrence

To effectively counter the Chinese "Anti-Access/Area Denial" (A2/AD) capabilities, India must focus on:

Addressing C4ISR Vulnerabilities:

Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR): This is the "nervous system" of modern war. India must eliminate gaps in real-time satellite imagery, ELINT (Electronic Intelligence), and secure communication links.

Incentivizing Select Capabilities:

Targeted Budgeting: Instead of spreading resources thin, the budget must be funneled into "Select High-Impact Capabilities" such as long-range precision strikes and cyber-defense.

Inventory Resilience: Ensuring that the inventory is not only modern but "sufficiently deep" to survive a high-intensity, protracted conflict.

5. Conclusion

India's security in the late 2020s depends on its ability to operationalize the "Enabling Layers" of its defense. A multi-domain force that can effectively deter aggression is not built through hardware alone, but through doctrinal convergence and strategic industrial reforms. By fostering a collaborative ecosystem between the military, the private sector, and research institutions, India can transition from a defensive posture to a sophisticated, deterrent-focused power.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-key-to-indias-multi-domain-deterrence-capabilities/article70789040.ece

Question

"The effectiveness of a modern military force is increasingly dependent on its 'enabling layers' rather than its sheer numerical strength. Elucidate this statement in the context of India's strategic posture against the backdrop of China's 'intelligentized' warfare capabilities." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In the era of "Intelligentized Warfare," military dominance is no longer a factor of how many boots are on the ground or the number of hulls in the water. Instead, it is defined by the speed of information and the precision of decision-making. For India, facing a technologically advanced adversary like China, the focus must shift from "mass" to "connectivity"—specifically the enabling layers that empower a fighting force.

2. Understanding the 'Enabling Layers'

The "enabling layers" refer to the C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) architecture. This serves as the "nervous system" of a multi-domain force:

Sensor Layer: Utilizing a constellation of satellites, high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) drones, and electronic intelligence (ELINT) to create a transparent battlefield.

Communication Layer: Ensuring seamless, jam-resistant data links that connect a soldier in the Himalayas directly to naval assets in the Indian Ocean.

Decision Layer: Using AI and edge computing to process vast amounts of data, providing commanders with a "Common Operating Picture" (COP) in real-time.

3. Why Numerical Strength is No Longer Sufficient

The A2/AD Challenge: China's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities utilize long-range precision missiles to keep numerically superior forces at a distance. Without enabling layers to detect and neutralize these threats, "massed" forces become easy targets.

Speed of Conflict: Modern warfare is "compressed." Decisions made in seconds can determine the outcome of a battle. A numerically smaller force with a faster OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) will consistently defeat a larger, slower-moving adversary.

Multi-Domain Integration: A force of 1.4 million is ineffective if its land, air, and sea wings operate in silos. The enabling layers provide the "glue" for Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), allowing for simultaneous strikes across cyber, space, and physical realms.

4. India's Strategic Industrial Response

To operationalize these layers, India is adopting a "Middle Path Strategy":

Infrastructure over Inventory: Prioritizing investments in secure C2 (Command and Control) networks and domestic satellite constellations over just buying more legacy hardware.

Private Sector Collaboration: Recognizing that the "intelligence" of modern war often resides in the private tech sector (AI, software-defined radios), India is incentivizing startups to build the "software" of defense.

Doctrinal Convergence: Moving toward Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) where the focus is on "sensor-to-shooter" efficiency rather than traditional divisional mass.

5. Conclusion

To elucidate the modern military paradigm: Hardware is the muscle, but the enabling layers are the brain and nerves. India's strategic posture must continue to evolve from a "buy-and-bolt" hardware approach to a "design-and-integrate" system. By mastering the enabling layers, India can build a credible, high-tech deterrent that neutralizes numerical disadvantages and ensures sovereignty in an increasingly "intelligent zed" regional security environment.

Source: **https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-key-to-indias-multi-domain-deterrence-capabilities/article70789040.ece**

2. West Asia war is a warning.

It is also a window to securing India's energy (IE)

GS Paper III: Economy & Environment

Topic: Infrastructure: Energy; Conservation and Environmental Pollution.

Sub-Topic: Energy Security, Renewable Energy Transition, Nuclear Policy, and Strategic Autonomy.

1. Introduction

In 2026, India faces a stark reality: energy insecurity is a systemic feature of its economy, not an episodic glitch. With an 85% dependence on crude oil imports, every flare-up in West Asia translates into fiscal strain, inflationary pressure, and a widening Current Account Deficit (CAD). However, this crisis is a catalyst for a "Great Reset," shifting India's strategy from mere import substitution to absolute Energy Sovereignty.

2. Structural Challenge: The Import Trap

Macroeconomic Instability: High import dependence links India's inflation and fiscal health directly to geopolitical whims.

Strategic Autonomy: Energy vulnerability limits India's maneuvering room in international diplomacy.

Climate Linkage: Transitioning is not just about security; it is the only path to meeting India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

3. Scaling Renewables: The "Ambition Reset"

To move beyond incrementalism, India must multiply its targets:

Revised 2030 Target: The previous 500 GW goal must be scaled to 1,500 GW by 2030.

The China Comparison: While India added 49 GW in 2025, China added nearly 1,600 GW, highlighting the scale of effort required.

Policy Imperatives:

1. **Central Aggregation:** SECI and other agencies must contract at least 200 GW+ annually.
2. **Obligations:** Strengthen Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs) and introduce Renewable Consumption Obligations (RCOs).

4. Grid Infrastructure & Storage: The Missing Link

Energy generated is useless if it cannot be evacuated:

Transmission Bottlenecks: States like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu face massive curtailment. In 2025**,** 50 GW of capacity remained stranded.

Key Reforms:

1. Mandatory storage integration in all RE tenders.
2. Expansion of Renewable Energy Management Centres (REMCs).
3. Incentivizing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro through GST reductions.

5. Sector-Specific Electrification Strategies

Household Transition

The LPG Dilemma: While PM Ujjwala Yojana increased access, it also increased import dependence.

The Solution: Promote electric induction cooking using the UJALA model (demand aggregation) to make appliances affordable.

Transport Electrification

Roadmap: 100% electrification of 2W/3W by 2030; Buses/Cars/Trucks by 2035.

Actionable: Restructure the PLI scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC) to fix the current underperformance of the battery ecosystem.

6. Nuclear Energy: The Firm Power Backbone

Renewables are intermittent; nuclear provides the "base load":

2047 Vision: Reaching 100 GW of nuclear capacity is a strategic necessity.

Innovation: Focus on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) for faster, scalable deployment.

Liberalization: Enable private sector participation and streamline global technology partnerships.

7. Securing the "Veins": Critical Minerals

A green transition swaps oil for minerals (Lithium, Cobalt, REE):

The China Threat: Overdependence on concentrated global supply chains (specifically China's processing dominance).

Strategic Measures:

1. Develop end-to-end domestic processing and refining.
2. Secure assured offtake agreements with mineral-rich nations.
3. Invest in human capital for battery chemistry and mineralogy.

8. Clean Energy Manufacturing & Financing

Manufacturing Hub: Align PLI schemes to turn India into an export hub for electrolysers, solar modules, and green hydrogen.

Financing Mechanisms:

1. Leverage Green Bonds and blended finance.
2. Deepen Carbon Markets to incentivize private capital.
3. Use sovereign-backed risk mitigation to attract Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).

9. Governance: The "Whole-of-Government" Approach

Execution must mirror the success of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):

Coordination: Integrated action across Center, State, and Municipal bodies.

Accountability: Institutionalizing the transition through a dedicated statutory framework to ensure coordination between the Power, MNRE, and Finance ministries.

Conclusion

The 2026 West Asia crisis is the final warning. India stands at a crossroads: it can remain a hostage to geopolitical chokepoints or emerge as a Global Green Superpower. By shifting from an "energy-poor" mindset to an "energy-sovereign" architecture, India will not only secure its own economic future but also define the global template for a democratic, large-scale energy transition.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/west-asia-war-is-a-warning-it-is-also-a-window-to-securing-indias-energy-10603364/

Question

"India's journey from energy insecurity to energy sovereignty is not merely a matter of 'fuel substitution,' but a total 'architectural reimagining' of its strategic and economic identity. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 West Asia conflict and the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz have exposed the systemic vulnerability of India's current energy model. Achieving Energy Sovereignty—true independence from external supply shocks—requires India to pivot from its role as a passive "price-taker" in the global oil market to a "technology-leader" in the green economy. This is a fundamental shift in the nation's DNA.

2. Moving Beyond 'Fuel Substitution'

Simply replacing an internal combustion engine with an electric one is "fuel substitution." However, the 2026 crisis shows this is insufficient because:

Mineral Dependency: Swapping oil for Lithium or Cobalt merely shifts dependency from West Asian oil rigs to Chinese mineral processing hubs.

The Intermittency Trap: Adding solar panels without a "nervous system" (Grid and Storage) leads to energy being "stranded," as seen with the 50 GW of lost capacity in 2025.

3. Reimagining the Strategic Architecture

Energy sovereignty requires a new "Backbone" and "Nervous System":

Firm Power (The Backbone): Transitioning to a 100 GW Nuclear target by 2047 ensures that the grid has a non-intermittent, domestic base-load. The use of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) allows for decentralized, scalable industrial power.

Grid & Storage (The Nervous System): Treating grid infrastructure as a national priority involves building High-Capacity Transmission Corridors and making Battery Energy Storage (BESS) mandatory in all tenders.

Mineral Diplomacy: Strategic autonomy now depends on "end-to-end" processing of critical minerals and securing offtake agreements with the "Lithium Triangle" to de-risk the supply chain.

4. Reimagining the Economic Identity

From Importer to Exporter: Through the PLI Schemes, India is positioning itself as a global hub for solar modules, electrolyzers, and green hydrogen. This transforms energy from a "Current Account Deficit" (CAD) burden into an export engine.

Electrification of the Household: Replicating the UJALA model for electric induction cooking moves millions of households away from imported LPG, linking domestic energy security to the kitchen.

Green Finance: Developing a robust Carbon Market and utilizing sovereign-backed green bonds ensures that the transition is funded by private capital rather than just state exchequer.

5. Governance: The 'Whole-of-Government' Shift

The reimagining requires a shift from siloed ministries to an integrated execution model. Much like the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) success, energy sovereignty needs coordinated action across Center, States, and Municipalities to handle everything from land acquisition for 1,500 GW of RE to urban EV charging networks.

6. Conclusion

The transition to energy sovereignty is the ultimate test of India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision. By moving beyond simple fuel replacement toward a total architectural reboot—encompassing nuclear base-load, storage-centric grids, and mineral security—India will secure its economic future and emerge as a leader in the global green transformation.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/west-asia-war-is-a-warning-it-is-also-a-window-to-securing-indias-energy-10603364/

3. The war opens up renewable energy pathway (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Energy, Environment & Economy
Topic: Energy security and renewable energy
Sub-Topic: Sustainable development and climate change

Introduction

Geopolitical conflicts, particularly in energy-rich regions, have exposed the vulnerabilities of fossil fuel dependence. Rising import bills and price volatility are pushing India to accelerate its renewable energy transition, transforming it from a climate imperative into an economic necessity.

1. Impact of Geopolitical Conflicts on Energy

Rising Import Dependence

1. India's fossil fuel imports (oil, gas, coal) continue to increase.

Price Volatility

1. Global conflicts lead to sharp fluctuations in crude oil and LNG prices.

Fiscal Pressure

1. Higher energy costs widen current account deficit and inflation.

2. Structural Energy Challenges

High Fossil Fuel Dependence

1. India relies heavily on imported energy sources.

Limited Renewable Share

1. Renewables still constitute a relatively small portion of total energy mix.

Infrastructure Constraints

1. Challenges in grid integration and storage capacity.

3. Shift Towards Renewable Energy

Electrification of Economy

1. Transition from fossil fuels to electric mobility and appliances.

Expansion of Renewable Capacity

1. Growth in solar and wind energy installations.

Energy Transition as Economic Strategy

1. Renewables seen as a way to reduce import dependence and enhance resilience.

4. Role of States in Energy Transition

Decentralised Implementation

1. States play a key role in policy execution and infrastructure development.

Best Practices

1. States like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka leading in renewable deployment.

Urban and Local Initiatives

Electrification of public transport and energy-efficient urban planning.

5. Opportunities Emerging

Energy Security

1. Reduced reliance on volatile global markets.

Economic Growth

1. Investment in renewables creates jobs and industrial opportunities.

Environmental Benefits

1. Lower carbon emissions and progress towards climate goals.

6. Challenges Ahead

Financing Constraints

1. High upfront investment required.

Technological Gaps

1. Need for advancements in energy storage and grid management.

Policy Coordination

1. Aligning Centre and State policies for effective implementation.

7. Way Forward

Strengthening Renewable Infrastructure

1. Invest in grid modernisation and storage systems.

Promoting Electrification

1. Encourage adoption of EVs and electric appliances.

Policy Stability

1. Ensure long-term clarity to attract investment.

State-Level Innovation

1. Encourage states to adopt context-specific renewable strategies.

Conclusion

The ongoing global energy crisis provides India with a critical opportunity to accelerate its renewable energy transition. By leveraging policy reforms, technological innovation, and state-level initiatives, India can achieve energy security, economic resilience, and sustainability.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Geopolitical conflicts have accelerated the shift towards renewable energy in India. Analyse the drivers of this transition and examine the role of states in achieving energy security.* (250 words)

Introduction

Geopolitical tensions have exposed the vulnerabilities of fossil fuel dependence, prompting India to accelerate its transition to renewable energy.

Drivers

1. Energy Security

1. Reduce dependence on imports.

2. Price Volatility

1. Mitigate impact of global price fluctuations.

3. Climate Commitments

1. Achieve sustainability goals.

Role of States

1. Implementation

1. Execute renewable policies and projects.

2. Innovation

1. Adopt state-specific strategies.

Conclusion

Renewable energy transition is essential for India's long-term sustainability. Effective coordination between Centre and States will be crucial to achieving energy security.

4. Empowering women could help save us from water bankruptcy (MT)

General Studies Paper I: Role of women in society

Topic: Water resource management, sustainable development

Sub-Topic: Sustainable development and climate change

Introduction

India is facing a growing water crisis driven by over-extraction, climate variability, and governance gaps. Evidence increasingly shows that empowering women in water management can

significantly improve efficiency, sustainability, and equitable access, making it a critical strategy for addressing water scarcity.

1. India's Water Crisis: Key Features

1. Declining groundwater levels due to overuse.
2. Increasing urban and rural water stress.
3. Climate change causing erratic rainfall and droughts.
4. Governance challenges in distribution and conservation.

2. Why Women Are Central to Water Management

Primary Stakeholders

1. Women are the main managers of household water usage.

Local Knowledge

1. Possess deep understanding of local water sources and needs.

Community Mobilisation

1. Play a key role in collective action and awareness.

3. Evidence of Women-Led Success

Improved Resource Management

1. Better monitoring of water usage and conservation practices.

Sustainable Outcomes

1. Reduced over-extraction and improved groundwater recharge.

Enhanced Equity

1. More inclusive distribution of water resources within communities.

4. Key Policy Interventions

Water Budgeting

1. Community-based planning of water usage and supply.

Demand-Side Management

1. Promoting conservation practices like efficient irrigation and water-saving technologies.

Infrastructure Development

1. Investments in rainwater harvesting and local storage systems.

Institutional Support

1. Strengthening women's participation in local governance bodies (e.g., Panchayats).

5. Challenges

Social Barriers

1. Limited decision-making power for women in many regions.

Capacity Constraints

1. Need for training and awareness.

Policy Implementation Gaps

1. Weak coordination between institutions and communities.

6. Way Forward

Empowering Women Leaders

1. Increase representation in water governance institutions.

Capacity Building

1. Provide training in water management and leadership skills.

Integrated Approach

1. Combine community participation, technology, and policy support.

Behavioural Change

1. Promote water conservation through education and awareness campaigns.

Conclusion

Empowering women in water governance offers a sustainable and inclusive solution to India's water crisis. By leveraging their knowledge and leadership, India can ensure efficient resource management, resilience, and long-term water security.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/empower-women-water-bankruptcy-managers-vital-resources-india-budgeting-conservation/amp-11774449068218.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *"Empowering women is key to achieving sustainable water management in India." Discuss with examples and suggest policy measures.* (250 words)

Introduction

India's water crisis requires innovative and inclusive solutions. Women, as primary users and managers of water, play a crucial role in sustainable water governance.

Role of Women

1. Resource Management

1. Efficient use and conservation of water.

2. Community Leadership

1. Mobilising collective action.

Measures

1. Institutional Inclusion

1. Increase women's participation in governance.

2. Capacity Building

1. Provide training and awareness.

Conclusion

Empowering women can transform water management practices and ensure sustainability. Inclusive policies will be key to addressing India's water challenges.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/empower-women-water-bankruptcy-managers-vital-resources-india-budgeting-conservation/amp-11774449068218.html

Editorial of the Day – 28.03.2026

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1. Beyond the rhetoric of the north-south divide (TH)

GS Paper II: Polity, Governance, and Social Justice.
Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Devolution of powers and finances.
Sub-Topic: Regionalism, Inter-state disparities, Finance Commission mandates, and the Delimitation Exercise

1. Introduction

India's development trajectory is increasingly characterized by a "Dual-Speed" growth model. While the nation aims for a $5 trillion (and beyond) economy, the gap between the Peninsular States (South) and the Great Indian Plain (North) has deepened into a structural fault-line. This divide is not just about GDP numbers; it encompasses demographic shifts, human development indicators, and the looming 2026 delimitation exercise, which threatens to unbalance the political equilibrium of the Republic.

2. The Socio-Economic Fault-line: "Two Unequal Indias"

The divergence between the two regions has created two distinct socio-economic realities:
The Peninsular Success: Southern states have achieved human development indicators (health, TFR, literacy) that align with global middle-income standards. They are characterized by higher per capita income and better social infrastructure.
The Heartland Struggle: The Northern heartland continues to grapple with lower income levels, higher population growth, and weaker human development indicators, resembling developing regions.
Structural Imbalance: This is no longer a uniform national story; the development gap has become a fixed feature of the Indian landscape, raising concerns about long-term national cohesion.

3. The Mismatch: Economic Power vs. Political Representation

A core tension in 2026 is the growing disconnect between who "earns" for the country and who "decides" for it:
Wealth Creation: The Southern states contribute a disproportionately high share to the national exchequer and industrial output.
Political Dominance: Due to higher population density, the Northern states hold greater representation in Parliament.
The Delimitation Crisis: With the freeze on seats set to expire, an upcoming **delimitation exercise** based on recent population data threatens to further reduce the political weight of Southern states. This creates a perception that the South is being "penalized" for its success in population control.

4. Risks to Federal Stability

History provides cautionary tales (like the USSR or Yugoslavia) where perceived economic extraction led to regional fragmentation.
Subsidizing the Majority: A "productive minority" (South) perceives itself as perpetually subsidizing a "poorer majority" (North) without adequate political recourse.
Federal Trust Deficit: If the South feels its economic contribution is met with political marginalization, the spirit of Cooperative Federalism suffers.

Threat to Unity: Continued economic extraction without inclusive political growth could fuel regionalist sentiments, potentially weakening national unity.

5. Internal Challenges within the South

It is a mistake to view the South as a monolithic utopia. It faces its own "Middle-Income Trap":

Urban Concentration: Wealth is often concentrated among urban elites, leaving rural hinterlands within Southern states behind.

Social Stagnation: Economic growth has not fully eroded deep-seated issues like caste hierarchies, patriarchy, and gaps in the rule of law.

Fragile Success: The regional success is uneven and remains vulnerable to shifts in global supply chains and internal migration pressures.

6. Proposed Reforms: Toward a New Social Contract

Addressing the divide requires moving beyond regional identity politics toward systemic reform:

Fair Representation Models: Exploring concepts like Digressive Proportionality (ensuring smaller states retain a minimum effective voice regardless of population).

Inclusive Economic Growth: Shifting focus from mere "transfers" to building self-sustaining industrial bases in Northern states to reduce the subsidy burden on the South.

Internal Migration Balance: Addressing the rights of "internal outsiders" (migrant workers) to ensure social stability across borders.

Institutional Strengthening: Empowering the Finance Commission and GST **Council** to act as neutral arbiters of regional equity.

Conclusion

The North-South divide is the ultimate test of the Indian Union's "Unity in Diversity." It is a delicate balance between the North's population-based democratic right and the South's performance-based federal right. Scurrying toward 2030, India needs a new social contract—one that ensures political fairness, rewards developmental success, and uplifts the lagging regions through cooperative, rather than coercive, federalism.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/beyond-the-rhetoric-of-the-north-south-divide/article70793560.ece

Question

"The 'North-South Divide' in India is evolving from a demographic and economic disparity into a structural threat to the federal equilibrium of the Union. Critically analyze the implications of the upcoming delimitation exercise on regional representation and suggest a framework for a 'New Social Contract' to ensure national unity." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's federalism is currently navigating a "Dual-Speed" reality. While the Southern states have achieved middle-income status with advanced human development indicators (HDI), the Northern heartland continues to struggle with high population growth and lower income levels. In 2026, this divide is being tested by the looming delimitation exercise, which threatens to transform demographic success into political marginalization for the South.

2. Implications of the Delimitation Exercise

The upcoming redistribution of Parliamentary seats based on current population data poses several risks:

The 'Performance Penalty': Southern states, which successfully implemented national goals of population control and literacy, fear losing their political voice. A decrease in their share of seats in the Lok Sabha would mean less influence over national policy and budget allocations.

Mismatch of Economic and Political Power: The South contributes a disproportionately high share to the national GDP and tax exchequer. However, the North holds the "demographic dividend" that translates

into greater legislative dominance. This creates a perception of economic extraction without adequate political representation.

Risk to Federal Trust: If one region feels its developmental success leads to political irrelevance, the spirit of Cooperative Federalism is undermined. Historical parallels (like the fragmentation of the USSR) suggest that such perceived imbalances can fuel regionalist sentiments.

3. Fiscal and Social Fault-lines

The Subsidy Tension: The Finance Commission's use of 2011 population data for horizontal devolution has already created friction. Southern states argue that the "revenue-sharing" model should reward efficiency and performance rather than just "needs and population."

The Internal Migration Crisis: As labor moves from the North to the South, "internal outsiders" often lack political rights in their host states, while the Southern states face cultural and linguistic anxieties, complicating social cohesion.

4. Framework for a 'New Social Contract'

To bridge this gap, India requires a balanced reform that respects both Democratic Rights (population) and Federal Rights (performance):

Institutional Safeguards: Exploring Digressive Proportionality, where seat allocation is not purely population-based, ensuring smaller/successful states retain a "minimum effective voice."

Empowering the Rajya Sabha: Transforming the Upper House into a true "House of States" with equal or weighted representation for states, regardless of population, to act as a federal check on the Lok Sabha.

Performance-Linked Devolution: The 16th Finance Commission must balance "Equity" (uplifting the North) with "Efficiency" (rewarding the South), ensuring that success in health and education is not financially penalized.

Inclusive Industrialization: Aggressively building industrial corridors in the North to create a "convergence" of income levels, reducing the long-term dependence of the Heartland on Peninsular transfers.

5. Conclusion

The North-South divide is not a zero-sum game; the North needs the South's capital and technology, while the South needs the North's market and labor. National unity in 2026 depends on transitioning from "Coercive Federalism" to a "Social Contract of Shared Prosperity." By protecting regional representation and rewarding developmental excellence, India can ensure that its demographic diversity remains a strength rather than a structural fault-line.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/beyond-the-rhetoric-of-the-north-south-divide/article70793560.ece

2. GDP: From the US to India, who are the economic winners and losers of US-Iran war?

GS Paper III: Indian Economy & International Relations

Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Sub-Topic: Geopolitics and Global Economic Transmission, Energy Security, and Exchange Rate Volatility.

1. Introduction

In early 2026, the global economy is grappling with a renewed era of "geopolitical heartburn." The escalation in West Asia has not just disrupted regional peace but has triggered a series of economic shockwaves across trade, finance, and energy channels. For India, which sits at the crossroads of these global linkages, the conflict represents a significant "external headwind" that threatens the stability of the Rupee and the trajectory of domestic inflation.

2. Geopolitical Conflict & Global Economic Transmission

The crisis acts as a catalyst for global volatility through several key vectors:

The Hormuz Chokepoint: The conflict places a direct threat on the Strait of Hormuz, a maritime artery through which nearly 20% of the world's oil supply pulses. Any blockade here is not just a regional issue but a global energy cardiac arrest.
Capital Flight to Safety: Global uncertainty has triggered a "Risk-Off" sentiment. Investors are fleeing emerging markets in favor of "Safe Haven" assets like Gold and the US Dollar.
Interconnected Vulnerability: Unlike previous eras, the 2026 economy is hyper-globalized. A disruption in West Asian logistics immediately translates into higher production costs in Noida or Tokyo.
Historical Echoes: This mirrors the 1991 Gulf War and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine shock, where energy became the primary weapon of economic transmission.

3. Impact on Global Growth: Divergent Destinies

The OECD Economic Outlook (2026) suggests that while global growth remains at 2.9%, the pain is far from uniform:
The Hardest Hit (Europe & UK): High energy dependence has pushed the Euro Area into a **-0.4%** slowdown and the UK into a -0.5% slump.
The Strategic Gainer (USA): Paradoxically, the US economy is projected to gain +0.3 percentage points. Its status as a major energy producer and a destination for capital flight cushions it against the shocks hitting its allies.
The Insulated Players (China & Russia): Both nations have leveraged alternative trade networks and "de-dollarized" channels to remain relatively resilient.

4. Inflationary Pressures and the Energy Shock

The conflict has birthed a new wave of Cost-Push Inflation:
Imported Inflation in India: India's inflation is set to leap from ~2% (2025) to 5.1% (2026), breaching the RBI's medium-term target of 4%.
Logistics & Production: Rising crude prices filter through the economy, raising the cost of everything from food transport to industrial manufacturing.
The Developed World's Burden: Japan, Korea, and the EU are seeing inflation spikes of over 1 percentage point, dampening consumer spending.
The "Oil-Rich" Exception: Nations like Saudi Arabia remain insulated, enjoying a "windfall" from higher export prices.

5. Currency Depreciation & Financial Markets

The Indian Rupee is currently a "barometer of external stress":
The 4% Slide: In just one month, the Rupee plummeted to ₹94.6/$, a depreciation rate nearly double its usual annual average.
Exchange Rate as a Signal: This rapid fall reflects a widening Current Account Deficit (CAD) and a massive outflow of Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI).
Market Fluctuations: Bonds and stocks are experiencing "whiplash" as investors adjust to a higher-for-longer interest rate environment globally.

6. Sectoral Impact on the Indian Economy

India's economic structure makes it uniquely sensitive to this conflict:
Energy Achilles' Heel: With over 85% oil import dependency, India's fiscal math is at the mercy of crude prices.
Agriculture & Industry: High fuel prices drive up fertilizer costs (India's agricultural backbone) and input costs for the manufacturing sector.
Trade Balance: A surging oil bill threatens to deplete India's hard-earned foreign exchange reserves.
The Devaluation Silver Lining: On the flip side, a weaker Rupee may boost IT services exports and Pharmaceuticals, making Indian products cheaper in the global market.

7. Policy Response & Economic Resilience

India is not a passive spectator; it is actively building "economic fortifications":

Monetary Tightening: The RBI is expected to use interest rate hikes to defend the Rupee and anchor inflation expectations.
Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR): India is leaning on its underground oil caches to manage supply hiccups.
Energy Diversification: The crisis has accelerated the shift toward Green Hydrogen and Renewables to break the fossil-fuel "oil-chain."
Digital Strength: India's robust Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) ensures that domestic consumption remains resilient despite external shocks.

Conclusion

The 2026 West Asia conflict is a reminder that in a globalized world, "geopolitics is macroeconomics." For India, the path forward requires a delicate balancing act: shielding the common man from imported inflation today while doubling down on Energy Sovereignty for tomorrow. While the Rupee may be under pressure, India's structural reforms and large domestic market provide a safety net that many other energy-importers lack.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/us-india-china-economic-winners-losers-iran-war-10604728/

Question

"Discuss the multi-dimensional impact of the 2026 West Asia conflict on global economic stability. How should India navigate the resulting fiscal and monetary challenges to maintain its growth momentum?" (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 West Asia conflict has transcended its regional boundaries to become a "Global Economic Stress Test." By threatening the Strait of Hormuz—a artery for 20% of the world's oil—the crisis has triggered a "Risk-Off" sentiment. For a hyper-globalized economy like India, this manifests as a "Triple-Whammy" of surging energy costs, a depreciating currency, and imported inflation.

2. Multi-dimensional Impact on Global Stability

Energy Shock & The "Winner-Loser" Gap: Rising crude prices have created a sharp divergence. Energy-exporters like the USA (+0.3% growth) are benefiting from domestic production, while energy-dependent regions like Europe (-0.4%) and Japan are facing a sharp slowdown.
Capital Flight & Safe Havens: Global uncertainty has led to massive capital outflows from emerging markets. Investors are retreating to "Safe Havens" like Gold and the US Dollar, causing a spike in the Dollar Index and a corresponding crash in local currencies.
Supply Chain Contraction: Increased freight costs and insurance premiums in the Persian Gulf have disrupted global logistics, leading to a worldwide surge in Cost-Push Inflation.

3. Fiscal and Monetary Challenges for India

India, importing over 85% of its crude, faces specific structural pressures:
The Rupee Slide: In March 2026, the INR depreciated 4% to ₹94.6/$. This raises the cost of all imports (not just oil), putting immense pressure on the Current Account Deficit (CAD).
Inflationary Breach: Domestic inflation has hit 5.1%, crossing the RBI's 4% median target. This "Imported Inflation" reduces the purchasing power of the Indian middle class and increases input costs for farmers (fertilizers).
Fiscal Deficit Pressure: High oil prices may force the government to increase subsidies or cut excise duties to protect consumers, potentially derailing the Fiscal Consolidation roadmap.

4. Navigating the Crisis: The Way Forward

To maintain its 6.1% growth momentum, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy:
Monetary Vigilance: The RBI must engage in "Calibrated Tightening" to defend the Rupee and anchor inflation expectations without stifling credit growth for industries.

Energy Sovereignty: The conflict provides a "Strategic Pivot" point to accelerate the shift toward Green Hydrogen and Renewables, reducing the long-term "Oil-Chain" dependency.
Trade Diversification: India should leverage the weakened Rupee to boost exports in resilient sectors like IT services, Pharmaceuticals, and Textiles, while seeking alternative "non-dollar" trade arrangements with strategic partners.
Strategic Reserves: Utilizing Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to cushion short-term supply shocks can prevent a sudden "Fiscal Shock" to the exchequer.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 West Asia conflict is a reminder that in a globalized world, "Geopolitics is Macroeconomics." India's resilience lies in its large domestic market and digital economy, but its vulnerability remains rooted in its energy import bill. By balancing short-term monetary defense with long-term structural shifts toward Energy Autonomy, India can transform this external headwind into an opportunity for economic maturity and strategic independence.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/us-india-china-economic-winners-losers-iran-war-10604728/

3. Grim future for world economy (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Global economic trends and their impact on India
Sub-Topic: Inflation, recession, and macroeconomic stability

Introduction

The global economy is entering a phase of heightened uncertainty marked by geopolitical tensions, inflationary pressures, and slowing growth. With limited fiscal and monetary space, economies face the risk of stagflation, making macroeconomic management increasingly challenging.

1. Current Global Economic Scenario

Slowing Growth

1. Major economies experiencing reduced economic expansion.

Persistent Inflation

1. Inflation remains elevated due to energy prices and supply disruptions.

Geopolitical Uncertainty

1. Conflicts disrupt trade routes and global supply chains.

2. Constraints on Policy Response

Limited Fiscal Space

1. High public debt restricts government spending capacity.

Monetary Policy Limits

1. Interest rate hikes to control inflation may slow growth further.

Trade-offs

1. Policymakers must balance growth, inflation, and financial stability.

3. Risk of Stagflation

Definition

1. Simultaneous occurrence of high inflation and low growth.

Drivers

1. Energy shocks, supply constraints, and weak demand recovery.

Consequences

1. Reduced investment, unemployment, and economic instability.

4. Financial Market Concerns

Capital Flow Volatility

1. Foreign investments may fluctuate due to global uncertainty.

Currency Pressures
1. Exchange rate volatility affects trade and inflation.

Asset Market Risks
1. Overvaluation and corrections in equity markets.

5. Implications for India

External Vulnerability
1. Exposure to global shocks through trade and capital flows.

Inflationary Pressures
1. Rising energy prices impact domestic inflation.

Fiscal Challenges
1. Increased expenditure on subsidies and welfare.

6. Policy Priorities for India

Macroeconomic Stability
1. Maintain balance between growth and inflation control.

Fiscal Prudence
1. Rationalise expenditure while supporting critical sectors.

Diversification
1. Reduce dependence on volatile global markets.

Strengthening Domestic Demand
1. Promote investment and consumption.

7. Way Forward

Structural Reforms
1. Improve productivity and competitiveness.

Resilient Supply Chains
1. Strengthen domestic manufacturing.

Prudent Policy Mix
1. Coordinate fiscal and monetary policies effectively.

Conclusion

The global economy faces a challenging phase with limited policy options and rising risks of stagflation. For India, maintaining macroeconomic stability through prudent policies and structural reforms will be crucial to navigating this uncertain environment.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/grim-future-for-world-economy/article70793434.ece

Q. *"The global economy is heading towards a stagflationary phase with limited policy space." Discuss the causes and implications of this trend and suggest policy measures for India.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Stagflation, characterised by high inflation and low growth, is emerging as a key risk in the global economy due to geopolitical tensions and supply disruptions.

Causes

1. Energy Price Shocks
1. Rising oil and gas prices.

2. Supply Chain Disruptions
1. Impact of global conflicts.

Measures

1. Fiscal Prudence
1. Rationalise expenditure.

2. Monetary Stability

1. Balance inflation control with growth.

Conclusion Managing stagflation requires a coordinated policy approach. India must focus on stability, resilience, and structural reforms to mitigate global economic risks.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/grim-future-for-world-economy/article70793434.ece

4. Justice for CAPFs, stability for the nation(TP)

General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Role of CAPFs in internal security
Sub-Topic: Centre–State coordination in policing

Introduction

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) form the backbone of India's internal security framework, operating across diverse terrains and challenges. The debate on CAPF reforms, particularly regarding service conditions and structural alignment, must be viewed in the broader context of **national security, federal coordination, and institutional efficiency**.

1. Role of CAPFs in Internal Security

1. CAPFs such as CRPF, BSF, ITBP, and CISF operate in border management, counter-insurgency, and law and order support.
2. They function in close coordination with state police forces.
3. Serve as a bridge between Union and State security mechanisms.

2. Key Issues in CAPF Governance

Service Conditions and Career Progression

1. Concerns regarding promotion, cadre management, and stagnation.

Operational Challenges

1. Frequent deployment in high-risk and diverse environments.

Coordination Gaps

1. Need for better integration with state police systems.

3. Federal Dimension of Internal Security

Interdependence of Forces

1. Internal security requires joint functioning of CAPFs and state police.

Avoiding Fragmentation

1. Creating parallel or isolated structures may weaken overall security architecture.

Constitutional Balance

1. Law and order is a State subject, while CAPFs operate under the Union.

4. Concerns with Isolated Reforms

Institutional Disconnect

1. Reforms that treat CAPFs separately may disrupt coordination mechanisms.

Operational Inefficiency

1. Lack of synergy can affect real-time response to threats.

Policy Fragmentation

1. Weakens unified command in critical situations.

5. Need for Balanced Reform

Structural Integration

1. Align CAPF reforms with broader internal security framework.

Career and Welfare Measures

1. Address grievances while maintaining operational effectiveness.

Strengthening Coordination

1. Improve joint training, communication, and inter-agency cooperation.

6. Strategic Importance

National Security Stability

1. CAPFs are critical for maintaining internal stability and border security.

Crisis Response Capability

1. Essential for handling insurgency, terrorism, and emergencies.

Institutional Cohesion

1. Unified approach strengthens governance and security outcomes.

7. Way Forward

Comprehensive Reform Approach

1. Integrate CAPF reforms within the national security architecture.

Enhancing Coordination

1. Strengthen Centre–State collaboration.

Capacity Building

1. Invest in training, technology, and modernisation.

Reforming CAPFs is essential, but it must be done within the framework of India's integrated internal security system. A balanced approach that ensures institutional cohesion, operational efficiency, and personnel welfare will strengthen national stability.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/justice-for-capfs-stability-for-the-nation

Q. *Discuss the role of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in India's internal security framework. Examine the need for reforms while maintaining federal balance and institutional cohesion.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

CAPFs play a crucial role in maintaining internal security by supporting state police and managing border security. Their functioning is integral to India's federal security architecture.

Role

1. Internal Security

1. Counter-insurgency and law and order support.

2. Border Management

1. Safeguarding national borders.

Need for Reform

1. Service Conditions

1. Address career progression and welfare.

2. Coordination

1. Improve integration with state police.

Conclusion

Reforms in CAPFs must balance personnel welfare with institutional efficiency. Strengthening coordination and integration will enhance India's internal security framework.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/justice-for-capfs-stability-for-the-nation


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Editorial of the Day – 30.03.2026

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1. Administrative Hub of Iron Age Kingdom?

ASI Dig at Bihar's Balirajgarh Seeks Answers on Ancient Mithila History (IE)

GS Paper I - Indian Culture & Ancient History

Topic - Ancient Indian Civilizations, Urbanization, and Archaeological Sites.

Sub-Topic - Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Mandate, Mithila/Videha History, and Stratigraphic Sequences

1. Introduction

In a landmark move to bridge the gap between Vedic literature and physical evidence, the ASI has launched a large-scale scientific excavation at Balirajgarh (Madhubani district, Bihar). Spanning approximately 176 acres, this site is often hailed as the "Gateway to Mithila." The project aims to uncover the urban complexity of a civilization that influenced Indian philosophy, trade, and politics from the Mauryan era through to the Pala period.

2. Archaeological Significance of Balirajgarh

Balirajgarh isn't just a mound of earth; it's a stratified library of Indian history.

Urbanization Evidence - Findings indicate a well-planned fortified settlement. The presence of massive brick fortifications suggests an advanced state of urban planning comparable to other early historic hubs like Pataliputra.

Historical Continuity - The site shows evidence of a "living" civilization that persisted through several dynasties - Mauryan, Sunga, Kushan, Gupta, and Pala.

The Videha Connection - Scholars believe this site is a primary center of the ancient Videha Kingdom, the legendary land of King Janaka and a crucible of early Indian thought.

Mythology Meets Science - Local lore connects the site to King Bali. While mythology provides the narrative, the excavation provides the empirical proof of a highly structured society.

3. The Role of the ASI - 21st Century Archaeology

The Archaeological Survey of India (established in 1861) has transitioned from shovels to sensors.

Scientific Precision - The ASI is employing satellite imagery, GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping, and trench excavation to ensure the integrity of the layers is maintained.

Mandate of Conservation - As a protected site since 1938 under the Ministry of Culture, the ASI balances the need for exploration with the duty of preservation.

Interdisciplinary Approach - By integrating anthropology, environmental science, and history, the ASI is reconstructing not just "what" was there, but "how" they lived.

4. Cultural & Historical Context of the Mithila Region

Mithila has long been the "think-tank" of ancient India.

Center of Scholarship - Historically, this was a hub for Vedic learning and the birthplace of the Nyaya school of philosophy.

Artistic Legacy - The region's aesthetic influence continues today through Madhubani painting and classical Sanskrit literature.

Economic Hub - The discovery of punch-marked coins and beads indicates that Mithila was a significant node in ancient trade networks, connecting the plains to the Himalayas.

5. Material Culture - Findings and Implications

The "trash" of the ancient world is the "treasure" of the modern historian.

Technological Markers - Discovery of terracotta figurines, copper objects, and bone tools reflects a society that mastered metallurgy and artisanal crafts.

Administrative Proof - The massive fortifications and structural remains hint at a strong central authority and sophisticated drainage systems.

Iron Age Links - Scientific dating of current findings could potentially push back the timeline of organized habitation in this region, linking it more firmly to the Iron Age.

6. Contemporary Relevance - Heritage as an Asset

Archaeology in 2026 is as much about the future as it is about the past.

Economic Catalyst - Developing Balirajgarh into a cultural tourism hub could revitalize the local economy in Bihar, creating jobs in infrastructure and hospitality.

Soft Power - Showcasing a continuous, sophisticated civilization enhances India's global cultural standing—often termed "Cultural Diplomacy."

The Challenges - Environmental - A high-water table in the region makes deep excavation difficult.

Logistical - Encroachment and high conservation costs remain significant hurdles for the ASI.

Conclusion

The Balirajgarh excavation is a vital step in mapping the "lost" chapters of the Videha Kingdom. By combining modern satellite mapping with traditional stratigraphic analysis, the ASI is ensuring that India's civilizational legacy is not just remembered, but scientifically validated. A balanced "heritage-first" development model can transform these ruins into a vibrant center of knowledge and regional growth.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/administrative-hub-of-iron-age-kingdom-asi-dig-at-bihars-balirajgarh-seeks-answers-on-ancient-mithila-history-10608595/

Question

"The transition from textual history to empirical evidence is essential for a holistic understanding of India's civilizational continuity. Elucidate this statement with special reference to the recent archaeological excavations at Balirajgarh and their significance for the Mithila region." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

For decades, the Videha Kingdom and the Mithila civilization were primarily known through Vedic texts, the Brahmanas, and the Epics. The recent large-scale scientific excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Balirajgarh (Bihar) marks a pivotal shift, providing tangible, stratigraphic evidence for an urban settlement that spanned over a millennium—from the Mauryan to the Pala periods.

2. Bridging Literature and Empirical Evidence

The excavation at Balirajgarh provides the physical "proof" for the scholarly and political descriptions found in ancient literature -

Fortified Urbanism - While texts mention the grandeur of King Janaka's Mithila, the discovery of massive brick fortifications across 176 acres confirms the existence of a highly organized, administrative center.

Cultural Sequence - Stratigraphic layers provide a "timeline" that literary traditions often lack. The evidence of habitation from the Mauryan (3rd century BCE) to the Pala (12th century CE) periods proves the region's long-term socio-political stability.

The Videha Link - By uncovering Iron Age and early historic phase indicators, archaeology is moving closer to identifying the specific material culture associated with the Vedic-era Videha Kingdom.

3. Socio-Economic and Technological Insights

The material culture found at the site paints a vivid picture of ancient life -

Trade and Economy - The discovery of punch-marked coins and beads signifies that Mithila was a significant node in ancient trade routes, linking the Gangetic plains with the Himalayan foothills.
Artisanal Mastery - Terracotta figurines, copper objects, and bone tools reflect a society with a high degree of specialization in metallurgy and arts, paralleling the region's known history as a center of learning and philosophy.
Urban Infrastructure - Structural remains and drainage indicators suggest an advanced understanding of public health and civic planning, consistent with the "Second Urbanization" of India.

4. Role of Modern Scientific Techniques

The ASI's use of 21st-century technology has refined the historical narrative -
Precision Mapping - Satellite imagery and GIS mapping allow for a non-invasive understanding of the site's layout before a single trench is dug.
Interdisciplinary Study - Integrating anthropology and environmental studies helps reconstruct the ancient climate and diet, providing a holistic view of how the Mithila region sustained its population for centuries.

5. Contemporary Significance - Soft Power and Development

Beyond history, the excavation has modern strategic value -
Cultural Diplomacy - Validating the antiquity of the Mithila region enhances India's global "soft power" by showcasing a continuous and sophisticated civilization.
Regional Growth - Transforming Balirajgarh into a protected heritage hub can drive **cultural tourism**, providing a sustainable economic engine for Northern Bihar.

6. Conclusion

The Balirajgarh excavation is more than a search for artifacts; it is a reconstruction of India's intellectual and political heartland. By grounding the literary traditions of Mithila in empirical archaeological fact, the ASI is ensuring that the legacy of the Videha Kingdom is preserved not just in memory, but in science. Such endeavors are essential to building a cohesive national identity based on proven civilizational continuity.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/administrative-hub-of-iron-age-kingdom-asi-dig-at-bihars-balirajgarh-seeks-answers-on-ancient-mithila-history-10608595/

2. Neighbours first - On India-Nepal ties (TH)

GS Paper II - International Relations
Topic - Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub-Topic - India-Nepal Strategic Ties, Boundary Disputes, and the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

1. Introduction

The relationship between India and Nepal is unique, defined by an open border and the "Roti-Beti" (bread and daughter) connection. However, the rise of Balendra Shah as a significant political force represents a departure from the traditional Brahmin-Chettri elite dominance. For India, the challenge lies in engaging this "New Nepal"—which is more nationalistic and less tied to legacy political movements—while safeguarding strategic interests against external influences.

2. The Shift - Rise of a New Leadership

Nepal's political DNA is evolving rapidly with the emergence of a Gen-Z leadership -
Balendra Shah (35) - Represents a shift from the traditional political guard (Congress/Maoists).
Identity Shift - As the first major Madhesi leader to break the traditional elite dominance, his rise signals a change in domestic power dynamics.
Foreign Policy Uncertainty - Not shaped by older movements like the Panchayat or anti-monarchy struggles, his diplomatic stance remains pragmatic yet strongly nationalistic.
Nationalistic Posturing - Earlier apprehensions in New Delhi were raised by his use of the "Greater Nepal" map, reflecting a desire for a more assertive Nepali identity.

3. Strategic and Deep-rooted Connections

Despite political shifts, the structural foundations of the tie remain immutable -

Shared Heritage - Deeply rooted in shared culture, familial ties, and religious history.

Geographical Interdependence - As a landlocked nation, Nepal is fundamentally dependent on India for trade, transit, and access to sea lanes.

Energy Symbiosis - India's regional energy grid plans are the primary vehicle for Nepal's prosperity, offering a platform to export hydropower and generate significant revenue.

4. Historical Frictions and Challenges

The past decade has been marked by "trust deficit" events that continue to shadow the relationship -

Constitutional Issues - Tensions arising from Nepal's 2015 Constitution and the subsequent perceived border blockade.

Territorial Disputes - Lingering disagreements over border regions that have occasionally flared into diplomatic standoffs.

Sovereignty Concerns - A growing sensitivity in Kathmandu regarding Indian influence, often leveraged by external actors to create a "zero-sum" game in the Himalayas.

5. Economic Vulnerabilities in 2026

Nepal is currently navigating a precarious economic environment, exacerbated by global shifts -

Energy & Food Security - Shortages in fuel and fertilizer due to the ongoing West Asia crisis.

Remittance Dependency - Nearly 14% of the population works abroad, making the economy highly sensitive to global labor market fluctuations.

Tourism - A critical sector that requires stable regional connectivity to flourish.

6. Way Forward - A "Non-Intrusive" Partnership

To reinforce trust, India must adopt a proactive and sensitive diplomatic posture -

Action Category	Specific Policy Recommendation
Connectivity	Grant overflight access for newly constructed Nepali airports to boost tourism.
Energy Trade	Ease restrictions on Nepali power imports to facilitate their hydropower growth.
Diplomatic Engagement	Extend an early invitation to Balendra Shah for a high-profile visit to New Delhi.
Treaty Reform	Be open to updating the 1950 Bilateral Friendship Treaty to reflect 21st-century realities.
Emergency Support	Provide priority assistance for fuel and fertilizer to cushion Nepal from West Asian shocks.

Conclusion

India-Nepal relations stand at a critical juncture where "Big Brother" diplomacy must give way to a "Supportive Partner" model. By addressing past frictions with sensitivity and supporting Nepal's economic stability during global crises, India can ensure that its "Neighbourhood First" policy is not just a slogan, but a strategic reality. Proactive engagement with the new generation of leadership will be the key to maintaining a stable and influential presence in the Himalayas.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/neighbours-first/article70799573.ece

Question

"Examine the significance of the 'Energy-Connectivity' nexus in redefining India-Nepal relations against the backdrop of shifting political leadership in Kathmandu and global economic volatility in 2026." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India-Nepal relations have historically been viewed through the prism of shared culture and the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. However, in March 2026, the ascent of a nationalistic, Gen-Z

leadership under Balendra Shah—Nepal's first prominent Madhesi leader—has shifted the focus toward a more pragmatic, functional partnership. The "Energy-Connectivity" nexus has now emerged as the most critical pillar for stabilizing bilateral ties and countering external strategic influences.

2. Shifting Political Landscape - The Gen-Z Factor

Departure from Legacy - The new leadership is not tethered to the anti-monarchy or Panchayat-era political baggage. Their approach is rooted in sovereign pragmatism and a desire to reduce economic dependence.

Assertive Nationalism - The use of "Greater Nepal" maps by the new guard highlights a shift toward a more assertive identity, making "Big Brother" diplomacy in New Delhi counterproductive.

Economic Urgency - The ongoing West Asia crisis has hit Nepal hard through fuel and fertilizer shortages, forcing the new leadership to look toward India for immediate economic cushions.

3. The Energy Nexus - Hydropower as a Strategic Bridge

From Aid to Trade - Nepal's massive hydropower potential is its primary ticket to middle-income status. India's regional energy grid provides a guaranteed market for Nepali power exports.

Revenue Generation - By easing restrictions on power imports, India allows Nepal to generate substantial revenue, reducing its trade deficit and fiscal dependence on remittances (currently 14% of its population).

Grid Stability - For India, Nepali hydro-power acts as a clean "base-load" that complements its own renewable energy targets for 2030.

4. The Connectivity Nexus - Open Borders to Open Skies

Logistical Sovereignty - Granting overflight access for Nepal's newly built international airports is a high-value diplomatic gesture that supports Nepal's vital tourism sector.

Infrastructure Integration - Cross-border railways and Integrated Check-Posts (ICPs) are essential for ensuring that the landlocked nation remains "land-linked" to the global economy via India.

Transit Security - In 2026, as global supply chains are disrupted, the reliability of Indian transit corridors is the primary deterrent against Nepal seeking riskier, less-efficient alternatives.

5. Strategic Challenges and Way Forward

Treaty Modernization - New Delhi must investigate a revision of the 1950 Treaty to address Nepali concerns about sovereignty while protecting India's security interests in the Himalayas.

Non-Intrusive Support - Moving away from "political engineering" in Kathmandu and focusing on timely delivery of projects (Fertilizer supplies, Rail links) to prove India's reliability as a partner.

Proactive Engagement - Personalizing diplomacy by engaging directly with young leaders like Balendra Shah to bridge the "trust deficit" inherited from the 2015 constitutional crisis.

6. Conclusion

The "Energy-Connectivity" nexus represents a transition from a security-centric approach to a prosperity-centric one. While historical and cultural ties provide the "soul" of India-Nepal relations, functional cooperation in power and transit provides the "sinews" for a resilient 21st-century partnership. In 2026, a sensitive and supportive "Neighbourhood First" policy is the only way to ensure that Nepal remains a stable, sovereign, and friendly buffer in the Himalayas.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/neighbours-first/article70799573.ece

3. We must rethink insider lending in cases of corporate insolvency (MT)

General Studies Paper II – Governance & Polity

Topic - Banking sector and NPAs

Sub-Topic - Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

Introduction

India's insolvency framework under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) seeks to balance efficient resolution of stressed assets with equitable treatment of creditors. However, the treatment of

related-party (insider) creditors raises concerns about fairness, transparency, and potential misuse of the system.

1. Concept of Insider/Related-Party Creditors

1. Includes promoters, directors, or entities with close links to the debtor company.
2. They may provide loans during distress but also possess informational and control advantages.
3. Their claims are treated alongside other financial creditors under the IBC.

2. Current Legal Position

Equal Treatment Principle

1. Courts have generally upheld that IBC does not differentiate between creditors of the same class.

Committee of Creditors (CoC) Dominance

1. Financial creditors control resolution decisions.

Judicial Interpretation

1. Emphasis on commercial wisdom of creditors rather than rigid legal distinctions.

3. Key Issues and Concerns

Conflict of Interest

1. Insider creditors may influence decisions to protect their own interests.

Fairness to External Creditors

1. External lenders may be disadvantaged due to information asymmetry.

Potential Misuse

1. Risk of promoters regaining control through structured insider lending.

4. Comparative Perspective

Subordination of Insider Claims

1. Many countries subordinate insider debt to protect external creditors.

Equity-like Treatment

1. Insider loans sometimes treated closer to equity rather than debt.

5. Challenges in Reform

Genuine vs Strategic Lending

1. Difficulty in distinguishing bona fide rescue financing from opportunistic lending.

Maintaining Credit Flow

1. Over-regulation may discourage legitimate financial support during distress.

Legal Complexity

1. Changes may affect predictability and investor confidence.

6. Way Forward

Subordination Framework

1. Consider subordinating insider claims in specific circumstances.

Enhanced Disclosure

1. Improve transparency in related-party transactions.

Case-by-Case Assessment

1. Evaluate insider claims based on intent, timing, and impact.

Strengthening CoC Oversight

1. Ensure decisions are aligned with overall creditor interests.

Conclusion

A balanced approach is required to address the role of insider creditors in insolvency. While protecting the integrity of the resolution process, reforms must ensure fairness without discouraging genuine financial support to distressed firms.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/ibc-recovery-insider-lending-corporate-insolvency-cases-capital-debt-creditors-insolvent-firms-11774527190329.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Discuss the challenges associated with the treatment of related-party (insider) creditors under India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Suggest measures to ensure fairness and efficiency in the resolution process.* (250 words)

Introduction

The IBC aims to ensure time-bound resolution of stressed assets. However, the treatment of insider creditors raises concerns about fairness and conflict of interest.

Challenges

1. Conflict of Interest

1. Insider creditors may influence decisions.

2. Information Asymmetry

1. Advantage over external creditors.

Measures

1. Subordination Rules

1. Limit priority of insider claims.

2. Transparency

1. Enhance disclosure norms.

Conclusion

Reforms must balance fairness with efficiency. Strengthening safeguards against misuse while encouraging genuine lending will improve the insolvency framework.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/ibc-recovery-insider-lending-corporate-insolvency-cases-capital-debt-creditors-insolvent-firms-11774527190329.html

4. Return to Reality (TS)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Quality of governance and public service delivery
Sub-Topic - Role of civil services in democracy

Introduction

Effective governance in a democracy is not defined by optics or rhetoric but by **service delivery, accountability, and public trust**. The need to "return to reality" highlights the importance of reconnecting governance with **citizens' everyday experiences and institutional credibility**.

1. Core Idea - Governance as Service

1. Governance must focus on delivery of essential public goods.
2. True success lies in improving citizens' daily lives, not symbolic achievements.
3. Emphasises humility and responsibility in public office.

2. Disconnect Between Optics and Reality

Symbolic Governance

1. Excessive focus on announcements, events, and publicity.

Ground-Level Deficits

1. Persistent issues in basic services like water, roads, electricity, and healthcare.

Credibility Gap

1. Citizens lose trust when promises do not translate into outcomes.

3. Importance of Accountability

Institutional Responsibility

1. Systems must ensure answerability of public officials.

Democratic Accountability

1. Elected representatives are accountable to citizens, not just political leadership.

Performance-Based Governance

1. Outcomes should be measured by service delivery and impact.

4. Role of Bureaucracy

Neutral and Efficient Administration

1. Civil services must function with professionalism and integrity.

Implementation Focus

1. Shift from rule-based functioning to result-oriented governance.

Bridging Policy and Practice

1. Ensure policies translate into tangible benefits for citizens.

5. Challenges

Over-Centralisation

1. Decision-making concentrated at higher levels.

Weak Local Governance

1. Limited capacity of local institutions.

Lack of Feedback Mechanisms

1. Insufficient citizen participation in governance.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

1. Use audits, transparency tools, and citizen feedback systems.

Improving Service Delivery

1. Focus on basic infrastructure and welfare services.

Decentralisation

1. Empower local bodies for context-specific solutions.

Ethical Governance

1. Promote values of integrity, humility, and public service.

Conclusion

Governance must return to its fundamental purpose—serving citizens effectively and transparently. By prioritising accountability, delivery, and trust, India can strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure inclusive and responsive governance.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/return-to-reality-1503575322.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *"Good governance is measured not by intent or announcements, but by outcomes and accountability." Discuss in the context of contemporary governance challenges in India.* (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Good governance in a democracy is defined by effective service delivery and accountability. Mere announcements without outcomes undermine public trust.

Analysis

1. Service Delivery Gap

1. Basic services often remain inadequate.

2. Accountability Deficit

1. Weak mechanisms for monitoring performance.

3. Over-Centralisation

1. Limits local responsiveness.

Measures

1. Strengthen Institutions

1. Enhance transparency and audits.

2. Citizen-Centric Approach

1. Focus on outcomes and feedback.

Conclusion

Bridging the gap between intent and outcomes is essential for effective governance. Accountability and service delivery must remain central to democratic functioning.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/return-to-reality-1503575322.html

Editorial of the Day – 31.03.2026

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1. Ensuring federalism within delimitation (TH)

GS Paper II - Indian Constitution & Governance
Topic - Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Separation of powers.
Sub-Topic - Delimitation Commission, Article 81, Demographic Performance (DemPer), and North-South regional disparities.

1. Introduction

With the freeze on seat allocation set to expire in 2026, India faces a critical constitutional juncture. Delimitation—the process of redrawing boundaries for representative bodies—is mandatory under Article 81. However, the uneven demographic transition between different states has created a fear that states which successfully implemented population control policies will be "penalized" with reduced political representation. The current discourse emphasizes a balanced approach - incorporating Demographic Performance (DemPer) alongside population size to safeguard federal fairness.

2. Constitutional Basis and Delimitation Context

Mandate of Article 81 - It requires that the ratio between the number of Lok Sabha seats and the population of a state remain, as far as practicable, the same across all states.
Historical Equilibrium - Between 1951 and 1971, population growth across Indian states was relatively uniform, making the seat-to-population ratio balanced and uncontroversial.
The Divergence - In the decades following 1971, states began to show significant demographic variation, leading to the current structural imbalance.
Resumption of Process - The delimitation of constituencies is expected to resume shortly after the upcoming Census (projected for 2028).

3. The 'Freeze' on Seats - A Strategic Delay

84th Amendment Act, 2002 - This amendment froze the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha based on the 1971 Census until the first Census after the year 2026.
Rationale for the Freeze - The goal was to provide a "governance incentive" for states to pursue population control without the fear of losing political influence in Parliament.
Current Timeline - Lok Sabha seats will remain unchanged until the results of the post-2026 Census are published. The revised allocation is likely to define the 2029 General Elections.

4. Population Trends and the Fertility Gap

TFR Achievement - Several states reached the Replacement Level Fertility (TFR 2.1) early, while others (primarily in the Northern heartland like Bihar and U.P.) took longer.
Growth Disparity - Even as more states reach replacement levels, the historical momentum means that high-fertility states still show significantly larger population growth.
The 45% Gap - There remains an approximate 45% growth gap between high-fertility and low-fertility states, which would drastically alter the political map if population is the *sole* criterion for seat allocation.

5. The 'DemPer' Proposal - Rewarding Governance

A significant proposal to prevent a "federal shock" is the inclusion of Demographic Performance (DemPer) in the allocation formula, similar to the criteria used by the Finance Commission.

Structure of DemPer -

Early Achievement (10% weight) - Rewarding states that achieved population control targets ahead of others.

Rate of Fertility Decline (90% weight) - Measuring the efficiency and speed of the decline in fertility rates.

Impact - This formula ensures that while all states may gain seats due to absolute population growth, those with better demographic management do not lose their *relative share* of representation.

6. Safeguarding the Federal Balance

To ensure national unity and mitigate the North-South divide, the following strategies are proposed -

States as Political Units - Moving away from treating states merely as "collections of individuals" and recognizing them as distinct political and federal units.

Limiting House Size - Suggesting a Lok Sabha size of approximately 700 seats to balance the need for more representatives with the necessity for effective legislative functioning.

Equity over Numbers - Ensuring that governance quality—specifically in health and family planning—is not sacrificed at the altar of raw population numbers.

Dispelling Myths - Emphasizing that population control was a cross-regional effort; it was not limited to the South, but achieved by many states across India through varied governance efforts.

Conclusion

The post-2026 delimitation is more than an administrative exercise; it is a test of India's democratic and federal resilience. By incorporating demographic performance into the seat allocation formula, the Union can honor its constitutional commitment to equal representation while rewarding the states that have contributed to national stability through effective population management. A balanced approach will prevent regional resentment, incentivize good governance, and ensure that India's democratic future is both representative and equitable.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ensuring-federalism-within-delimitation/article70804377.ece

Question

"The freeze on Lok Sabha seats since 1971 was a strategic pause to prevent the penalization of states for successful population control. Evaluate the proposal to incorporate 'Demographic Performance' into the post-2026 delimitation framework as a means to uphold federal equity." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Under Article 81, the allocation of Lok Sabha seats must be proportional to a state's population. To ensure that states were not "penalized" for pursuing national family planning goals, the 84th Amendment (2002) froze seat allocation until the first Census after 2026. As this deadline approaches, the sharp demographic divergence between the North and South has made the incorporation of Demographic Performance (DemPer) a central pillar for maintaining federal stability.

2. The Rationale for the 'DemPer' Proposal

The proposal suggests that seat allocation should not rely solely on absolute population but should include a weighted metric for "Demographic Performance," similar to the 15th and 16th Finance Commissions.

Rewarding Governance - It recognizes that population control is a result of long-term investments in education, healthcare, and women's empowerment.

Maintaining Relative Weight - Without DemPer, states that achieved Replacement Level Fertility (TFR 2.1) early could see their political influence diluted by nearly 15–20% relative to high-growth states.

Federal Harmony - By ensuring that all states gain seats while maintaining a fair relative share, it mitigates the "North-South" political friction.

3. Evaluating the Benefits of the Proposal

Strengthens Cooperative Federalism - It treats states as strategic partners in national goals rather than just administrative units of population.

Prevents 'Majoritarianism' of Geography - It ensures that a handful of high-growth states do not gain a "veto power" over national legislation, preserving the voice of states with higher human development indicators.

Incentivizes Future Policy - It signals that good governance in any sector (not just population) will be protected and rewarded at the federal level.

4. Evaluating the Challenges and Limitations

Constitutional Conflict - Article 81 is grounded in the principle of "One Person, One Vote." Incorporating DemPer may be challenged as a violation of the equal weight of a citizen's vote across different states.

Implementation Complexity - Deciding the weightage (e.g., 10% for early achievement vs. 90% for rate of decline) is a politically sensitive task that requires broad consensus.

Size of the House - Even with DemPer, a massive increase in the Lok Sabha size (potentially to 700+ seats) is necessary to ensure no state sees an absolute reduction in seats, leading to concerns about legislative efficiency.

5. Way Forward

The transition must be balanced and gradual.

Institutional Buffering - Enhancing the powers of the Rajya Sabha to act as a stronger "House of States" can provide a federal safety net.

Holistic Metrics - Using the 1971 population as a "base floor" and allocating "bonus seats" based on Demographic Performance could be a viable middle path.

6. Conclusion

The post-2026 delimitation is not merely an exercise in redrawing lines; it is an exercise in reaffirming the Indian Social Contract. While numerical democracy is the heart of the Republic, federal equity is its soul. Evaluating the DemPer proposal suggests it is a necessary corrective to ensure that developmental excellence is not met with political marginalization. A balanced approach will ensure that India's growth remains inclusive and its Union remains indissoluble.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ensuring-federalism-within-delimitation/article70804377.ece

2. Fractured bones to amputations - How Kuno's now-thriving cheetah programme was kept alive (IE)

GS Paper III - Environment, Ecology, and Science & Technology.

Topic - Conservation, Environmental Impact Assessment, and Species Reintroduction.

Sub-Topic - Project Cheetah, Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, and Ecosystem Restoration.

1. Introduction

Project Cheetah is the world's first intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore, aimed at reviving a species declared extinct in India in 1952. In 2026, the program has reached a critical milestone with the population crossing the 50-mark, including second-generation cheetahs born on Indian soil. This success is underpinned by a robust governance model that integrates cutting-edge veterinary science with strategic ecological restoration.

2. Project Cheetah - A Global Reintroduction Milestone

Transcontinental Strategy - The project involves the translocation of cheetahs from Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana (added in early 2026) to establish a self-sustaining metapopulation.

Ecological Restoration - The primary objective is the restoration of neglected grassland ecosystems. By reintroducing an apex predator, the project initiates a trophic cascade, regulating prey populations like Chital and Nilgai.
Strategic Site Selection - Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh) was chosen for its high prey density and suitable "open forest" habitat. Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary has recently been operationalized as a second site to manage "density pressure."

3. Veterinary Excellence and Advanced Wildlife Management

The project has become a showcase for specialized wildlife medicine -
Clinical Success Stories - Mukhi's Recovery - Advanced treatment for a humerus fracture demonstrated the ability to perform complex surgeries on wild carnivores.
Nirva's Case - Management of severe bone infections (osteomyelitis) using long-term antibiotics and surgical debridement proved the resilience of the veterinary response.
High-Speed Injury Management - Specialized protocols handle injuries resulting from the cheetah's unique physiology, where speeds of 100 km/h lead to high-impact fractures during hunts.
Self-Reliance-Indian Forest and veterinary staff have developed independent expertise, reducing the reliance on foreign specialists and institutionalizing global best practices within the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

4. Conservation Biology and Ecosystem Perspectives

Flagship Species Concept - The cheetah acts as an "umbrella species," where its protection ensures the survival of other grassland-dependent species like the Blackbuck and Chinkara.
Genetic Diversity - To avoid "inbreeding depression," India continues to import genetically diverse individuals from multiple African nations to ensure long-term population viability.
Human-Wildlife Interface - The "Cheetah Mitra" initiative and community compensation schemes have been vital in minimizing conflict and fostering local support in the Sheopur and Morena districts.

5. Policy, Legal, and Institutional Framework

Statutory Backing - The project operates under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and is monitored by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
International Alignment - It fulfills India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), positioning the nation as a leader in innovative "rewilding."
Technological Integration - The use of high-tech tools has revolutionized monitoring -

1. GPS/Satellite Collars - For real-time movement tracking.
2. Digital Radiography - For on-site health assessments.
3. Surveillance Drones - For habitat and prey monitoring.

6. Critical Challenges and Strategic Hurdles

Despite successes, the project faces ongoing scrutiny -
Adaptation Stress - Initial mortalities highlighted the challenges of climate differences (Indian monsoon vs. African savanna) and the "winter coat" issue leading to infections.
Habitat Size Constraints - Experts debate if the 748 sq. km core of Kuno is sufficient for a population that naturally requires vast territories.
Resource Prioritization - The "Cheetah vs. Lion" debate persists, with some conservationists arguing for the relocation of Asiatic Lions to Kuno as originally planned by the Supreme Court.

7. Success Indicators and Emerging Outcomes

Birth of Native Cubs - The birth of multiple litters—specifically the survival of Mukhi's offspring (the first second-generation Indian-born cheetahs)—is a definitive indicator of biological adaptation.
100% Medical Recovery - The ability of Indian teams to achieve a 100% recovery rate in recent injury cases highlights matured clinical governance.
Economic Impact - The project has boosted local eco-tourism and generated direct employment for hundreds of residents around the Kuno-Gandhi Sagar landscape.

Conclusion

Project Cheetah in 2026 is no longer an experiment; it is a holistic conservation model. By blending ecological ambition with surgical precision and institutional governance, India has proven that extinct species can be brought back to play their vital role in the environment. Sustaining this momentum will require continued adaptive management, genetic vigilance, and the expansion of protected grasslands across the subcontinent.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/fractured-bones-amputations-kuno-cheetah-programme-alive-10609525/lite/

Question

"Project Cheetah represents a transition from 'species-centric' conservation to 'ecosystem-centric' restoration. Critically analyze the ecological significance of this initiative and the structural challenges involved in establishing a self-sustaining cheetah population in India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Project Cheetah, launched in 2022, is the world's first intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore. Aimed at reviving a species declared extinct in India in 1952, the project seeks to restore the ecological functional role of the cheetah as an apex predator. By 2026, the project has moved into a consolidation phase, highlighting the synergy between advanced veterinary science and institutional governance.

2. Ecological Significance of the Initiative

Apex Predator and Trophic Cascade - As an apex predator, the cheetah regulates the population of herbivores (like Chital and Nilgai), preventing overgrazing and promoting the health of the vegetation layer—a process known as a trophic cascade.

Restoration of Grassland Ecosystems - Grasslands are often neglected in Indian conservation compared to dense forests. Project Cheetah acts as a "flagship" for grassland restoration, protecting the habitat of other endangered species like the Chinkara and Blackbuck.

Flagship for Biodiversity - The protection of the cheetah's vast home range ensures the conservation of the entire biological community within that landscape, fulfilling India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

3. Structural and Operational Challenges

Adaptation and Mortality - Initial setbacks, including mortalities due to climate differences (monsoon-induced infections and adaptation stress), raised concerns about the suitability of Indian conditions compared to African savannas.

Habitat Size and Fragmentation - Cheetahs naturally require vast, unfragmented territories. Kuno National Park, despite its suitability, faces challenges of "density pressure," necessitating the expansion into satellite sites like Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary.

Genetic Management - Maintaining a viable breeding population requires continuous genetic monitoring and periodic "infusion" of new individuals from Africa to prevent inbreeding depression.

Human-Wildlife Interface - Ensuring the safety of the animals while maintaining the livelihoods of local communities in the buffer zones requires constant engagement through initiatives like "Cheetah Mitras."

4. Role of Advanced Governance and Science

Veterinary Innovation - 2026 has seen 100% recovery rates in complex clinical cases (e.g., Mukhi's humerus fracture), proving the maturity of Indian wildlife medical protocols.

Technological Integration - The use of satellite-linked GPS collars and digital radiography has transformed wildlife monitoring into a data-driven science.

Legal and Institutional Framework - The project is anchored in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and is managed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), ensuring high-level statutory and financial backing.

5. Conclusion

Project Cheetah is not merely about bringing back a charismatic animal; it is about restoring the lost balance of India's scrub and grassland biomes. While adaptation challenges and resource allocation debates persist, the birth of native-born cubs and the success of medical interventions indicate a stabilizing trajectory. Long-term success will depend on adaptive management, habitat expansion beyond Kuno, and sustained community participation, eventually making India a global leader in innovative rewilding strategies.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/fractured-bones-amputations-kuno-cheetah-programme-alive-10609525/lite/

3. The global economy's many chokepoints (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & International Relations
Topic - Globalisation and its effects
Sub-Topic - Energy security and trade routes

Introduction

The global economy today is highly interconnected, but this integration has created critical chokepoints—geographical, technological, and financial nodes where disruptions can trigger widespread systemic risks. These chokepoints expose the tension between efficiency-driven globalisation and the need for resilience in an era of geopolitical uncertainty.

1. Concept of Economic Chokepoints

1. Refers to critical nodes in global economic networks where disruption causes cascading effects.
2. Includes trade routes, supply chains, financial systems, and technological hubs.
3. Represents single points of failure in an interconnected system.

2. Types of Chokepoints

Geographical Chokepoints

1. Strategic maritime routes (e.g., Hormuz, Malacca, Suez).
2. Critical for global trade and energy flows.

Technological Chokepoints

1. Concentration in sectors like semiconductors and rare earths.
2. Dominance of a few firms/countries creates dependency.

Financial Chokepoints

1. Systems like SWIFT control global financial transactions.
2. Can be used for sanctions and economic coercion.

3. Structural Drivers

Efficiency-Oriented Globalisation

1. Just-in-time supply chains minimise costs but reduce buffers.

Technological Concentration

1. High entry barriers lead to production clustering.

Network Centralisation

1. Hub-and-spoke systems increase systemic vulnerability.

4. Key Risks and Challenges

Single-Point Failure

1. Disruptions (wars, accidents) can affect entire global systems.

Weaponisation of Interdependence

1. Use of trade and finance as geopolitical tools.

Economic Volatility

1. Price shocks in energy, commodities, and technology.

Systemic Fragility
1. Lack of redundancy increases vulnerability.

5. Efficiency vs Resilience Trade-off
Efficiency Advantages
1. Lower costs and higher productivity.
2. Global specialisation enhances growth.

Resilience Advantages
1. Diversification reduces risks.
2. Improves economic security.

Trade-off
1. Resilience increases costs and may fragment trade.
2. Efficiency increases vulnerability to shocks.

6. Global Responses
Diversification Strategies
1. Friend-shoring, near-shoring, China+1 strategy.

Domestic Capacity Building
1. Investments in critical sectors like semiconductors.

Strategic Stockpiling
1. Energy, food, and critical minerals reserves.

Infrastructure Strengthening
1. Redundant logistics and digital systems.

7. Implications for India
Opportunities
1. Alternative manufacturing hub in global supply chains.

Challenges
1. High import dependence in energy and technology.

Policy Imperatives
1. Strengthen domestic manufacturing and logistics.
2. Balance strategic autonomy with global integration.

Conclusion
Economic chokepoints highlight the vulnerabilities of globalisation. A balanced approach combining efficiency with resilience is essential to ensure stable and secure economic systems in a geopolitically uncertain world.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-global-economys-many-chokepoints/article70803999.ece

Question

Q. *Economic chokepoints have transformed global interdependence into both an opportunity and a vulnerability. Examine the nature of these chokepoints and analyse the efficiency–resilience trade-off in managing them.* (250 words)

Introduction
1. Globalisation has created highly integrated economic networks.
2. However, it has also led to economic chokepoints that act as critical vulnerabilities and tools of geopolitical leverage.

Nature of Economic Chokepoints
1. Geographical Chokepoints
1. Strategic trade routes concentrate global flows of energy and goods.
2. Disruptions can trigger global supply shocks.

2. Technological Chokepoints

1. Advanced sectors (e.g., semiconductors) dominated by few players.
2. Creates dependence and supply insecurity.

3. Financial Chokepoints

1. Centralised systems enable global transactions.
2. Can be weaponised through sanctions and restrictions.

Efficiency vs Resilience Trade-off

Efficiency (Benefits)

1. Minimises costs through global specialisation.
2. Enhances productivity via lean supply chains.

Efficiency (Limitations)

1. Reduces redundancy and buffers.
2. Increases vulnerability to shocks and disruptions.

Resilience (Benefits)

1. Diversification reduces dependency risks.
2. Strengthens economic security and stability.

Resilience (Limitations)

1. Higher costs due to duplication of systems.
2. Risk of global fragmentation and reduced cooperation.

Way Forward

1. Selective Diversification

1. Focus on critical sectors rather than blanket decoupling.

2. Domestic Capacity Building

1. Invest in strategic industries and technologies.

3. Strengthening Multilateralism

1. Promote rules-based global trade systems.

4. Infrastructure Resilience

1. Develop alternative routes and digital systems.

Conclusion

Managing economic chokepoints requires a calibrated balance between efficiency and resilience. While efficiency drives growth, resilience ensures stability in times of crisis. A strategic approach combining diversification, domestic capacity, and global cooperation is essential to build a secure and sustainable economic system in an increasingly uncertain world.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-global-economys-many-chokepoints/article70803999.ece

4. process reforms REVIVE IEPFA (FE)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & International Relations
Topic – Financial sector reforms
Sub-Topic – Digital governance and process reforms

Introduction

The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA) was established to safeguard investor interests by facilitating the recovery of unclaimed dividends and shares. However, procedural inefficiencies historically limited its effectiveness. Recent reforms aimed at process simplification and digital integration highlight how governance improvements can enhance efficiency and citizen outcomes.

1. Background of IEPFA

1. Established in 2016 under the Companies Act.

2. Manages unclaimed dividends, shares, and financial assets.
3. Aims to return these assets to rightful owners.

2. Pre-Reform Challenges

Complex Procedures

1. Claim process involved multiple steps and approvals.

Fragmented Systems

1. Separate portals for application, share transfer, and payment.

Manual Intervention

1. Repeated data entry and verification increased errors.

Delays and Backlogs

1. Claims took years; backlog exceeded tens of thousands.

3. Nature of Reforms

Process Mapping

1. Identification of inefficiencies across stages.

System Integration

1. Merging multiple portals into a unified system.

Reduction in Steps

1. Steps reduced significantly (from ~25 to ~15).

Automation and Digitisation

1. Faster approvals and reduced manual intervention.

4. Outcomes of Reforms

Increased Efficiency

1. Processing time reduced from years to months/days.

Higher Throughput

1. Monthly approvals increased significantly.

Backlog Reduction

1. Pending cases expected to be cleared rapidly.

Improved User Experience

1. Easier navigation and reduced reliance on intermediaries.

5. Governance Lessons

Process Reforms vs Structural Reforms

1. Small administrative changes can yield high impact.

Digital Governance

1. Integration and automation improve service delivery.

Citizen-Centric Approach

1. Simplification reduces transaction costs for citizens.

Data-Driven Policy

1. Process mapping helps identify bottlenecks.

6. Challenges Ahead

Sustaining Efficiency

1. Need continuous monitoring and upgrades.

Digital Inclusion

1. Ensuring accessibility for all users.

System Integration Risks

1. Managing data security and interoperability.

7. Way Forward

Further Simplification

1. Reduce documentation and improve interfaces.

Awareness Campaigns

1. Inform citizens about claim processes.

Replication of Model

1. Apply similar reforms in other governance sectors.

Conclusion

IEPFA reforms demonstrate that targeted process improvements and digital integration can significantly enhance governance outcomes. Such reforms, though incremental, play a crucial role in improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen trust in public institutions.

Source - https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/process-reforms-revive-iepfa/4189734/

Question

Q. *Administrative process reforms and digital integration can significantly improve governance outcomes. Discuss with reference to investor protection mechanisms in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Efficient governance requires not only policy formulation but also effective implementation. In investor protection mechanisms, procedural inefficiencies often hinder outcomes despite robust institutional frameworks.

Key Issues

1. Procedural Complexity

1. Multiple steps and approvals delay service delivery.

2. Fragmented Systems

1. Lack of integration leads to inefficiencies and duplication.

Role of Reforms

1. Process Simplification

1. Reduction in steps improves efficiency.

2. Digital Integration

1. Unified platforms enhance transparency and speed.

3. Automation

1. Reduces manual errors and delays.

Way Forward

1. Continuous Process Evaluation

1. Regular audits to identify bottlenecks.

2. Citizen-Centric Design

1. Simplify procedures and improve accessibility.

Conclusion

Administrative and digital reforms are essential for improving governance efficiency. Strengthening implementation mechanisms will enhance investor confidence and overall economic performance.

Source - https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/process-reforms-revive-iepfa/4189734/

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC



DAILY EDITORIALS
APRIL 2026

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 01.04.2026

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1. An impeachment move with no winners (TH)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance

Topic - Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Sub-Topic - Election Commission of India (ECI), Neutrality of Constitutional Bodies, Electoral Reforms, and the Removal Process of the CEC.

1. Introduction

In an unprecedented turn of events in early 2026, Opposition parties have moved a motion for the impeachment of the Chief Election Commissioner. The move comes amid a backdrop of systemic mistrust, fueled by allegations of partisan conduct and large-scale voter disenfranchisement. While the constitutional threshold for removing a CEC is exceptionally high—modelled after the removal of a Supreme Court Judge—the motion itself signals an alarming erosion of institutional sanctity.

2. Core Allegations - The Catalyst for Aggression

The Opposition's move is rooted in several specific grievances regarding the ECI's recent operations -

Partisan Conduct - Accusations that the Commission has acted with a bias favoring the ruling dispensation.

Electoral Roll Irregularities - The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls allegedly led to the exclusion of vast numbers of voters, particularly from specific demographics.

Obstruction of Justice - Allegations that the ECI obstructed independent probes into suspected electoral fraud.

Disenfranchisement - The concern that legitimate citizens are being denied their fundamental right to vote through administrative "opacity."

3. The Impeachment Motion - Symbolic vs. Substantive

The move is widely viewed as a "strategic statement" rather than a procedural certainty.

Procedural High Bar - Under Article 324(5), the CEC can only be removed in a manner similar to a Judge of the Supreme Court (proven misbehaviour or incapacity, requiring a special majority in both Houses).

Symbolic Value - Even if the motion fails to garner the required numbers, the Opposition views it as a way to highlight institutional "decay" to the public and the international community.

The "Strategic Illusion" - A compromise might appear as a "win-win," but often masks an underlying power imbalance where the weaker side accepts a "managed loss."

4. Politicisation and Communication Breakdown

The conflict reflects a structural collapse in the relationship between the ECI and political stakeholders -

ECI as an Opponent - Political parties are increasingly treating the ECI as a political adversary rather than a neutral arbiter.

Dialogue Collapse - A complete breakdown in communication between the ECI and the Opposition has prevented the resolution of technical grievances.

Legal Frustration - Repeated failures to secure immediate relief from the courts have pushed the conflict into the legislative arena and onto the streets through protests.

5. Impact on Democracy and the Citizenry

The "no winners" scenario primarily affects the common citizen -

Erosion of Trust - When the neutrality of the ECI is questioned, the legitimacy of the entire electoral mandate is weakened.

Voter Uncertainty - Large-scale exclusions from the SIR create a sense of precarity among genuine voters.

Polarisation - The confrontation deepens the divide between political actors, making bipartisan consensus on electoral reforms nearly impossible.

Weakened Institutional Faith - The "ultimate losers" are the citizens whose faith in the ballot box as a fair tool of change is compromised.

6. Way Forward - Restoring Neutrality

To preserve the integrity of the Indian Republic, several steps are essential -

Restoring Dialogue - The ECI must adopt a more transparent and communicative posture to address Opposition concerns.

Transparency in SIR - Making the process of electoral roll revision more auditable and open to public scrutiny.

Institutional Neutrality - Reaffirming the ECI's role as a non-partisan body through clear, consistent, and documented decision-making.

Judicial Clarity - Faster judicial review of electoral petitions to prevent political frustrations from boiling over into impeachment motions.

Conclusion

The 2026 impeachment move is a symptom of a deeper malaise in India's democratic health. Whether the motion succeeds or fails is secondary to the fact that it was deemed necessary by a large section of the political spectrum. Moving forward, the focus must shift from political "grandstanding" to structural "cleansing"—ensuring that the Election Commission remains, in word and deed, the impartial guardian of the world's largest democracy.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-impeachment-move-with-no-winners/article70808568.ece

Question

"The constitutional safeguards provided to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) are intended to ensure institutional autonomy, yet the recent move for impeachment highlights a deepening trust deficit between political stakeholders and the Commission. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is envisioned as a "bulwark of democracy." To ensure its neutrality, the CEC is granted specific constitutional protections that equate their status to that of a Supreme Court Judge. However, the unprecedented impeachment motion in April 2026 suggests that while the "legal firewalls" remain intact, the "political consensus" surrounding the ECI's neutrality has fractured.

2. Constitutional Safeguards for the CEC

To prevent executive or political interference, the Constitution provides three primary safeguards -

Security of Tenure - Under Article 324(5), the CEC cannot be removed from office except in a manner and on grounds similar to a Judge of the Supreme Court.

Rigid Removal Process - Removal requires a motion passed by each House of Parliament supported by a special majority (majority of total membership and 2/3rd of members present and voting) on grounds of "proven misbehaviour or incapacity."

Fixed Service Conditions - The conditions of service of the CEC cannot be varied to their disadvantage after appointment, ensuring they are not "punished" for impartial decisions.

3. The 2026 Friction - Why Safeguards Are Being Tested

The current impeachment move is not just a procedural event but a symptom of deeper institutional strain -

Allegations of Partisanship - Opposition parties have alleged that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls was used for voter disenfranchisement, turning the "referee" into a "player."

Communication Breakdown - A collapse in formal dialogue between the ECI and major political parties has moved technical grievances into the realm of constitutional confrontation.

The 'No-Win' Paradox - Even if the motion fails (due to the high constitutional bar), the ECI suffers a loss of perceived neutrality, and the Opposition faces a loss of institutional faith, leaving the citizen as the ultimate loser.

4. Implications of the Impeachment Move

Symbolic vs. Substantive - The motion serves a symbolic purpose of signaling systemic distrust to the public, even if the legislative numbers do not support a final removal.

Politicisation of Removal - Treating impeachment as a tool for political protest risks devaluing a rare constitutional remedy intended only for the most extreme cases of "proven misbehaviour."

Erosion of Legitimacy - When the arbiter of the "will of the people" is under trial by the representatives of the people, the legitimacy of the entire electoral mandate comes under a shadow.

5. Way Forward - Beyond Impeachment

Institutional Transparency - The ECI must adopt "Open-Door" protocols for electoral roll revisions to preempt allegations of bias.

Judicial Oversight - Ensuring that electoral disputes are adjudicated rapidly by the courts can prevent political frustrations from escalating into legislative "grandstanding."

Selection Reform - Moving toward a more bipartisan selection committee for ECI appointments could help restore the "Initial Trust" that is currently lacking.

6. Conclusion

Safeguards like Article 324(5) are the "armour" of the CEC, but the strength of the Election Commission ultimately lies in public and political trust. The 2026 impeachment move serves as a warning that legal protections are not a substitute for institutional transparency and constant dialogue. To preserve the Republic, the ECI must not only *be* neutral but must also be *seen* to be neutral by all actors in the democratic arena.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-impeachment-move-with-no-winners/article70808568.ece

2. Will the Iran war lead to food inflation? (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy & Agriculture

Topic - Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies; Public Distribution System; Buffer stocks and food security.

Sub-Topic - Agricultural Input Costs, Fertiliser Subsidy, Geopolitics and Food Inflation.

1. Introduction

As of April 2026, India's food security remains robust in terms of volume, thanks to a "Bumper Rabi" season. However, a structural vulnerability has resurfaced - Input-Side Insecurity. Geopolitical tensions in West Asia have choked the supply of vital raw materials like ammonia and naphtha. This has created a "supply-side shock" that threatens to transition into "cost-push inflation," potentially undoing the stability achieved by the 2025 monsoon.

2. The Buffer - Food Security & Current Inflation Stability

Despite the global chaos, India's immediate food situation is a rare bright spot.

Adequate Buffer Stocks - As of March 2026, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) holds roughly 23.6 MT of wheat and 36.5 MT of rice, well above the mandatory requirements.

The Rabi Resilience - Favorable weather during the 2025-26 grain-filling stage has ensured high yields for pulses and oilseeds.

Price Anchors - Cereals and sugar (trading at stable ranges of ₹38–45/kg) have kept food inflation within the RBI's comfort zone for now.

Shock Absorber - Much like during the 2020-22 period, the agricultural sector is acting as a national insurance policy against global macroeconomic volatility.

3. The Crisis - Fertiliser Supply Chain Vulnerability

The primary concern is the dependence on the "West Asian corridor" for chemical inputs.

Import Dependency - India remains a heavy importer of Urea, Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) used in production.

Global Price Spikes -

1. Ammonia - Surged from $450 to $750/tonne.
2. Sulphur - Spiked from $200 to over $700.
3. DAP - Hovering around $825/tonne.

Kharif Season Risk - While current stocks are sufficient for April-May, a prolonged conflict could lead to severe shortages during the peak Kharif sowing (June–July).

Fiscal Strain - Rising global prices force the government to increase the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS), widening the fiscal deficit.

4. The Hidden Link - Agrochemicals & Petrochemicals

Beyond fertilizers, the "pesticide shield" of Indian crops is under pressure.

Petrochemical Derivatives - Most agrochemicals rely on naphtha, propylene, and benzene—byproducts of the petroleum industry concentrated in West Asia.

The Hormuz Chokepoint - With 55% of global naphtha supply linked to this region, any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz is a direct threat to Indian pesticide manufacturing.

Ancillary Costs - Packaging materials (HDPE and PET bottles) have seen a 30–40% price hike, further inflating the final cost to the farmer.

5. Macroeconomic Transmission - Input Cost to Inflation

Rising input costs do not remain confined to the farm; they eventually hit the consumer's plate.

Cost-Push Mechanism - When fertilizers and pesticides become expensive, the "cost of cultivation" rises. If the Minimum Support Price (MSP) or market prices don't rise proportionally, farmer incomes shrink.

Delayed Inflation - We are currently enjoying "yesterday's" low-cost harvest. The "tomorrow" (Kharif/Rabi 2026) is where the inflationary pressure will manifest.

Imported Inflation - This is a classic case where energy prices and geopolitical risk are "imported" into the domestic food basket.

6. Structural Challenges & The Reform Opportunity

The 2026 crisis is a "wake-up call" for long-overdue agricultural reforms.

Urea Imbalance - India consumes a staggering ~40 MT of urea annually. The subsidy-led overuse of urea has degraded soil health and made us overly reliant on external supply.

Inefficiency - Low nutrient-use efficiency means we are "importing to waste."

The Path Forward -

1. Nano-Fertilisers - Scaling up domestic production to reduce the bulk import of conventional fertilizers.
2. Balanced Nutrition - Shifting from pure urea to complex NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium) blends.
3. Precision Farming - Using tech to reduce the quantity of input while maintaining yield.
4. Diversification - Actively seeking supply contracts outside West Asia to mitigate regional geopolitical risks.

Conclusion

India's overflowing silos provide a tactical shield, but the West Asian supply shock has exposed a strategic flank. While the short-term goal must be ensuring input availability for the upcoming Kharif season through calibrated subsidies, the long-term imperative is "Atmanirbharta" in fertilizers. Transitioning to nano-fertilizers and bio-inputs is no longer just an environmental choice—it is a national security requirement in an increasingly unstable world.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/us-israel-iran-war-food-inflation-10608686/

Question

"India's agricultural sector in 2026 presents a paradox of 'buffer-stock stability' shadowed by 'input-side vulnerability.' Analyze how the ongoing West Asian crisis exposes structural weaknesses in India's fertilizer ecosystem and discuss the policy measures required to ensure long-term agricultural resilience." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In early 2026, India stands on a firm footing regarding food availability, bolstered by comfortable buffer stocks (approx. 60 MT of wheat and rice) and a bumper rabi harvest. However, the escalating conflict in West Asia involving Iran has triggered a supply-side shock for agricultural inputs. This "input-output" paradox highlights that while India has secured its food supply for today, its "food factories" (farms) remain highly vulnerable to external geopolitical shocks for tomorrow.

2. Structural Weaknesses Exposed by the 2026 Crisis

The West Asian crisis acts as a stress test for India's agricultural input architecture, revealing several fractures -

Import Concentration & Chokepoints - India's heavy reliance on the Gulf region for urea, DAP, and LNG (the feedstock for fertilizer) makes the Strait of Hormuz a strategic chokepoint. Any blockade here directly impacts the June-July Kharif sowing season.

Petrochemical Linkages - Agrochemicals and pesticides are derived from petrochemicals like naphtha and propylene. With 55% of global naphtha supply linked to West Asia, the "pesticide shield" of Indian crops faces a cost-driven contraction.

The Subsidy Trap - As global prices for ammonia (surged to $750/tonne) and sulphur spike, the government's Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) bill swells. This creates a fiscal dilemma - either balloon the fiscal deficit or risk passing on the cost to farmers, which would trigger cost-push food inflation.

Imbalanced Consumption - The persistent over-reliance on Urea (approx. 40 MT annually) over complex NPK fertilizers has not only degraded soil health but also deepened the import-dependency on specific raw materials like natural gas.

3. Policy Measures for Long-Term Resilience

To move from "vulnerability" to "sovereignty," India must adopt a multi-pronged reform strategy -

Scaling Nano-Fertilizers - Accelerating the adoption of Nano-Urea and Nano-DAP can drastically reduce the bulk import requirement and improve nutrient-use efficiency.

Atmanirbhar Inputs - Enhancing domestic production of complex fertilizers and raw materials under the "Make in India" initiative to decouple the agricultural cycle from West Asian geopolitics.

Diversifying the Supply Chain - Actively seeking long-term offtake agreements with resource-rich nations outside West Asia (e.g., in North Africa or Central Asia) to mitigate regional risks.

Promoting Bio-Inputs - Shifting the focus toward bio-fertilizers and organic pesticides to reduce the petrochemical footprint of Indian agriculture.

Precision Farming - Utilizing Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and IoT to optimize fertilizer application, ensuring we "import less but grow more."

4. Conclusion

The 2026 agri-input crisis is a clear signal that Food Security is incomplete without Input Security. While India's current silos provide a short-term cushion, the long-term solution lies in structural de-

risking. By pivoting toward balanced fertilization, domestic manufacturing, and technological innovation, India can transform this geopolitical headwind into a catalyst for a more sustainable and sovereign agricultural ecosystem.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/us-israel-iran-war-food-inflation-10608686/

3. Trade-Led Regional Integration (IE)

GS Paper II - International Relations

Topic - Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub-Topic - Neighborhood First Policy, Trade Diplomacy, Connectivity, and Regional Geopolitics.

1. Introduction

The year 2026 represents a "strategic reset" for India's Neighborhood First policy. Following a series of generational political transitions in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, the old narratives of personality-driven diplomacy and anti-India posturing are giving way to economic pragmatism. To capitalize on this, India is recalibrating its foreign policy to move beyond "cultural sentimentality" toward Trade Diplomacy, leveraging its status as a $5 trillion economy to foster regional interdependence.

2. Neighborhood First Policy - The Strategic Foundation

Core Diplomatic Pillar - Prioritizing stable, cooperative relations with immediate neighbors to ensure a peaceful periphery, which is essential for domestic growth.

Geostrategic Imperative - South Asia's shared borders and maritime proximity make it the primary theater for India's security and internal stability.

Counter-Hegemonic Buffer - Stronger regional ties serve as a natural check against the expansion of external powers, specifically providing an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Border Management - Stability in the neighborhood is directly linked to curbing illegal migration, insurgency, and cross-border crime in India's sensitive border states.

3. The 2026 Reset - Capitalizing on Political Transitions

The recent churn in South Asian capitals offers a clean slate for Indian diplomacy -

Bangladesh (National Interest Approach) - A transition toward a leadership focused on pragmatic national interest allows for diplomacy based on economic deliverables rather than historical legacies.

Nepal (The Gen-Z/Madhesi Shift) - The rise of younger, more nationalistic leaders like Balendra Shah signals a departure from traditional elite politics. India must engage this "New Nepal" with a focus on sovereign equality.

Sri Lanka (Post-Crisis Realism) - After the devastating 2022-24 economic crisis, Colombo has moved toward "pragmatic engagement," viewing India as a vital partner for energy security and debt restructuring.

End of Patronage - Neighbors are increasingly rejecting "Big Brother" patronage in favor of "Strategic Partnership," seeking access to India's vast market rather than just development aid.

4. Trade as the New Language of Diplomacy

Interdependence as Security - Deepening trade ties create a "stakeholder" effect where conflict becomes economically irrational for all parties (e.g., the integrated India-Bangladesh supply chain).

Leveraging Comparative Advantage - India's massive domestic market and manufacturing base are its strongest diplomatic tools, yet regional trade remains one of the least integrated globally.

Extended FTAs - India's aggressive pursuit of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the EU and UK in 2026 provides a template for similar "Comprehensive Economic Partnerships" with its neighbors.

Export-Led Growth - Regional demand for Indian rice, pharmaceuticals, and technology can transform neighborhood borders into economic gateways.

5. Structural Hurdles in Regional Trade Integration

Persistent Protectionism - Historical reliance on high tariffs and restrictive "Sensitive Lists" continues to stifle the flow of goods.

The "Surplus" Friction - India runs significant trade surpluses with its neighbors, leading to local anxieties about economic "colonization" and dependence.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) - Opaque customs regulations, slow certification processes, and complex "Rules of Origin" often act as invisible walls.

Logistical Inefficiency - Poor border infrastructure and mismatched railway gauges increase the "cost of distance" despite geographical proximity.

6. Connectivity - The "Nervous System" of Integration

Physical Corridors - Initiatives like the BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement aim to turn the region into a single transport zone.

Energy Grids - Cross-border electricity trade—such as importing Nepal's hydropower and exporting refined fuels—is creating a shared regional energy security architecture.

Digital & Financial Links - Scaling the UPI (Unified Payments Interface) and RuPay cards across South Asia facilitates seamless B2B and B2C transactions, bypassing traditional banking hurdles.

Uplifting the Periphery - Robust connectivity projects are essential for the development of India's Northeast and Eastern states, linking them directly to Southeast Asian markets.

7. The Global Context - Why Regionalism Matters Now

Fragmented Global Trade - As the WTO weakens and global trade becomes "weaponized," regional blocs provide a safe harbor for economic stability.

Supply Chain "Friend-Shoring" - India is positioning South Asia as a regional manufacturing hub to de-risk supply chains from over-reliance on a single northern neighbor.

Gulf Volatility - Ongoing instability in West Asia (2026) has disrupted energy supplies and remittances, making intra-regional trade in South Asia even more critical for resilience.

Strategic Autonomy - A cohesive South Asia allows India to project power globally without being bogged down by "border-firefighting."

8. The Necessary Mindset Shift

From Patron to Partner - India must shed its "dominant power" optics and engage as an "equal partner" that respects the sovereign sensitivities of smaller neighbors.

The "Win-Win" Doctrine - Diplomatic wins must be measured by mutual economic gains rather than political "concessions."

Institutional Agility - Moving away from the stagnant SAARC framework in favor of more flexible, project-based sub-regional groupings like BIMSTEC or bilateral "2+2" dialogues.

Conclusion

The political transitions of 2026 have presented India with a "once-in-a-generation" window. By placing Trade and Connectivity at the heart of its neighborhood strategy, India can move from being a regional administrator to a regional engine of growth. This transition requires a shift in DNA—from security-centric caution to trade-centric confidence. If India succeeds in turning its neighbors into economic stakeholders, it will not only secure its borders but also define the future of the Indo-Pacific.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-must-reboot-neighbourhood-policy-trade-is-the-key-10612233/

Question

"The 2026 political transitions in South Asia offer India a 'strategic window' to redefine its 'Neighbourhood First' policy through the prism of trade and connectivity. Examine the potential of trade-led diplomacy in fostering regional stability and the structural hurdles that India must overcome to achieve this integration." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In early 2026, the simultaneous political transitions in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have created a rare geopolitical alignment. As these nations move away from personality-driven legacy politics toward pragmatic national interests, India has the opportunity to pivot its "Neighbourhood First" policy. The shift involves moving from a "Security-First" posture to a "Trade-First" framework, treating economic interdependence as the ultimate guarantor of regional peace.

2. Potential of Trade-Led Diplomacy

Conflict Reduction through Interdependence - Deep trade linkages create a "stakeholder effect." When regional supply chains are integrated (e.g., textiles in Bangladesh-India), the cost of conflict becomes prohibitively high.

Strategic Buffer against External Powers - By offering a credible, trade-driven alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India can provide its neighbors with "Strategic Autonomy," reducing their over-reliance on non-regional actors.

Energy and Resource Security - Cross-border energy grids—specifically importing Nepal's hydropower and exporting refined fuels to Sri Lanka—create a shared "Resource Sovereignty" that stabilizes regional economies during global shocks.

3. Key Structural Hurdles

Despite the potential, several "friction points" persist -

Protectionist Legacy - Historically high tariffs and long "Sensitive Lists" under SAFTA continue to stifle the flow of goods.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) - Opaque customs regulations, slow certification processes, and inconsistent "Rules of Origin" often act as invisible walls, even when tariffs are low.

Infrastructure Gaps - Mismatched railway gauges, inadequate Integrated Check-Posts (ICPs), and poor last-mile connectivity at borders like the India-Bangladesh frontier increase the "cost of distance."

Perception of Trade Imbalance - India runs massive trade surpluses with almost all its neighbors. This often fuels domestic political rhetoric in those countries about "economic colonization," requiring India to provide asymmetrical market access.

4. Way Forward - Toward a New Social Contract

From Patron to Partner - India must shed the "Dominant Power" optics. This involves adopting the "Gujral Doctrine 2.0," offering non-reciprocal economic concessions to smaller neighbors to build "Initial Trust."

Digital and Financial Integration - Scaling the UPI (Unified Payments Interface) and RuPay across the region can facilitate seamless B2B transactions, bypassing the dollar-dependent banking hurdles.

Sub-Regional Pragmatism - Focusing on flexible groupings like BBIN and BIMSTEC rather than the stagnant SAARC framework to ensure project-led connectivity.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 transitions signify that South Asia is ready for partnership, not patronage. Trade, backed by robust connectivity and political sensitivity, is the most effective tool to transform a "distrustful neighborhood" into a "prosperous periphery." For India, regional leadership in the 21st century will not be defined by its military reach, but by its ability to act as the primary engine of South Asian economic growth.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-must-reboot-neighbourhood-policy-trade-is-the-key-10612233/

4. What happens when CAD rises (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic - Balance of Payments (BoP)

Sub-Topic - External sector and capital flows

Introduction

The Current Account Deficit (CAD) reflects the gap between a country's imports and exports. In India, rising CAD amid global shocks highlights the slow adjustment of exchange rates toward purchasing power parity (PPP), influenced by capital flows, inflation differentials, and policy responses.

1. Concept of CAD and Exchange Rate Adjustment

1. CAD arises when imports exceed exports.
2. Exchange rates ideally adjust toward PPP equilibrium over time.
3. Adjustment ensures external balance and competitiveness.

2. Factors Influencing CAD Rise

War-Driven Energy Shocks

1. Oil price spikes increase import bills.

Strong Dollar Effect

1. Depreciates domestic currency, raising import costs.

Capital Flow Dynamics

1. Portfolio inflows delay currency adjustment.

Domestic Demand Patterns

1. High consumption drives imports.

3. The 'Disconnect' in India

Limited Currency Depreciation

1. Rupee adjustment slower than expected.

Role of Capital Inflows

1. Equity and debt inflows cushion depreciation.

Services Surplus

1. Strong services exports partially offset trade deficit.

4. Adjustment Mechanism

Inflation Differential Channel

1. Higher domestic inflation reduces competitiveness.

Exchange Rate Correction

1. Currency depreciation helps restore balance.

Time Lag Effect

1. Adjustment occurs gradually over years.

5. Risks of Rising CAD

External Vulnerability

1. Increased dependence on foreign capital.

Currency Instability

1. Sudden outflows can trigger sharp depreciation.

Imported Inflation

1. Higher import costs increase domestic prices.

6. Policy Responses

Monetary Tightening

1. Controls inflation and stabilises currency.

Diversification of Energy Sources

1. Reduces dependence on volatile imports.

Export Promotion

1. Enhances competitiveness and reduces deficit.

Capital Flow Management

1. Attract stable long-term investments.

7. Way Forward

Strengthen External Sector

1. Boost manufacturing and exports.

Enhance Resilience

1. Build forex reserves and reduce vulnerabilities.

Balanced Macroeconomic Policy

1. Align fiscal, monetary, and trade policies.

Conclusion

Rising CAD reflects structural and cyclical pressures on the economy. A gradual exchange rate adjustment combined with prudent macroeconomic policies is essential to ensure external stability and sustainable growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/what-happens-when-cad-rises/article70808142.ece

Question

Q. *Rising Current Account Deficit (CAD) reflects underlying macroeconomic imbalances. Examine the factors contributing to CAD in India and discuss the role of exchange rate adjustment in correcting it.* (250 words)

Introduction

The Current Account Deficit indicates external imbalance in an economy. In India, rising CAD is influenced by global shocks, domestic demand, and capital flow dynamics.

Factors Contributing to CAD

1. High Import Dependence

1. Especially in energy and commodities.

2. Global Economic Shocks

1. War and inflation increase import costs.

3. Strong Dollar Impact

1. Raises cost of imports and widens deficit.

Role of Exchange Rate Adjustment

1. Depreciation Mechanism

1. Makes exports competitive and imports expensive.

2. Gradual Adjustment

1. Influenced by capital flows and policy interventions.

Conclusion

Effective management of CAD requires a balanced approach combining exchange rate flexibility, export promotion, and macroeconomic stability.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/what-happens-when-cad-rises/article70808142.ece

5. Recycled water can insure India against the threat of shortfalls (MT)

General Studies Paper III – Environment & Ecology / Indian Economy

Topic - Water resource management

Sub-Topic - Sustainable development

Introduction

India faces increasing water stress due to rapid urbanisation, population growth, and climate variability. In this context, recycled water (treated wastewater) emerges as a sustainable and cost-effective solution to address water scarcity while reducing environmental degradation.

1. Concept of Wastewater Recycling

1. Refers to treatment and reuse of used water for various purposes.
2. Includes domestic, industrial, and municipal wastewater.
3. Enables circular use of water resources.

2. Magnitude of Water Challenge in India

Rising Demand

1. Increasing population and urban expansion strain water resources.

Limited Freshwater Availability

1. India has a disproportionately low share of global freshwater.

Groundwater Depletion

1. Over-extraction leading to declining water tables.

3. Potential of Recycled Water

Supplementary Water Source

1. Reduces dependence on freshwater sources.

Urban Water Security

1. Supports cities facing supply shortages.

Industrial and Agricultural Use

1. Can replace freshwater in non-potable uses.

4. Economic and Environmental Benefits

Cost Efficiency

1. Reduces cost of sourcing and transporting freshwater.

Environmental Protection

1. Minimises pollution of rivers and water bodies.

Resource Optimisation

1. Promotes circular economy in water use.

5. Challenges in Implementation

Infrastructure Gaps

1. Lack of adequate sewage treatment facilities.

Policy and Governance Issues

1. Fragmented responsibilities across agencies.

Public Perception

1. Limited acceptance of recycled water.

Financial Constraints

1. High initial investment requirements.

6. Policy and Institutional Measures

National Frameworks

1. Emphasis on water reuse in urban planning.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

1. Encourage investment in treatment infrastructure.

Regulatory Standards

1. Ensure quality and safety of recycled water.

7. Way Forward

Scaling Treatment Capacity

1. Expand sewage treatment infrastructure.

Promoting Demand for Recycled Water

1. Incentivise industries and municipalities.

Integrated Water Management

1. Combine reuse with conservation and efficiency.

Awareness and Behavioural Change

1. Improve public acceptance.

Conclusion

Recycled water offers a viable pathway to address India's water crisis by enhancing supply, reducing pollution, and promoting sustainability. A comprehensive approach combining infrastructure, policy support, and public awareness is essential for achieving long-term water security.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/treat-used-water-management-waste-security-recycling-treatment-drought-flood-climate-change-11774882103799.html

Question

Q. *Recycled wastewater can play a crucial role in addressing India's water scarcity. Examine its potential and discuss the challenges in scaling up wastewater reuse in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

India faces severe water stress due to rising demand and limited freshwater resources. Wastewater recycling offers a sustainable alternative to augment water supply.

Potential of Wastewater Recycling

1. Augments Water Supply

1. Provides an additional source for non-potable uses.

2. Reduces Environmental Degradation

1. Limits discharge of untreated sewage into water bodies.

3. Supports Economic Activities

1. Ensures water availability for industries and agriculture.

Challenges

1. Infrastructure Deficit

1. Limited sewage treatment capacity.

2. Governance Issues

1. Lack of coordination among agencies.

3. Public Acceptance

1. Perception barriers hinder adoption.

Way Forward

1. Investment in Infrastructure

1. Expand treatment and distribution systems.

2. Policy Incentives

1. Promote reuse through regulations and pricing.

Conclusion

Wastewater recycling is essential for sustainable water management. Addressing infrastructural and institutional challenges can significantly enhance water security in India.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/treat-used-water-management-waste-security-recycling-treatment-drought-flood-climate-change-11774882103799.html

Editorial of the Day – 02.04.2026

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1. Corridor of opportunity: On the end of Left-Wing Extremism (TH)

GS Paper III: Internal Security.
Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
Sub-Topic: Left Wing Extremism (LWE), Red Corridor, SAMADHAN Strategy, and Tribal Rights.

1. Introduction

In a historic session of the Lok Sabha, the union home minister officially declared India "Naxal-free." This announcement follows years of intensified, multi-pronged operations aimed at dismantling the command structure of Left Wing Extremism (LWE). While the military phase is deemed a success, the focus now pivots toward the more complex task of post-conflict governance, ensuring that the vacuum left by insurgents is filled by equitable development rather than exploitative interests.

2. The Declaration of a "Naxal-Free" India

A Timely Milestone: The announcement by Amit Shah was made just one day prior to his self-imposed deadline, signaling a high level of confidence in the security apparatus.
Security Coordination: The claim reflects a successful integration of central paramilitary forces and state police units (e.g., Greyhounds, COBRA).
Sustained Momentum: This is presented as the final chapter in a strategy that prioritized the absolute neutralization of the armed insurgency.

3. Outcomes of Intensive Operations (The Last 3 Years)

The "Naxal-free" status is supported by significant operational data indicating the erosion of insurgent morale and capacity:
Mass Surrenders: Approximately 4,839 Maoists surrendered, opting for the state's rehabilitation programs over continued conflict.
High Arrest Rates: Nearly 2,218 individuals were arrested, effectively breaking the logistical and urban support networks of the movement.
Tactical Neutralization: About 706 insurgents were neutralized in active encounters, significantly depleting the Maoists' "People's Liberation Guerrilla Army" (PLGA).

4. Evolution of Strategy: Historical Context

The current success is often contrasted with previous administrative approaches:
The 2000s (Manmohan Singh Era): LWE was famously termed the "biggest internal security challenge." This led to Operation Green Hunt, an approach characterized by cautious escalation while grappling with high human and institutional costs.
The 2020s (Current Era): The strategy shifted toward a more aggressive, zero-tolerance policy. It focused on the legacy of security, aiming for a permanent end to the conflict through overwhelming force and simultaneous administrative saturation.

5. The Dual-Track Policy: Security & Governance

The government's "Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove" approach utilized two distinct levers:

Hard Power: Strict military action against those continuing armed resistance and a crackdown on the "Urban Naxal" support infrastructure.

Soft Power & Governance:

1. Administrative Saturation: Rapidly providing Aadhaar cards and ration cards to tribal populations to link them with the formal economy.
2. Educational Outreach: Establishing schools in remote villages to prevent the ideological recruitment of the next generation.
3. Rehabilitation: Offering attractive dialogue and resettlement packages for surrendered cadres.

6. Critical Challenges and Concerns

Despite the military victory, several "fault lines" remain that could trigger future unrest:

1. Civil Liberties: Criticism persists regarding the shrinking space for dissent and the potential targeting of activists under the "Urban Naxal" label.
2. Tribal Alienation: The risk of tribal communities feeling like spectators in their own lands, especially if their rights are sidelined for developmental projects.
3. Resource Exploitation: In the absence of Maoist resistance, there is a fear that large-scale mining and industrial interests might exploit mineral-rich tribal areas without fair compensation.

7. Way Forward: From Victory to Reconciliation

Military success has cleared the "Corridor," but Inclusive Development must now fill it:

1. Protecting Tribal Rights: Strict adherence to the PESA Act and the Forest Rights Act to ensure communities have a say in land use.
2. Democratic Deepening: Encouraging local body elections and tribal participation in mainstream politics to build grassroots accountability.
3. Healing and Reconciliation: Transitioning from a state of "security monitoring" to a state of "social trust," ensuring that the government is seen as a provider rather than just an enforcer.

Conclusion

India's "Naxal-free" declaration is a testament to state capacity and coordinated security strategy. However, the true test of this milestone lies in the sustainability of peace. Lasting stability requires a governance model that prioritizes the marginalized, protects the ecological and cultural heritage of tribal regions, and prevents the resurgence of inequality. The "Corridor of Opportunity" must lead to shared prosperity, ensuring that the roots of extremism are permanently addressed through justice and equity.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/corridor-of-opportunity-on-the-end-of-left-wing-extremism/article70811690.ece

Question

"The transition from a 'Red Corridor' to a 'Corridor of Opportunity' necessitates a shift from tactical military success to strategic administrative reconciliation. Analyze the evolution of India's counter-insurgency strategy against Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) and discuss the hurdles in ensuring a just and stable post-conflict order." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), once described as India's "biggest internal security challenge," has reached a historic turning point with the Union Government's 2026 declaration of a "Naxal-free" India. This milestone is the result of a multi-decadal evolution in state response, moving from uncoordinated local actions to a sophisticated, centralized "Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove" approach.

2. Evolution of India's Counter-Insurgency Strategy

The strategy has evolved through three distinct phases:

Phase I: Cautious Escalation (2000s-2014): Recognizing LWE as a systemic threat, the state launched Operation Green Hunt. The focus was on area reclamation, but it often struggled with high human costs and a "trust deficit" among tribal populations.

Phase II: The SAMADHAN Doctrine (2017-2024): A more holistic framework was adopted, focusing on Smart Leadership, Aggressive Strategy, Motivation, Actionable Intelligence, Dashboard-based KPIs, Harnessing Technology, Action plan for each theater, and No access to financing.
Phase III: Saturation & Neutralization (2024-2026): The final push combined aggressive paramilitary operations with administrative saturation—ensuring every household in affected zones had Aadhaar, banking, and ration cards, thereby "choking" the Maoists' ideological and logistical space.

3. Significance of the 'Naxal-Free' Milestone

The 2026 declaration is supported by unprecedented operational data:
Erosion of Command: Over 4,800 surrenders in three years indicate a total collapse of insurgent morale.
Territorial Reclamation: Security forces have established a permanent presence in former "liberated zones" like the Abujhmad and Saranda forests.

4. Hurdles in Post-Conflict Governance

Military victory does not automatically translate into social peace. Several structural hurdles remain:
The Resource Curse: With the "insurgent buffer" gone, there is a risk of unregulated resource extraction by corporate interests, which could lead to fresh tribal alienation if not managed equitably.
Tribal Rights vs. Development: Ensuring the strict implementation of the PESA Act (1996) and Forest Rights Act (2006) is essential. If local *Gram Sabhas* are bypassed for large-scale projects, the "roots" of extremism may regrow.
Rehabilitation Fatigue: Successfully integrating nearly 5,000 surrendered cadres into the mainstream without triggering social friction in local villages is a complex psychological and economic task.
Accountability: Post-conflict governance requires addressing past grievances regarding human rights and ensuring the state is seen as a provider of justice, not just an enforcer of law.

5. Conclusion

The "Naxal-free" status of 2026 is a hard-won tactical victory. To transform it into a strategic peace, the state must now prioritize the "Velvet Glove." The "Corridor of Opportunity" will only be sustainable if it is paved with inclusive development, tribal sovereignty, and democratic deepening. The focus must now shift from the "War on Terror" to the "Work of Healing."
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/corridor-of-opportunity-on-the-end-of-left-wing-extremism/article70811690.ece

2. Ashoka helped spread Buddhism far and wide. How his grandson did the same for Jainism (IE)

GS Paper I Subject: Indian Heritage and Culture; History of the World.
Topic: Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times.
Sub-Topic: Mauryan Empire; Religious Patronage (Buddhism & Jainism); Samrat Samprati; Jain Architecture.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the inauguration of the Samrat Samprati Museum in Gandhinagar marked a significant cultural milestone. While the Mauryan era is often dominated by the Buddhist legacy of Emperor Ashoka, this event highlights the equally vital role of his grandson, Samrat Samprati, in institutionalizing Jainism. Together, these rulers represent the foundational pluralism of the Indian state, where royal patronage served as a catalyst for the global and domestic spread of diverse shramanic traditions.

2. Mauryan Empire & Religious Pluralism

Diverse Traditions: The Mauryan period (4th–2nd century BCE) was characterized by the peaceful coexistence of Buddhism, Jainism, Brahmanism, and the Ajivika sect.
State Policy of Tolerance: Rulers generally practiced a policy of "Dhamma-concord," where the state supported multiple faiths simultaneously.

Royal Lineage Diversity:

1. Chandragupta Maurya: Associated with the migration to Shravanabelagola and Jain asceticism.
2. Ashoka: The foremost patron of Buddhism.
3. Samprati: Credited with the "Golden Age" of Jain Shvetambara patronage.

3. Ashoka and the Global Spread of Buddhism

Dhamma as State Policy: Ashoka used Rock and Pillar Edicts to propagate a moral code based on non-violence (*Ahimsa*), social welfare, and religious tolerance.
nternational Missions: He dispatched Buddhist missions to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Hellenistic kingdoms, transforming Buddhism into a world religion.
Institutional Building: The construction of thousands of Stupas and Viharas provided the physical infrastructure for monastic growth.
Governance Model: He established the "Chakravartin" ideal—a righteous ruler who governs through moral authority rather than raw force.

4. Samrat Samprati: The "Jain Ashoka"

Lineage: Grandson of Ashoka and son of Prince Kunala, Samprati ruled approximately between 230–220 BCE.
Conversion: Jain literary traditions, particularly Shvetambara texts, record his conversion by the monk Arya Suhastin.
Patronage of Jainism: Much like Ashoka, Samprati utilized state resources to transform Jainism into a prominent organized religion across India.
Literary Presence: While Ashoka's history is found in stone, Samprati's legacy is deeply embedded in the Jain Prabandhas and historical chronicles.

5. Spread of Jainism under Samprati's Reign

Missionary Expansion: He is credited with sending Jain monks to "non-Aryan" frontier regions such as Afghanistan (Gandhara), Nepal, and South India (Andhra/Karnataka).
Temple Construction: Tradition attributes the construction of thousands of Jain temples to him. Most ancient Jain sites in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh trace their origins to his reign.
Iconography: He promoted the installation of Jina idols and icons, facilitating the transition of Jainism into a faith with a strong lay-worship component.
Economic Integration: By fostering Jainism among the Vaniyas (trading communities), he ensured the religion's long-term economic and social sustainability.

6. Comparative Analysis: Ashoka vs. Samprati

Religious Focus: Ashoka championed Buddhism; Samprati championed Jainism.
Mode of Propagation: Ashoka relied heavily on Epigraphy (Edicts); Samprati focused on Architecture (Temples) and icon installation.
Evidence Type: Ashoka's legacy is historically authenticated via inscriptions; Samprati's is preserved primarily through literary and religious traditions.
Shared Values: Both emphasized Ahimsa (non-violence), vegetarianism, and the welfare of all living beings as pillars of Mauryan statecraft.

7. Contemporary Relevance

Heritage Recognition: The establishment of the Samrat Samprati Museum corrects a historical imbalance, giving due credit to the Jain contributions of the Mauryan dynasty.
Soft Power: Reclaiming these figures reinforces India's image as the "Vishwa Guru" and the birthplace of major world religions.
Lessons in Secularism: The Mauryan model of "state-supported pluralism" provides a historical blueprint for modern Indian secularism.
Art & Architecture: Understanding Samprati is essential for studying the evolution of Western Indian temple styles and Jain sculpture.

Conclusion

The dual legacies of Ashoka and Samprati illustrate that the Mauryan Empire was a mosaic of faiths rather than a monolith. While Ashoka's stones speak of Buddhism, Samprati's temples speak of the resilience of Jainism. The recognition of Samrat Samprati in 2026 ensures that the full spectrum of India's ancient pluralistic governance is celebrated, reinforcing the values of tolerance and ethical leadership for future generations.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/samrat-samprati-ashoka-grandson-jainism-history-10613510/

Question

1. "The Mauryan Empire was not merely a period of political unification but a laboratory of religious pluralism. Elucidate this statement with special reference to the contributions of Samrat Ashoka and Samrat Samprati to the religious landscape of India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Mauryan Empire (4th–2nd Century BCE) laid the foundation for the first pan-Indian state. Beyond administrative centralization, it was a pivotal era for religious pluralism, where the ruling elite actively patronized diverse Shramanic traditions. While Samrat Ashoka is globally recognized for his Buddhist patronage, his grandson Samrat Samprati played a parallel role in the institutionalization of Jainism.

2. Ashoka: The Architect of Buddhist Expansion

Ashoka transformed Buddhism from a regional sect into a global faith through:

Dhamma Policy: A state-sponsored moral code that emphasized non-violence and social responsibility, etched on Rock and Pillar Edicts.

Missions: Sending emissaries to the Hellenistic world and Sri Lanka, creating the first international network of religious diplomacy.

Physical Infrastructure: Construction of Stupas and monasteries that provided a permanent base for Buddhist monasticism.

3. Samprati: The "Jain Counterpart"

In the Shvetambara Jain tradition, Samprati is viewed as the "Jain Ashoka" for several reasons:

Missionary Zeal: He is credited with sending Jain monks to Afghanistan and South India, regions previously outside the primary Jain fold.

Temple and Icon Installation: He initiated a massive program of building temples and installing Jina idols, which shifted Jainism toward a more structured, temple-centric faith.

Support for Monasticism: Under the guidance of Arya Suhastin, he provided the logistical and financial support necessary for the Jain sangha to flourish during the Mauryan decline.

4. The Pluralistic Ethos of the Mauryan State

Coexistence: The Mauryan court supported Buddhism, Jainism, and the Ajivikas (as seen in the Barabar caves), showcasing a model of state-neutrality or multi-faith patronage.

Socio-Ethical Impact: Both rulers emphasized Ahimsa (non-violence), which influenced Indian dietary habits, trade ethics, and the legal treatment of animals.

Source Divergence: While Ashoka's legacy is epigraphically proven, Samprati's is literarily preserved, but both contributed equally to the "Shramanization" of Indian culture.

5. Conclusion

The Mauryan legacy is a testament to the idea that diverse religious ideologies can coexist and thrive under a single political umbrella. By recognizing the contributions of both Ashoka and Samprati, we understand that Indian civilization's strength lies in its pluralistic roots. This historical precedent continues to influence India's modern identity as a land of religious tolerance and cultural synthesis.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/samrat-samprati-ashoka-grandson-jainism-history-10613510/

3. India's chance in supply chain reset (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Globalisation and its effects on the Indian economy
Sub-Topic: Industrial policy and manufacturing sector

Introduction

The ongoing geopolitical tensions, trade disruptions, and pandemic-induced shocks have exposed the vulnerabilities of concentrated global supply chains. As countries diversify sourcing and production networks, India has a strategic opportunity to position itself as a key manufacturing and export hub in the emerging global supply chain reset.

1. Global Supply Chain Reset

1. Global production networks are undergoing restructuring due to geopolitical tensions and economic risks.
2. Countries and firms are increasingly adopting diversification strategies such as "China+1".
3. Supply chains are shifting toward resilience, security, and geographic diversification.

2. Drivers of the Supply Chain Reconfiguration

Geopolitical Tensions

1. Trade wars and conflicts disrupt traditional supply routes.

Pandemic Lessons

1. COVID-19 exposed fragility of concentrated production hubs.

Economic Security Concerns

1. Countries seek to reduce dependence on a single supplier.

3. India's Emerging Opportunities

Large Domestic Market

1. Strong internal demand provides scale for manufacturing.

Demographic Advantage

1. Young workforce supports labour-intensive industries.

Policy Support

1. Initiatives such as Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes.

Strategic Location

1. Access to major maritime trade routes.

4. Key Sectors with Potential

Electronics and Semiconductors

1. Growing investments in electronics manufacturing.

Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals

1. Strengthening supply chains beyond traditional producers.

Automobiles and Engineering Goods

1. Expansion of global production networks.

5. Structural Challenges

Infrastructure Gaps

1. Logistics and transportation costs remain high.

Regulatory Complexity

1. Policy unpredictability affects investor confidence.

Skill and Productivity Constraints

1. Workforce training and technology adoption remain limited.

Global Competition

1. Competing manufacturing hubs in Asia.

6. Policy Measures Required

Logistics and Infrastructure Development

1. Strengthen ports, highways, and industrial corridors.

Trade Integration

1. Expand free trade agreements and export market access.

Ease of Doing Business

1. Simplify regulatory frameworks and reduce compliance costs.

Skill Development

1. Enhance workforce capability for advanced manufacturing.

7. Way Forward

Build Export-Oriented Manufacturing

1. Move from consumption-led growth to production-led growth.

Strengthen Industrial Ecosystems

1. Integrate MSMEs into global value chains.

Promote Supply Chain Resilience

1. Diversify sourcing and develop domestic capabilities.

Conclusion

The restructuring of global supply chains presents India with a historic opportunity to emerge as a major manufacturing hub. By addressing structural constraints and strengthening policy support, India can transform supply chain diversification into sustained economic growth.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-chance-in-supply-chain-reset/article70812439.ece#:~:text=Combined%20with%20supply%20chain%20diversification,ports%20and%20multimodal%20networks%20expand.

Question

Q. *The ongoing global supply chain reset presents both opportunities and challenges for India. Examine how India can leverage this transition to emerge as a major manufacturing and export hub.* (250 words)

Introduction

Global supply chains are undergoing restructuring due to geopolitical tensions and pandemic-induced disruptions. This shift provides India an opportunity to strengthen its role in global manufacturing networks.

Opportunities for India

1. Diversification of Production

1. Firms are adopting "China+1" strategies, creating space for alternative manufacturing hubs.

2. Policy Initiatives

1. Schemes like PLI encourage domestic manufacturing.

3. Demographic Advantage

1. Large workforce supports labour-intensive sectors.

Challenges

1. Infrastructure Deficits

1. High logistics costs reduce competitiveness.

2. Regulatory Complexity

1. Compliance burdens discourage investment.

3. Global Competition

1. Other Asian economies competing for supply chain relocation.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Logistics Infrastructure

1. Improve ports, highways, and supply chain connectivity.

2. Expand Trade Partnerships

1. Increase access to global markets through FTAs.

3. Enhance Industrial Capacity

1. Invest in technology and skill development.

Conclusion

By strengthening infrastructure, improving policy frameworks, and integrating into global value chains, India can transform the supply chain reset into a major driver of industrial growth and export expansion.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-chance-in-supply-chain-reset/article70812439.ece#:~:text=Combined%20with%20supply%20chain%20diversification,ports%20and%20multimodal%20networks%20expand

4. Naxal free Indian begins with youth welfare (TT)

General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Role of socio-economic factors in internal security
Sub-Topic: Development and security nexus

Introduction

Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India is not merely a law-and-order issue but a manifestation of deep-rooted socio-economic grievances, governance deficits, and alienation among marginalised communities. While security measures have weakened insurgent capacities, long-term resolution requires restoring trust, justice, and inclusive development.

1. Nature of Left-Wing Extremism

1. Ideologically driven movement rooted in Maoist principles.
2. Concentrated in tribal and underdeveloped regions.
3. Combines armed struggle with mobilisation of local grievances.

2. Structural Causes of LWE

Governance Deficit

1. Weak state presence and poor service delivery.

Socio-Economic Inequality

1. Land alienation, poverty, and lack of opportunities.

Marginalisation of Tribal Communities

1. Displacement and lack of rights over resources.

Developmental Gaps

1. Poor infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

3. Changing Nature of Extremism

Decline in Organised Cadres

1. Security operations have reduced militant strength.

Shift in Recruitment Patterns

1. Youth participation influenced by local grievances.

Reduced Ideological Commitment

1. Economic motivations increasingly significant.

4. Limitations of Security-Centric Approach

Temporary Suppression

1. Military action weakens insurgency but does not eliminate root causes.

Alienation Risks

1. Excessive force may deepen distrust among local populations.

5. Role of Youth and Trust Deficit

Youth Vulnerability

1. Unemployment and lack of opportunities create discontent.

Trust Deficit with State

1. Weak institutional engagement fosters alienation.

Identity and Dignity Concerns

1. Cultural and social exclusion reinforce grievances.

6. Integrated Approach to Address LWE

Security Measures

1. Continue targeted operations to maintain order.

Developmental Interventions

1. Improve infrastructure, education, and livelihoods.

Governance Reforms

1. Strengthen local institutions and service delivery.

Community Engagement

1. Build trust through participation and inclusion.

7. Way Forward

Focus on Inclusive Growth

1. Address regional disparities.

Enhance State Capacity

1. Improve administrative reach in remote areas.

Youth-Centric Policies

1. Skill development and employment generation.

Conclusion

Addressing Left Wing Extremism requires moving beyond a purely security-centric approach to a holistic strategy integrating development, governance, and trust-building. Sustainable peace depends on addressing the underlying socio-economic and political causes of alienation.

Source: https://telanganatoday.com/opinion-naxal-free-india-must-begin-with-youth-welfare

Question

Q. *Left Wing Extremism in India is as much a development challenge as it is a security issue. Discuss the causes of LWE and suggest a comprehensive strategy to address it.* (250 words)

Introduction

Left Wing Extremism reflects deep socio-economic inequalities and governance deficits. While security measures have reduced its intensity, structural issues persist.

Causes of LWE

1. Governance Deficit

1. Weak administrative presence in affected regions.

2. Socio-Economic Inequality

1. Poverty, land alienation, and lack of development.

3. Tribal Marginalisation

1. Displacement and lack of resource rights.

Strategy to Address LWE

1. Security Measures

1. Targeted operations to maintain stability.

2. Development Initiatives

1. Improve infrastructure and livelihood opportunities.

3. Governance Reforms

1. Strengthen local institutions and service delivery.

Conclusion

A balanced approach combining security, development, and governance reforms is essential to sustainably address Left Wing Extremism in India.

Source: https://telanganatoday.com/opinion-naxal-free-india-must-begin-with-youth-welfare

Editorial of the Day – 03.04.2026

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1. In the running - On the Artemis II launch (TH)

GS Paper III - Science and Technology
Topic - Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotechnology, and Biotechnology.
Sub-Topic - Human Spaceflight Missions (Artemis II and Gaganyaan).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the successful launch of the Artemis II mission has ignited a new era of deep-space exploration. As the first crewed mission to fly around the Moon in over half a century, Artemis II is not merely a scientific endeavour but a pivotal moment in the shifting "Space Geopolitics" of the 21st century. This mission serves as the precursor to a permanent human presence on the lunar surface, signaling an intensifying competition between global powers for strategic dominance in cis-lunar space.

2. Artemis II Launch and Global Significance

Milestone for Humanity - The mission carried four astronauts into space, representing the most significant step toward returning humans to the lunar surface since the Apollo era.
Technological Symbolism - After years of heavy investment and rigorous development, the launch serves as a global symbol of cutting-edge aerospace engineering and national ambition.
Deep Space Revival - It marks the transition from Low Earth Orbit (LEO) activities—like those on the International Space Station—to high-stakes deep-space exploration.
Bridge to the Surface - Artemis II validates the life-support systems and navigation required for the subsequent Artemis III mission, which aims to land the first woman and the next man on the Moon.

3. Emerging Global Lunar Competition

U.S.–China Rivalry - A new "Lunar Space Race" has emerged between the U.S.-led Artemis bloc and China's International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) initiative.
Strategic Resources - Competition is increasingly focused on the Lunar South Pole, believed to contain significant deposits of water ice, essential for life support and rocket fuel.
First-Mover Advantage - Establishing permanent bases at strategic locations offers long-term advantages in monitoring and controlling lunar activities.
Equity and Fairness - The race raises critical questions about "space commons" and whether lunar resources will be shared fairly or dominated by a few technologically advanced nations.

4. Strategic Importance of Lunar Infrastructure

Beyond Exploration - Current programs aim to move beyond "flags and footprints" toward building sustainable infrastructure, including -

1. Research Stations - For long-term scientific habitation.
2. Refuelling Depots - Utilizing lunar water to produce liquid oxygen and hydrogen for deep-space travel.
3. Communication Systems - Creating a "Lunar GPS" and high-speed data links for cis-lunar activity.
4. Resource Extraction - Facilities for mining lunar regolith and minerals.

Gateway to Mars - Lunar infrastructure is the essential "proving ground" and refueling stop for future human missions to Mars.

Cis-Lunar Dominance - Control over the space between Earth and the Moon is becoming a primary objective for national security and strategic positioning.

5. Geopolitics Driving the New Space Age

National Prestige - Space achievements are increasingly used as a metric of a nation's soft power and technological superiority on the global stage.
Power Projection - Earth-based rivalries (U.S.-China-Russia) are being extended into the lunar domain, treating space as a new "high ground" for influence.
Strategic Competition - The idealistic vision of "pure science" is being tempered by the reality of space as a domain for securing future economic and military interests.
Global Standing - Success in lunar missions is tied to a nation's ability to lead global alliances and set the "rules of the road" for future space governance.

6. India's Role and Future Opportunities

Strategic Alignment - India joined the Artemis Accords in 2023, committing to the peaceful, transparent, and cooperative exploration of space.
Indigenous Capabilities - The Gaganyaan program is progressing rapidly, aiming to demonstrate India's capability for independent human spaceflight.
Vision 2040 - The Indian government has set ambitious targets, including the establishment of the Bharatiya Antariksha Station (BAS) and landing an Indian on the Moon by 2040.
Key Opportunities -

1. Collaborative Payloads - Integrating Indian scientific instruments into international lunar missions.
2. Joint Ventures - Partnering on lunar landers and rovers under global frameworks like the Artemis Accords.
3. Resource Development - Contributing to the development of lunar infrastructure and sustainable life-support technologies.

Conclusion

The Artemis II mission represents a transformative shift in human history, where the Moon is no longer just a destination but a strategic frontier. While the intensifying competition reflects Earthly rivalries, it also accelerates the technological innovation required for humanity to become a multi-planetary species. For India, the path forward involves a delicate balance - building robust indigenous capabilities through missions like Gaganyaan while strategically collaborating within international frameworks to ensure a seat at the table of lunar governance and exploration.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/in-the-running-on-the-artemis-ii-launch/article70816109.ece

Question

"The resurgence of lunar exploration through programs like Artemis II has transformed the Moon from a scientific curiosity into a strategic geopolitical asset. Discuss the implications of this shift for global space governance and analyze India's preparedness to navigate this competitive landscape." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The launch of Artemis II in 2026 marks humanity's return to deep-space flight. However, unlike the 20th-century space race centered on prestige, the current "Lunar Rush" is driven by the intent to establish permanent infrastructure and exploit lunar resources. This has shifted the perception of the Moon from a purely scientific domain to a vital geopolitical and economic asset.

2. Implications for Global Space Governance

Resource Competition - The hunt for water ice at the Lunar South Pole challenges the Outer Space Treaty (1967), which prohibits national appropriation of celestial bodies. The ambiguity of "resource utilization" vs. "ownership" creates a legal vacuum.

Bloc-Based Diplomacy - Space governance is fragmenting into competing alliances—the U.S.-led Artemis Accords vs. the China-Russia ILRS. This could lead to a "first-come, first-served" model of lunar occupancy.
Cis-Lunar Security - The strategic importance of the space between Earth and the Moon is leading to the "militarization of intent," where nations seek to monitor and protect their space assets from adversaries.

3. India's Preparedness and Strategy

India has adopted a "Multi-Track" strategy to remain competitive -
International Cooperation - By joining the Artemis Accords, India has aligned itself with transparent, democratic norms for space use while gaining access to critical data and joint mission opportunities.
Indigenous Milestones - The Gaganyaan mission is the cornerstone of India's human spaceflight capability, providing the technical foundation for the proposed Bharatiya Antariksha Station (BAS).
Strategic Vision - The Prime Minister's directive for a Moon landing by 2040 provides a long-term roadmap for ISRO, focusing on heavy-lift launch vehicles (LVM3/HLV) and sophisticated landing technologies.
Economic Integration - Encouraging private space startups through IN-SPACe allows India to build a robust commercial space ecosystem capable of contributing to global lunar supply chains.

4. Conclusion

As space becomes a domain of strategic competition, India must balance its indigenous "Atmanirbhar" ambitions with active participation in global rule-making. The success of India's lunar trajectory will depend on its ability to translate its low-cost engineering strengths into high-value infrastructure contributions, ensuring that the "Corridor of Opportunity" in space remains open and equitable for all.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/in-the-running-on-the-artemis-ii-launch/article70816109.ece

2. Some smart(phone) lessons for industrial policy (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Topic - Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
Sub-Topic - Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes.

- Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM).
- Global Value Chain (GVC) Integration.
- Export-led Growth vs. Import Substitution.

1. Introduction

By April 2026, India's smartphone PLI scheme has emerged as the "Gold Standard" of the country's new-age industrial policy. Launched in 2020, the scheme has effectively silenced critics of state-led incentives by nearly doubling production and octupling exports within five years. This success has sparked a broader debate on whether this "Electronics Template"—characterized by export-orientation and supply-chain rationalization—can be replicated to solve India's chronic manufacturing stagnation.

2. Industrial Policy in India - Concept and Evolution

Definition - Industrial policy involves strategic government interventions—through subsidies, tariffs, and regulatory reforms—to promote specific sectors and enhance national competitiveness.
Historical Shift -

1. Pre-1991 - Characterized by the "License Raj" and heavy state control.
2. Post-Liberalization - A shift toward market-driven growth.

3. The 2020s Era - Adoption of "Make in India," PLI, and "Atmanirbhar Bharat," focusing on building champions in Global Value Chains (GVCs).

Global Benchmarking - India's current strategy is heavily influenced by the successful "Manufacturing Hub" models of China and Vietnam.

3. Success of the Smartphone PLI - Key Outcomes (FY 2025-26)

Production Surge - Annual production rose from $30 billion in 2020 to approximately $64 billion by FY 2025.

Export Revolution - Exports grew from $3.1 billion to $24 billion, increasing India's share in the global smartphone market from ~1% to ~8%.

Employment Multiplier - The sector has generated 1.5 to 2 lakh direct jobs, with a remarkably high participation rate of women in large-scale assembly units.

Global Entry - The entry and expansion of giants like Foxconn, Pegatron, and Tata Electronics have anchored the ecosystem.

4. Strategic Pivot - Export-Orientation vs. Import Substitution

Export-Led Strategy - Unlike the protectionist policies of the past, the smartphone PLI rewarded firms based on incremental sales, forcing them to compete in the global market rather than just the domestic one.

Scale Advantage - By targeting the global market, firms achieved economies of scale that the domestic market alone could not support, leading to higher productivity and lower unit costs.

East Asian Replication - India is successfully mimicking the "Export-First" model utilized by China to build its initial industrial base.

5. The Role of Downstream Assembly

Entry Point for Industrialization - The policy prioritized final assembly. While "screwdriver technology" is often criticized, it acts as a crucial growth engine for a nascent industrial ecosystem.

Labor Absorption - Assembly is labour-intensive, making it the most effective tool for absorbing India's semi-skilled workforce.

MSME Linkages - Large-scale assemblers create a "pull factor" for thousands of component manufacturers (MSMEs), eventually deepening the domestic supply chain.

Moving Upstream - With the base established, India is now moving toward high-value component manufacturing through the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS).

6. Supply Chain and Input Cost Rationalization

Tariff Coherence - The government proactively reduced import duties on components to ensure that the cost of production remained globally competitive.

Policy Coherence - Recognizing that high tariffs on inputs negate the benefits of PLIs, the smartphone policy ensured a smooth flow of raw materials.

Competitive Inputs - Stable and low input costs are identified as the "make-or-break" factor for sustaining exports in price-sensitive global electronics markets.

7. Ease of Doing Business and Governance Support

Administrative Agility - Rapid improvements in infrastructure—particularly airport cargo capacity and logistics—supported the "just-in-time" nature of electronics manufacturing.

Centre-State Synergy - State governments (like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) acted as facilitators, streamlining labor laws and land acquisition for "mega-factories."

Policy Predictability - Sustained commitment to the PLI timeline built long-term investor confidence among global OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers).

8. Limitations and Challenges in Other PLI Sectors

Low Disbursement Rates - Out of the ₹1.97 lakh crore allocated, only ~10% has been utilized across all 14 sectors, indicating significant implementation gaps outside electronics.
Inward-Looking Focus - Many other sectors (like food processing or textiles) still focus on "Import Substitution" rather than global exports, limiting their growth potential.
High Input Costs - In sectors like steel or specialty chemicals, high energy and raw material costs continue to hinder the effectiveness of PLI incentives.
Structural Bottlenecks - High logistics costs (reaching 14% of GDP) and regulatory "red tape" remain significant hurdles for smaller players.

9. Way Forward for India's Industrial Policy

Export-Centricity - Replicate the smartphone model in other high-potential sectors like textiles, toys, and footwear.
Component Deepening - Aggressively promote the domestic manufacturing of sub-assemblies (displays, batteries, and semiconductors) through ECMS.
Investment in Human Capital - Focus on vocational training to ensure a steady supply of skilled labor for advanced manufacturing.
Long-Term Fiscal Commitment - India must maintain sustained support; global competitors like China often spend up to 2% of their GDP on industrial subsidies.

Conclusion

The smartphone success story is proof that with the right mix of export focus, tariff rationalization, and governance support, India can break its "manufacturing jinx." However, for India to truly become a global hub, this success must transition from a "one-sector wonder" to a "multi-sector reality." The focus must now shift toward reducing structural costs and building a deep, resilient domestic component ecosystem that can survive beyond the duration of fiscal incentives.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/some-smartphone-lessons-for-industrial-police-10616286/

Question

"The success of the smartphone Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme provides a replicable template for India's industrial ambitions. Analyze the factors that contributed to its success and examine why similar results have been difficult to achieve in other PLI-eligible sectors." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's smartphone manufacturing has witnessed a meteoric rise, with production reaching $64 billion in FY 2025. This success is primarily attributed to a strategic shift in industrial policy—from traditional import substitution to a sophisticated, export-led PLI model that integrates India into Global Value Chains (GVCs).

2. Factors Behind the Smartphone PLI Success

Export-Linked Incentives - Unlike previous schemes, the smartphone PLI focused on global sales, ensuring that Indian-made products met international standards and achieved economies of scale.
Tariff Rationalization - The government strategically lowered import duties on critical components (e.g., camera modules, displays), ensuring that input costs did not stifle manufacturing competitiveness.
Anchor Investors - Attracting global "anchor" firms like Foxconn and Samsung created a "magnet effect," bringing in an entire ecosystem of sub-component suppliers.
Assembly-First Approach - By focusing on the labor-intensive assembly stage first, India successfully absorbed its semi-skilled workforce while building the foundation for future upstream (component) manufacturing.

3. Challenges in Replicating the Model in Other Sectors

While the smartphone model is successful, other PLI sectors face hurdles -

Low Disbursement - Across 14 sectors, only ~10% of funds have been utilized due to stringent "incremental production" targets that many domestic firms find difficult to meet.

Input Cost Disadvantage - In sectors like Specialty Chemicals and Technical Textiles, the high cost of power and logistics often outweighs the fiscal incentives provided by the PLI.

Lack of Export Focus - Many sectors remain "inward-looking," targeting only the domestic market, which prevents them from achieving the scale necessary for global price competitiveness.

Implementation Gaps - Frequent changes in technical specifications and delays in administrative clearances have hindered the uptake in sectors like "High-Efficiency Solar PV Modules."

4. Conclusion

The smartphone success story proves that industrial policy works when it is export-oriented and ecosystem-aware. To transform India into a global manufacturing hub, the government must now focus on reducing "cost of disabilities" (logistics and power) and ensuring that the "Smartphone Template" of policy coherence and global integration is applied across the industrial spectrum.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/some-smartphone-lessons-for-industrial-police-10616286/

3. Allied healthcare needs attention (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Health / Human Resource Development

Topic - Issues relating to development and management of social sector (health)

Sub-Topic - Skill development and education reforms

Introduction

India's healthcare system is increasingly dependent on Allied Healthcare Professionals (AHPs), who support diagnostics, treatment, and rehabilitation. However, acute shortages, fragmented training systems, and regulatory gaps have constrained their effectiveness, posing a major challenge to achieving accessible and quality healthcare.

1. Concept of Allied Healthcare Workforce

1. Includes a wide range of professionals such as lab technicians, radiographers, physiotherapists, dialysis technicians, and emergency care providers.
2. They act as a critical interface between doctors and patients, translating medical decisions into clinical outcomes.
3. Modern healthcare delivery is highly technology-driven, making AHPs indispensable for efficient and timely care.

2. Magnitude of Workforce Shortage

Severe Capacity Deficit

1. India requires around 10.9 million AHPs but currently has only about 2.7 million, indicating a massive gap.

Demand–Supply Imbalance

1. Rapid expansion of hospitals, diagnostics, and specialised care has increased demand, while training output remains limited.

Impact on Healthcare Delivery

1. Shortages lead to delays in diagnosis, overburdening of doctors, and compromised patient outcomes, especially in rural areas.

3. Structural Issues in Allied Healthcare

Fragmented Training Ecosystem

1. Multiple institutions operate with varying standards, leading to inconsistency in skills and quality.

Lack of Standardised Curriculum

1. Absence of uniform guidelines results in uneven competency levels across graduates.

Insufficient Clinical Exposure

1. Many programs are classroom-heavy with limited hands-on hospital training, reducing practical readiness.

High Cost and Duration of Training

1. Long courses with significant financial burden discourage students, especially from lower-income backgrounds.

4. Regulatory and Institutional Challenges

Delayed Implementation of NCAHP Framework

1. National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) reforms are still evolving, creating uncertainty in recognition and standards.

Accreditation Ambiguities

1. Institutions face confusion regarding compliance, affecting quality assurance and expansion of programs.

Rigid Regulatory Systems

1. Over-standardisation without flexibility may limit innovation and capacity growth.

5. Quality vs Quantity Dilemma

Need for Quality Assurance

1. Standardisation is essential to ensure patient safety, reliability, and professional competence.

Urgency of Capacity Expansion

1. Large shortages necessitate rapid scaling of workforce.

Policy Trade-off

1. Excessive regulation may slow expansion, while unchecked growth may lead to poor-quality professionals.

6. Importance of Allied Workforce

Enhancing Healthcare Efficiency

1. Frees doctors to focus on complex cases, improving overall system productivity.

Improving Access to Care

1. Expands service delivery in underserved and rural regions.

Supporting Specialised Healthcare

1. Critical for advanced diagnostics, chronic disease management, and rehabilitation services.

7. Policy Measures and Reforms

Standardised Curriculum Implementation

1. Develop uniform competency-based training aligned with global standards.

Expansion of Training Capacity

1. Encourage public-private partnerships to increase number and quality of institutions.

Integration with Healthcare Systems

1. Embed training within hospitals to ensure practical, real-world exposure.

Financial and Institutional Support

1. Scholarships, subsidies, and incentives to make courses accessible.

8. Way Forward

Balanced Regulatory Approach

1. Combine standardisation with flexibility to allow expansion.

Focus on Skill Development

1. Align curriculum with emerging technologies and healthcare needs.

Strengthening Institutional Ecosystem

1. Improve accreditation, monitoring, and evaluation systems.

Enhancing Career Attractiveness

1. Better wages, recognition, and career pathways to attract talent.

Conclusion

A robust allied healthcare workforce is essential for strengthening India's healthcare system. Addressing shortages requires a comprehensive strategy integrating education reforms, regulatory clarity, and capacity expansion, ensuring both quality and accessibility of healthcare services.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/allied-healthcare-needs-attention/article70816787.ece

Question

Q. *The shortage of allied healthcare professionals poses a significant challenge to India's healthcare system. Examine the structural issues and suggest measures to strengthen this workforce.* (250 words)

Introduction

Allied healthcare professionals are vital for effective healthcare delivery, supporting diagnostics, treatment, and rehabilitation. However, India faces a significant shortage due to structural inefficiencies and regulatory challenges.

Structural Issues

1. Training Deficiencies

1. Lack of standardised curriculum leads to inconsistent skill levels.
2. Limited clinical exposure reduces practical competence of graduates.

2. Capacity Constraints

1. Insufficient number of institutions restricts supply.
2. High cost of education discourages entry into the profession.

3. Regulatory Challenges

1. Delayed implementation of NCAHP creates uncertainty.
2. Complex accreditation processes hinder institutional expansion.

Measures to Strengthen Workforce

1. Standardisation of Education

1. Implement uniform, competency-based curriculum across institutions.

2. Expansion of Training Capacity

1. Promote public-private partnerships to scale up institutions.

3. Industry Integration

1. Link training programs with hospitals for hands-on experience.

4. Financial Support

1. Provide scholarships and reduce cost barriers for students.

Conclusion

Addressing workforce shortages requires coordinated reforms in training, regulation, and capacity building. Strengthening the allied healthcare sector is essential for improving healthcare access, quality, and overall system efficiency in India.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/allied-healthcare-needs-attention/article70816787.ece

4. MSMEs - From survival to scale (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - MSME sector and its role in economic development
Sub-Topic - Credit and financial inclusion

Introduction

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are central to India's economy, contributing significantly to employment, exports, and innovation. However, many MSMEs remain trapped in a "survival mode" due to inadequate and misaligned financing, preventing them from scaling and realising their full potential.

1. Importance of MSMEs in Indian Economy

1. Contribute significantly to GDP, exports, and employment generation.
2. Act as engines of inclusive growth, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.
3. Support entrepreneurship, innovation, and supply chain linkages.

2. Structural Challenges Faced by MSMEs

Limited Access to Formal Credit

1. Heavy reliance on informal sources due to lack of collateral and credit history.

Working Capital Constraints

1. Cash flow mismatches due to delayed payments and irregular revenues.

High Cost of Borrowing

1. Interest rates often higher for small firms, affecting profitability.

Low Financial Literacy

1. Limited awareness of financial products and credit options.

3. Problem of Misaligned Financing

Mismatch with Cash Flows

1. Loan structures often rigid and not aligned with business cycles.

Collateral-Based Lending Bias

1. Banks prioritise asset-backed lending rather than cash-flow-based lending.

Short-Term vs Long-Term Needs

1. MSMEs require flexible financing, but available products are often standardised.

4. Role of Formal Financial Systems

Banking Sector Limitations

1. Risk aversion and stringent norms restrict credit flow.

Delayed Payments Ecosystem

1. Late payments from large firms and government entities strain MSMEs.

Inadequate Credit Penetration

1. Despite policy efforts, credit access remains uneven.

5. Emerging Solutions

Cash Flow-Based Lending

1. Shift towards assessing repayment capacity based on business revenues.

Digital Financial Infrastructure

1. Use of GST data, digital payments, and fintech platforms to assess creditworthiness.

Supply Chain Financing

1. Leveraging relationships with larger firms to provide credit access.

Fintech Innovations

1. Faster, data-driven lending with reduced documentation.

6. Policy and Institutional Measures

Credit Guarantee Schemes

1. Reduce risk for lenders and improve access for MSMEs.

TReDS Platform

1. Facilitates invoice discounting and improves liquidity.

Regulatory Support

1. RBI initiatives for priority sector lending and MSME credit.

7. Way Forward

Align Finance with Business Cycles

1. Develop flexible repayment structures linked to cash flows.

Strengthen Digital Ecosystems

1. Expand use of data for credit assessment.

Improve Payment Discipline

1. Enforce timely payments from buyers.

Enhance Financial Literacy

1. Build awareness among MSMEs about available financial tools.

Conclusion

For MSMEs to transition from survival to scale, financial systems must evolve from collateral-based to cash-flow-based lending. Aligning finance with business realities will unlock growth, improve resilience, and strengthen India's economic foundation.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/msmes-from-survival-to-scale-with-finance-aligned-to-cash-flows-126040201483_1.html

Question

Q. *Access to finance remains a critical constraint for MSMEs in India. Analyse the challenges in MSME financing and suggest reforms to enable their transition from survival to scale.* (250 words)

Introduction

MSMEs are vital for economic growth and employment, but limited and misaligned access to finance restricts their scalability and competitiveness.

Challenges in MSME Financing

1. Limited Credit Access

1. Dependence on informal sources due to lack of collateral.

2. Cash Flow Mismatch

1. Rigid loan structures do not align with business cycles.

3. Delayed Payments

1. Late payments affect liquidity and working capital.

Reforms Needed

1. Cash Flow-Based Lending

1. Use digital data (GST, transactions) for credit assessment.

2. Strengthening Digital Platforms

1. Expand fintech and TReDS for faster credit access.

3. Policy Support

1. Enhance credit guarantee schemes and enforce payment discipline.

Conclusion

Improving access to appropriate finance is essential for MSMEs to scale. Financial innovation and policy support can transform MSMEs into engines of sustainable economic growth.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/msmes-from-survival-to-scale-with-finance-aligned-to-cash-flows-126040201483_1.html

Editorial of the Day – 04.04.2026

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1. Lessons unlearned - On the stampede in Nalanda, Bihar (TH)

GS Paper III - Disaster Management; Internal Security
Topic - Disaster and disaster management.
Sub-Topic - Crowd Management and Public Safety.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, a tragic stampede at the Sheetla Mata temple in Nalanda, Bihar, served as a grim reminder of India's persistent struggle with mass gathering safety. Despite decades of similar tragedies, the incident—which occurred during the auspicious Chaitra period—exposed deep-seated gaps in administrative foresight, the lack of scientific crowd control, and the distorting effects of "VIP culture" on public safety. This disaster highlights the urgent need to move from reactive policing to a proactive, "Crowd Science" based approach.

2. The Nalanda Stampede - Key Details

Casualties - The incident resulted in 9 deaths (predominantly women) and numerous injuries.
Context - The tragedy unfolded on the last Monday of Chaitra, a day of high religious significance that traditionally draws large crowds.
Scale - Approximately 10,000 devotees gathered at the temple complex, a number that far exceeded the site's structural and management capacity.
The Trigger - Reports suggest a single fall or a minor slip in a densely packed area triggered a wave of panic, leading to the fatal crush.

3. Critical Causes Behind the Incident

Intelligence and Information Gap - Local authorities reportedly had no formalized prior information or data-driven estimation of the expected footfall.
Manpower Shortage - Police deployment was critically thin, as a significant portion of the force was committed to other official duties, leaving the temple under-guarded.
Infrastructure Bottlenecks - The mismanagement of entry and exit points created "choke points," where the inward and outward flow of people clashed.
The "Special Darshan" Factor - Allegations emerged that the practice of paid/VIP darshan disrupted the normal flow of the queue, causing frustration and dangerous pressure build-ups in the general category lines.

4. The Recurring Pattern of Negligence

Predictability vs. Response - Most religious stampedes in India are "predictable disasters" occurring on known calendar dates, yet planning remains seasonal rather than systemic.
Lack of Accountability - Tragedies are often followed by ex-gratia payments and temporary inquiries, but rarely lead to the prosecution of officials for "planning negligence."
Normalization of Overcrowding - From railway stations to stadiums, there is a dangerous administrative tolerance for crowds that exceed safety thresholds until a disaster occurs.

5. Understanding the "Crowd Science" Framework

Crowd science is an interdisciplinary field that India must institutionalize to prevent future deaths -

Safety Thresholds - Scientific analysis suggests that a density of more than 5 persons per square metre is a critical danger zone where individual movement is lost.
Behavioral Dynamics - It studies the psychology of "flight or fight" responses in high-stress environments and how "rumor contagion" spreads in a packed space.
Fluid Dynamics Model - Treating a moving crowd like a fluid to identify where "turbulence" might occur in a physical structure.

6. Way Forward - Toward a Proactive Safety Model

Formal Academic Training - India should introduce specialized courses in Crowd Management for civil servants, police officers, and temple trust administrators.
Technological Integration - Use of AI-based video analytics and drone surveillance to detect "crowd density anomalies" in real-time.
Infrastructure Audits - Mandatory "Capacity Audits" for all major religious sites, limiting ticket sales or entry based on the physical square footage available.
Behavioral Interventions - Implementing "calm-down zones," clear public address systems, and bypass routes to alleviate pressure without causing panic.
Ending VIP Disruptions - Ensuring that special darshans do not infringe upon the safety or flow of the general public during peak hours.

Conclusion

The Nalanda tragedy is a call to action for India to bridge the gap between "tradition" and "safety." While religious fervor is a part of the national fabric, the state has a constitutional obligation to protect the Right to Life (Article 21) of every devotee. By integrating modern crowd science, leveraging technology, and enforcing strict administrative accountability, India can ensure that mass gatherings remain a source of spiritual fulfilment rather than a recurring site of preventable mourning.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/lessons-unlearned-on-the-stampede-in-nalanda-bihar/article70819697.ece

Question

"Frequent stampedes at religious gatherings in India are less of an 'act of God' and more of a failure of 'Crowd Science' and administrative planning. Discuss the socio-technical measures required to transform India's mass-gathering management into a zero-fatality system." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Stampedes at mass religious gatherings, such as the Nalanda incident in 2026, highlight a systemic failure in India's disaster management framework. These events are often categorized as "accidents," but from a governance perspective, they represent a failure to apply Crowd Science—the study of the physical and psychological dynamics of people in high-density environments.

2. The Failure of Current Administrative Planning

Reactive Posture - Current management focuses on "crowd control" (force) rather than "crowd management" (planning).
Infrastructural Choke Points - Historical religious sites often have narrow entry/exit routes that were never designed for modern population loads.
The VIP Distortion - Special darshan queues often compress the space available for general devotees, creating high-pressure pockets.
Communication Gaps - A lack of real-time communication between different agencies (police, health, and temple trusts) leads to delayed responses during a crisis.

3. Socio-Technical Measures for a Zero-Fatality System

Technical Measures -

1. Predictive Analytics - Utilizing historical data and AI to forecast crowd sizes and simulate movement patterns before the event.

2. Real-time Monitoring - Deploying sensors and drones to detect "density surges" (exceeding 4-5 people/sqm) to trigger immediate diversion protocols.
3. Digital Queue Management - Mandatory online registration and "time-slotting" to flatten the peak arrival of devotees.

Socio-Administrative Measures -

1. Capacity Capping - Enforcing a legal limit on the number of people allowed in a specific area based on the NDMA Guidelines on Crowd Management.
2. Community Involvement - Training local volunteers (Sevadars) in basic life support and panic-reduction techniques.
3. Legislative Accountability - Enacting laws that hold event organizers and local administrators personally accountable for planning failures.

4. Conclusion

Mass gatherings are a permanent feature of India's cultural landscape. Transforming them into safe environments requires a shift in mindset - seeing a crowd not as a threat to be "controlled," but as a dynamic system to be "managed." By institutionalizing crowd science and prioritizing the safety of the common citizen over VIP convenience, India can put an end to the cycle of "lessons unlearned."
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/lessons-unlearned-on-the-stampede-in-nalanda-bihar/article70819697.ece

2. Fresh IBC amendments - How govt looks to plug gaps in insolvency code (IE)

GS Paper III - ECONOMY
Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Sub-Topic - Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth. (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and its amendments)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, Parliament cleared a landmark amendment to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). While the 2016 Code was a "tectonic shift" in India's credit culture, the 2026 version aims to fix the "clogged pipes" of the system—specifically the judicial delays and low recovery rates. By introducing out-of-court mechanisms and cross-border frameworks, India is finally aligning its "exit policy" for businesses with global standards like the UNCITRAL model.

2. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) - Background

A Unified Framework (2016) - The IBC replaced a "spaghetti bowl" of laws like SICA and SARFAESI, providing a single window for time-bound insolvency resolution.
Core Objective - The goal is Resolution over Recovery. It aims to keep the "firm as a going concern" to save jobs and preserve asset value, rather than just liquidating it to pay back a few banks.
The Triangle of Institutions - Adjudicatory **-** NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal) and NCLAT (Appellate).

1. Regulatory - IBBI (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India).
2. Operational - Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Information Utilities.

Impact on Credit Culture - It ended the era of "debtor's paradise," significantly improving India's global ranking in resolving insolvency.

3. The Need for the 2026 Amendments

Despite early successes, by 2025 the system was showing signs of "fatigue" -
The 14-Day Myth - While the law mandated a 14-day admission period, in reality, it often took over 6 months just to get a case through the NCLT doors.

Value Erosion - For every day a distressed company sits in court, its machinery rusts, its talent leaves, and its brand fades.
Low Recovery Rates - Recovery for financial creditors dropped to approximately 34% by late 2025, compared to earlier highs.
Judicial Overload - NCLT benches were buried under thousands of cases, leading to a backlog that discouraged new investors.

4. Key Reforms in the 2026 Bill

Faster Admission & Efficiency

1. Mandatory Admission - The amendment limits the NCLT's discretion. If a default is proven, the tribunal *must* admit the case, stopping the endless "pre-admission litigation" that debtors used to stall the process.
2. Procedural Streamlining - Clearer criteria for admission reduce the initial bottlenecks that previously saw cases languishing for months.

Creditor-Initiated Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP)

The Out-of-Court Route - This introduces a mechanism where creditors can initiate resolution without waiting for a formal court order at every step.
Consent Threshold - It requires 51% approval from financial creditors, ensuring a democratic yet swift consensus.
PE/ARC Participation - This is expected to bring more private equity and "vulture funds" into the market, providing much-needed capital for distressed firms.

Group Insolvency Framework

The Holistic Approach - Companies are often parts of large conglomerates with interlinked assets and debts. The 2026 Bill allows for the simultaneous resolution of the entire group.
Preventing Fragmentation - This prevents a scenario where one part of a company is saved while another is liquidated, which often destroyed the overall value of the group.

Cross-Border Insolvency Framework

Global Integration - India has adopted the UNCITRAL Model Law, allowing Indian courts to cooperate with foreign jurisdictions.
Strategic Advantage - This is vital for modern tech and manufacturing firms that have offices, creditors, and assets spread across the globe (e.g., London, Singapore, and New York).

5. Strengthening Institutional Integrity

Role Separation - To prevent "moral hazard," a Resolution Professional (RP) is now prohibited from becoming the Liquidator for the same company. This ensures the RP works hard to save the company rather than waiting for a lucrative liquidation fee.
Appeal Cap - A strict 3-month timeline for appeals at the NCLAT has been introduced to prevent "litigation as a stalling tactic."
Civil vs. Criminal - Minor procedural errors have been "decriminalized" into civil penalties to encourage honest professionals to enter the field without fear of jail time for simple paperwork mistakes.

6. Performance Data (as of Dec 2025)

Resolutions - Over 1,300 companies successfully found new owners/solutions.
Recoveries - Approximately 4.1 lakh crore was recovered by creditors.
Systemic Health - The "threat of IBC" led many promoters to settle debts before ever reaching court, drastically improving the health of India's banking sector and reducing NPAs.

7. Lingering Challenges

The "Haircut" Problem - Banks are still taking massive losses (haircuts) in some cases, raising questions about whether the system is too lenient on resolution applicants.
Infrastructure Gaps - No matter how good the law is, we still need more judges and better digital infrastructure at the NCLT to dispose of cases in real-time.

Valuation Disputes - Conflicts over the "fair value" of assets continue to delay final approvals by the Committee of Creditors (CoC).

Conclusion

The 2026 IBC reforms are about moving from "Stall and Pray" to "Resolve and Grow." By tackling judicial delays and introducing group/cross-border frameworks, the government is trying to ensure that capital is not trapped in "zombie firms." For a 5 trillion economy, a robust insolvency system is not just a legal requirement; it is the "safety net" that allows entrepreneurs to take risks, fail fast, and restart even faster.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/fresh-ibc-amendments-how-govt-looks-to-plug-gaps-in-insolvency-code-10618084/

Question

"The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026, represents a strategic shift from 'judicial-heavy' recovery to a 'market-led' resolution ecosystem. Critically analyze how the new provisions address the twin challenges of value erosion and judicial delays in the Indian insolvency framework." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Since its inception in 2016, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has fundamentally altered India's credit culture. However, by 2025, systemic "fatigue"—manifested in a low recovery rate of ~34% and an average resolution time exceeding the mandated 330 days—necessitated a second generation of reforms. The IBC (Amendment) Bill, 2026, serves as a "course correction," introducing out-of-court mechanisms and cross-border frameworks to ensure that capital is not trapped in "zombie firms."

2. Addressing Value Erosion through Market-Led Mechanisms

The 2026 Bill recognizes that the longer a company stays in the insolvency process, the faster its "enterprise value" vanishes.

Creditor-Initiated CIRP - By introducing an out-of-court resolution mechanism with a 51% approval threshold, the Bill allows creditors to reach a consensus without waiting for lengthy NCLT admissions. This preserves the "going concern" value.

Group Insolvency Framework - Interlinked corporate groups can now be resolved holistically. This prevents fragmented liquidation, where the sum of the parts was often worth less than the whole, thereby maximizing overall asset valuation.

Role Separation - Prohibiting Resolution Professionals (RPs) from acting as Liquidators removes the "perverse incentive" to push a company toward liquidation for higher fees, focusing instead on revival.

3. Tackling Judicial Delays and Bottlenecks

Judicial backlog at the NCLT and NCLAT has been the "Achilles' heel" of the original Code.

Mandatory Admission - The 2026 Amendment requires the NCLT to admit a case immediately upon the proof of default. This eliminates "pre-admission litigation," which promoters often used as a stalling tactic.

Appellate Time-Cap - A strict 3-month timeline for the NCLAT to dispose of appeals ensures that legal battles do not become "eternal stay orders," providing a faster exit for failed businesses.

Cross-Border Cooperation - Adopting the UNCITRAL Model Law allows for judicial coordination across jurisdictions. This is critical for modern firms with global assets, preventing legal deadlocks in foreign courts.

4. Critical Analysis - The Lingering Hurdles

While the legislative intent is robust, several execution-level challenges remain -

The "Haircut" Dilemma - Faster resolution does not automatically guarantee higher recovery. Banks still face significant "haircuts" (losses), raising concerns about the rigor of the valuation process.

Infrastructure Deficit - Legislative amendments cannot substitute for physical infrastructure. The chronic shortage of judges and digital benches at the NCLT remains the primary reason for the persistent 14-day admission breach.
Capacity of Creditors - The success of "Creditor-Initiated" processes depends on the sophistication and speed of the Committee of Creditors (CoC), which has historically been slow to make decisions.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 reforms are a vital step toward creating a "frictionless exit" for businesses in a $5 trillion economy. By prioritizing Resolution over Recovery and moving away from a litigation-centric model, the Bill seeks to protect jobs and economic value. However, the true success of IBC 2.0 will depend on reinforcing the NCLT's institutional capacity and ensuring that the "market-led" spirit of the law is not diluted by a "litigation-first" mindset.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/fresh-ibc-amendments-how-govt-looks-to-plug-gaps-in-insolvency-code-10618084/

3. Let's Reassure the Migrants (TT)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Inclusive growth and issues arising from it
Sub-Topic - Energy security and subsidy policy

Introduction

Internal migration in India is closely tied to economic affordability in urban centres. Rising LPG prices and reduced access to small cylinders have increased the cost of living for migrant workers, exposing structural vulnerabilities and triggering reverse migration trends.

1. Link between Energy Prices and Migration

1. Rising LPG prices significantly increase monthly household expenditure, especially for low-income migrant families who spend a higher proportion of income on basic necessities.
2. Reduced availability of small, portable LPG cylinders affects migrants living in rented or temporary housing where large cylinders are impractical.
3. As affordability declines, migrants are forced to either shift to inferior fuels (firewood, kerosene) or return to rural areas, reversing urban labour mobility.

2. Structural Vulnerabilities of Migrant Workers

Informal Employment Dependence

1. Migrants are largely engaged in casual labour markets such as construction, transport, and services, where wages are uncertain and job security is minimal.
2. Any increase in living costs directly affects their ability to sustain urban livelihoods.

High Urban Living Costs

1. Expenses related to rent, food, transport, and energy combine to create a cost burden that is disproportionately high relative to migrant incomes.

Lack of Social Security Portability

1. Migrants often lose access to subsidised food, fuel, and welfare benefits when they move across states, making them more vulnerable during economic shocks.

3. Role of Global Economic Factors

Energy Price Volatility

1. Geopolitical conflicts, especially in oil-producing regions, lead to sharp increases in global crude oil and LPG prices, which are transmitted to domestic markets.

Import Dependence

1. India's reliance on imported energy exposes it to external shocks beyond domestic policy control.

Inflationary Spillover Effects

1. Rising fuel costs increase transportation and production expenses, leading to general inflation, further eroding migrant incomes.

4. Policy Gaps in LPG and Energy Access

Household-Centric Policy Design

1. Subsidy frameworks are structured around permanent households, ignoring the needs of mobile and temporary urban populations.

Inadequate Focus on Small Cylinders

1. Lack of policy emphasis on smaller LPG units creates access barriers for migrants living in informal settlements or shared accommodations.

Targeting and Delivery Issues

1. Identification systems fail to capture migrant mobility, resulting in exclusion errors in subsidy delivery.

5. Economic and Social Implications

Reverse Migration

1. Rising costs lead to outmigration from cities, affecting labour supply in key sectors such as construction, logistics, and hospitality.

Rural Stress

1. Increased return migration puts pressure on rural employment schemes like MGNREGA and local resources, reducing rural incomes.

Urban Economic Slowdown

1. Labour shortages disrupt productivity, supply chains, and service delivery, affecting overall urban economic efficiency.

6. Measurement and Perception Issues

GDP vs Ground Reality Disconnect

1. Macroeconomic indicators may show stable growth, but they often mask micro-level distress experienced by informal workers.

Underrepresentation of Informal Sector

1. Migrant hardships are inadequately captured in official data, leading to policy blind spots and delayed responses.

7. Way Forward

Targeted Energy Solutions

1. Promote affordable and accessible small LPG cylinders tailored to migrant needs, including flexible refill options.

Universal and Portable Welfare Systems

1. Strengthen initiatives like One Nation One Ration Card and extend portability to energy subsidies.

Urban Social Protection Framework

1. Develop policies for affordable rental housing, food security, and essential services for migrant populations.

Energy Price Stabilisation Measures

1. Use strategic reserves, diversify imports, and promote alternative energy sources to reduce vulnerability to global shocks.

Conclusion

The intersection of energy affordability and migration highlights deeper structural issues in India's development model. Ensuring inclusive energy access, portable welfare, and urban support systems is critical to stabilising migration patterns and sustaining economic growth.

Source - https -//www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/lets-reassure-the-migrants/

Question

Q. *Rising energy costs and gaps in LPG access have significant implications for internal migration in India. Analyse the structural challenges and suggest policy measures to address migrant vulnerabilities.* (250 words)

Introduction

Internal migration in India is shaped by economic viability in urban areas. Rising LPG prices and limited access to affordable fuel have increased living costs, disproportionately affecting migrant workers and triggering reverse migration trends.

Impact on Migration

1. Increased Cost Burden

1. Higher LPG prices significantly raise household expenditure, reducing disposable income and making urban living less sustainable.

2. Limited Access to Suitable Fuel

1. Inadequate availability of small LPG cylinders restricts access for migrants living in temporary or shared accommodations.

3. Reverse Migration Trends

1. Declining affordability and unstable employment compel migrants to return to rural areas, disrupting labour mobility.

Structural Challenges

1. Informal Employment and Income Instability

1. Migrants lack job security, making them highly vulnerable to cost shocks.

2. Weak Welfare Portability

1. Limited access to subsidies and social protection across states exacerbates vulnerability.

Policy Measures

1. Expand Affordable Energy Access

1. Introduce targeted subsidies and ensure availability of small LPG cylinders for migrant households.

2. Strengthen Welfare Portability

1. Extend portability of food, fuel, and social benefits nationwide.

3. Develop Urban Support Systems

1. Provide affordable housing, public services, and employment security.

Conclusion

Addressing migrant vulnerabilities requires integrating energy policy with social protection. Ensuring affordable fuel access and welfare portability will promote inclusive urbanisation and economic resilience.

Source - https -//www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/lets-reassure-the-migrants/

4. The Freebie Trap (TS)

General Studies Paper II- Governance
Topic - Welfare schemes and issues of targeting
Sub-Topic - Inclusive growth and human capital development

Introduction

Election-driven "freebies" have increasingly become a central feature of competitive politics in India. While some welfare measures enhance social protection, indiscriminate, non-merit subsidies risk fostering dependency, weakening fiscal discipline, and undermining long-term development outcomes.

1. Nature and Evolution of Freebies

1. Freebies include free electricity, water, cash transfers, consumer goods, and loan waivers, often announced during elections.

2. Political competition has shifted welfare discourse from targeted support to universal populist entitlements.
3. Distinction between merit goods (health, education) and non-merit freebies is increasingly blurred.

2. Economic Implications

Fiscal Stress on States

1. High expenditure on subsidies leads to rising fiscal deficits and mounting public debt, constraining future spending capacity.
2. Interest payments increase, reducing fiscal space for capital investment.

Crowding Out of Productive Expenditure

1. Resources diverted to freebies reduce investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which have long-term growth benefits.

Distortion of Market Signals

1. Free or highly subsidised utilities distort pricing mechanisms, leading to inefficient consumption and resource misallocation.

3. Impact on Labour and Productivity

Reduced Work Incentives

1. Regular, unconditional benefits may weaken the incentive to seek employment or upgrade skills, particularly among youth.

Decline in Labour Force Participation

1. Easy access to consumption-based benefits may contribute to lower participation rates in productive sectors.

Human Capital Trade-off

1. Funds used for short-term consumption reduce investments in skill development, education, and entrepreneurship.

4. Governance and Political Economy Concerns

Electoral Populism

1. Freebies become tools for vote mobilisation rather than welfare optimisation, undermining policy rationality.

Weak Accountability

1. Political parties rarely disclose long-term fiscal costs and funding sources of such schemes.

Intergenerational Inequity

1. Borrowing to finance freebies shifts the burden to future taxpayers without corresponding asset creation.

5. Social Dimensions

Short-Term Relief vs Long-Term Dependency

1. While freebies may provide immediate relief, they can create a culture of dependency rather than empowerment.

Equity Concerns

1. Universal freebies often benefit both needy and non-needy groups, leading to inefficient targeting.

6. Judicial and Institutional Perspective

1. The Supreme Court has highlighted concerns regarding fiscal sustainability and electoral integrity of such promises.
2. Need for stronger guidelines to ensure transparency and accountability in public spending commitments.

7. Way Forward

Distinguish Merit vs Non-Merit Subsidies

1. Prioritise spending on health, education, nutrition, and skill development over consumption freebies.

Fiscal Responsibility Framework

1. Strengthen FRBM norms and ensure transparent disclosure of fiscal implications.

Targeted Welfare Delivery

1. Use DBT and data-driven systems to ensure efficient targeting of subsidies.

Focus on Asset Creation

1. Shift from consumption support to productive investments like infrastructure and employment generation.

Conclusion

While welfare measures are essential for social justice, indiscriminate freebies can undermine economic sustainability and governance quality. A balanced approach that prioritises empowerment over entitlement is crucial for India's long-term development.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-freebie-trap-1503577513.html

Question

Q. *Critically examine the impact of election-driven freebies on fiscal sustainability, labour productivity, and governance in India. Suggest measures to ensure a balance between welfare and development.* (250 words)

Introduction

Election-driven freebies have become a prominent feature of Indian politics. While they aim to provide welfare support, excessive reliance on such measures raises concerns about fiscal sustainability, productivity, and governance.

Impact of Freebies

1. Fiscal Stress and Debt Burden

1. Increased subsidy expenditure leads to rising fiscal deficits and public debt.
2. Limits government capacity to invest in infrastructure and social sectors.

2. Distortion of Economic Efficiency

1. Free or subsidised services distort price signals, leading to inefficient consumption and resource misallocation.

3. Adverse Impact on Labour Productivity

1. Unconditional benefits may reduce work incentives and discourage skill development.
2. Contributes to declining labour force participation, especially among youth.

4. Governance and Political Concerns

1. Encourages populist policies over evidence-based policymaking.
2. Lack of transparency in funding such schemes weaken accountability.

Measures for Reform

1. Prioritise Merit Goods

1. Focus on education, healthcare, and skill development for long-term benefits.

2. Strengthen Fiscal Discipline

1. Enforce FRBM norms and ensure disclosure of fiscal costs of schemes.

3. Targeted Welfare Delivery

1. Use DBT to ensure subsidies reach only the needy.

4. Promote Employment and Asset Creation

1. Invest in infrastructure and job creation rather than consumption subsidies.

Conclusion

A balanced welfare framework must combine social protection with economic prudence. Shifting from populist freebies to empowerment-oriented policies will ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-freebie-trap-1503577513.html


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Editorial of the Day – 06.04.2026

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1. Elastic rules - On the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2026 (TH)

GS Paper III – Environment and Ecology
Topic – Environmental pollution and degradation; Conservation.
Sub-Topic – * Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules (2016–2026).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India's waste management landscape reached a critical juncture with the latest amendments to the Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules. While the 2026 update introduces ambitious mandates for "recycled content" and "reuse," it simultaneously incorporates a high degree of compliance flexibility. Critics have termed these "Elastic Rules," arguing that the provision to carry forward shortfalls risks diluting the accountability of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework. As India moves toward a circular economy, the gap between legislative intent and ground-level collection efficiency remains the primary hurdle.

2. Background and Evolution of PWM Rules

Regulatory Journey – India's framework began in 2016 and has undergone frequent updates to address the surging volume of plastic waste.
2026 Context – The amendments issued on March 31, 2026, reflect a policy shift from merely managing waste to mandating the use of waste as a resource in new products.
Core Objectives – The rules aim to divert plastic from "leaking" into the natural environment—specifically landfills, rivers, and oceans—while reducing the carbon footprint of the packaging industry.

3. The Rationale - The "Plastic Paradox"

Versatility vs. Regulation – Plastic's low cost, durability, and flexibility make it an indispensable material for modern logistics.
Management Difficulty – These same qualities—light weight and chemical stability—make plastic waste difficult to collect economically and slow to degrade.
Regulatory Necessity – Strong mechanisms like EPR are required because the "market value" of low-grade plastic waste is often lower than the cost of collecting it.

4. The EPR Framework - The Accountability Pillar

Introduced in 2022, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) shifts the burden of waste management from the government to Producers, Importers, and Brand Owners (PIBOs).

Escalating Targets –

1. 35% waste processing in 2021–22.
2. 70% waste processing in 2022–23.
3. 100% waste processing goal set for 2024–25.

Goal –

To create a closed-loop system where those who profit from plastic production also fund its end-of-life recovery.

5. Key Highlights of the 2026 Amendments

The 2026 update introduces specific technical mandates to force a "Circular Economy" -

Recycled Content Mandate - PIBOs must now ensure that rigid plastic packaging contains a minimum of 30% recycled content, with a target to scale this to 60% by 2028–29.

Reuse Obligations - For the first time, the rules formally introduce "reuse" quotas alongside recycling, encouraging the move away from single-use formats.

Compliance "Elasticity" - A controversial provision allows companies to carry forward their compliance shortfalls for up to three years, provided they show "partial compliance" annually.

6. Policy Gaps and Enforcement Concerns

Delayed Accountability - The "carry-forward" clause effectively allows 2025–26 targets to be pushed to 2028–29, which environmentalists argue creates a "grace period" that the environment cannot afford.

Collection Efficiency Gap - While processing targets are nearly 100%, actual collection efficiency hovers between 50–60%, meaning nearly half of the plastic still ends up in informal dumpsites.

The "Target Cliff" - There is currently a lack of clear, escalating targets beyond the 2025–26 cycle, leading to policy uncertainty for investors in recycling infrastructure.

Reliance on Trading Certificates - The system relies on PIBOs buying "EPR certificates" from recyclers. If not monitored strictly, this can lead to "greenwashing" or fraudulent certificate trading without actual waste reduction.

7. Conclusion

The 2026 amendments to the Plastic Waste Management Rules represent a double-edged sword. On one hand, they correctly identify recycled content and reuse as the future of sustainable packaging. On the other, the "elasticity" in compliance timelines risks turning a strict EPR regime into a flexible suggestion. For India to achieve a truly circular economy, the focus must shift from "legislative flexibility" to "logistical rigidity"—prioritizing 100% collection, transparent certificate trading, and the elimination of loopholes that allow for the indefinite deferral of environmental responsibility.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/elastic-rules-on-the-plastic-waste-management-amendment-rules-2026/article70826842.ece

Question

"India's transition toward a circular economy for plastics is hindered by a 'Collection-Compliance' gap. Critically analyze how the 2026 amendments to the Plastic Waste Management Rules attempt to balance industrial flexibility with environmental accountability." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India generates over 3.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually. To manage this, the Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules (2016–2026) have evolved to include the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework. The 2026 amendments mark a strategic shift by mandating "recycled content" in products, yet they raise concerns regarding the "elasticity" of compliance.

2. Balancing Industrial Flexibility

The 2026 amendments provide several levers to help the industry adapt -

Carry-Forward Provision - Companies can carry over shortfalls in recycling targets for up to three years. This recognizes the current shortage of high-quality recycling infrastructure in India.

Market-Based Mechanisms - The use of EPR certificates allows producers who cannot physically collect their waste to fund professional recyclers, providing financial flexibility.

Gradual Scaling - Mandating 30% recycled content initially, rising to 60% by 2028, provides a "glide path" for manufacturers to retool their supply chains.

3. Environmental Accountability vs. Systemic Gaps

Despite the mandates, environmental accountability remains at risk due to -

The Enforcement Loophole - The 3-year carry-forward clause can be exploited to delay action, potentially allowing plastic to accumulate in the environment during the "extension" period.
Low Collection Efficiency - While the law mandates 100% recycling, the collection rate (50–60%) remains the weak link. EPR targets are meaningless if the waste is never diverted from landfills to the recycling plants.
Oversight of Certificates - Without a robust, blockchain-based or digital tracking system, the trading of EPR certificates risks becoming a paper-exercise that does not reflect ground-level waste reduction.
Absence of Long-term Targets - The lack of specific targets beyond 2025 prevents the private sector from making long-term capital investments in advanced recycling technologies.

4. Conclusion

The 2026 PWM amendments are a step toward a "Circular Economy" by creating a demand for recycled plastic. However, "Elastic Rules" can only succeed if backed by "Inelastic Enforcement." To ensure accountability, the government must bridge the collection gap by integrating the informal waste sector and ensuring that "flexibility" does not become a permanent substitute for "compliance."
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/elastic-rules-on-the-plastic-waste-management-amendment-rules-2026/article70826842.ece

2. Iran war and the looming prospect of stagflation (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Topic - Inflation; Macroeconomic Stability; Energy Security.
Sub-Topic - Stagflation and Supply-side Shocks.

1. Introduction

The 2026 West Asia conflict has triggered a "Dual Shock" to the global financial system - a simultaneous surge in energy prices and a physical disruption in supply chains. This combination has revived the specter of Stagflation, a condition where economic stagnation meets persistent inflation. For a world still recovering from earlier shocks, the current crisis involves physical constraints in energy availability, making it significantly more complex than the price-driven inflations of 2008 or 2022.

2. The Concept of Stagflation

Definition - A rare and debilitating economic state characterized by high inflation, low or negative economic growth, and rising unemployment. It is often described as the "worst of both worlds."
Historical Origin - Coined by British politician Iain Macleod in the 1960s, it became a defining feature of the global economy during the 1970s oil crises.
Breakdown of the Phillips Curve - Traditional Keynesian economics suggested an inverse relationship between inflation and unemployment. Stagflation debunked this by showing that both can rise simultaneously.
The Policy Dilemma - Central banks face a "Catch-22." Raising interest rates to curb inflation can stifle already weak growth, while lowering rates to boost growth can further ignite inflation.

3. Demand-Supply Framework & The Supply Shock

Market Equilibrium - In a stable economy, prices and output are set where the demand and supply curves intersect.
Negative Supply Shock - The 2026 conflict acts as a catalyst that shifts the Aggregate Supply curve to the left.
Economic Impact - A leftward shift results in higher prices (inflation) and lower output (stagnation) at the same time.
Real-World Triggers - Physical blockades in shipping routes (e.g., the Strait of Hormuz), destruction of energy infrastructure, and scarcity of raw materials directly paralyze production systems.

4. Historical Context - The 1970s Oil Shocks

1973 Embargo - Following the Yom Kippur War, Arab nations imposed an oil embargo, leading to double-digit inflation (11% in the US, 16% in the UK).
1979 Revolution - The Iranian Revolution caused a second major supply disruption, leading to negative GDP growth across major economies (-0.5% in the US, -1.7% in the UK) between 1974–75.
The Lesson - Energy is a "universal input." A shock to energy supply acts as a tax on all production, leading to prolonged instability.

5. Contemporary Context - The 2026 Iran Crisis

Dual Shock Nature - This is not just a "Price Shock" (expensive oil) but a "Supply Shock" (unavailable oil).
Industrial Dependence - Modern value chains are more tightly integrated than in the 70s, meaning energy shortages in West Asia trigger non-linear effects—sudden factory shutdowns and immediate job losses.
Comparison - Unlike the 2008 financial crisis (demand-led) or 2022 (post-pandemic price surge), the 2026 crisis involves physical constraints on energy and petrochemicals, making recovery more difficult.

6. Impact on the Indian Economy

India's position is particularly vulnerable due to its structural dependencies -
Import Dependence - India imports roughly 85% of its crude oil, making the national budget hostage to West Asian stability.
Agriculture & Fertilizers - Higher natural gas prices lead to a spike in the cost of Urea and DAP. This increases the government's subsidy burden and threatens food security.
Industrial Cost-Push - Sectors such as chemicals, plastics, textiles, and logistics face rising input costs, which are eventually passed to the consumer.
Macro Indicators - Stagflation leads to a widening Current Account Deficit (CAD), a depreciating Rupee, and a potential slowdown in GDP growth.

7. Policy Challenges in Tackling Stagflation

Ineffectiveness of Monetary Policy - Raising the Repo Rate (RBI) to control "imported inflation" does nothing to fix the supply of oil; it only makes borrowing for domestic industries more expensive.
Limits of Fiscal Policy - Governments cannot easily spend their way out of a supply shock. Stimulus checks or subsidies might increase demand, but if the supply of goods is stuck, it only causes more inflation.
Global Interdependence - Because supply chains are global, a domestic fix is impossible. Solutions require international diplomatic and logistical cooperation.

Conclusion

Managing the 2026 stagflation risk requires a pivot from demand-side management to supply-side resilience. India must accelerate its diversification into renewable energy, strengthen its Strategic Petroleum Reserves, and focus on structural reforms that improve logistics and domestic production. Ultimately, the crisis serves as a reminder that "Energy Sovereignty" is a prerequisite for "Economic Stability." A balanced mix of macroeconomic caution and aggressive structural reform is the only path to navigating the "worst of both worlds."
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/iran-war-prospect-stagflation-lpg-10621075/lite/

Question

"Stagflation is often described as a 'policy-maker's nightmare' because it renders traditional monetary and fiscal tools ineffective. Analyse this statement in the context of the 2026 West Asia energy supply shock and suggest measures to enhance India's macroeconomic resilience." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Stagflation is a complex economic phenomenon characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of high inflation, stagnant growth, and high unemployment. The 2026 Iran-West Asia conflict has triggered a classic "Negative Supply Shock," creating a stagflationary environment that challenges the traditional tools of the RBI and the Ministry of Finance.

2. The Policy-Maker's Nightmare

Traditional economic tools are designed to manage the "demand side," but stagflation is a "supply side" problem -

Monetary Policy Limitations - If the RBI raises interest rates to curb inflation, it increases the cost of capital for Indian businesses, further slowing down an already stagnant economy.

Fiscal Policy Constraints - Increasing government spending to boost growth (Fiscal Stimulus) can be counterproductive, as it puts more money in the hands of consumers to chase a shrinking pool of goods (due to supply disruptions), leading to even higher inflation.

The Phillips Curve Breakdown - In a supply-shock scenario, the trade-off between inflation and unemployment vanishes, leaving policy-makers with no clear "lever" to pull.

3. Context of the 2026 Energy Shock

The 2026 crisis is unique because it combines a Price Shock with a Physical Supply Disruption. For India, this leads to -

Imported Inflation - As oil and gas become scarce, the cost of transportation and fertilizer (Urea) rises, leading to "Cost-Push" inflation in food and essential services.

Growth Compression - Energy-intensive industries (Chemicals, Plastics, Manufacturing) face shutdowns or reduced output, leading to lower GDP growth and job losses.

4. Measures for Macroeconomic Resilience

To navigate this, India must adopt a Supply-Side Strategy -

Energy Diversification - Rapidly scaling Green Hydrogen, Solar, and Wind to decouple the economy from West Asian oil.

Strategic Reserves - Utilizing and expanding Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to cushion the impact of sudden supply disruptions.

Buffer Management - Maintaining healthy food stocks to prevent "Supply-Shock" inflation from turning into a retail food crisis.

Structural Reforms - Improving logistics efficiency (National Logistics Policy) and reducing the "Cost of Doing Business" to help firms absorb high energy costs.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 stagflation risk is a test of India's structural endurance. While monetary policy acts as a shield, the "sword" of economic recovery must be supply-side resilience. By moving toward energy autonomy and fiscal prudence, India can transform a global crisis into an opportunity for structural modernization.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/iran-war-prospect-stagflation-lpg-10621075/lite/

3. A lethal injection for a boil? (BS)

General Studies Paper II – Governance

Topic - Regulation of NGOs and civil society

Sub-Topic - Economic governance and regulatory frameworks

Introduction

The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) aim to strengthen oversight of foreign funding to NGOs. However, certain provisions—particularly those related

to asset vesting upon cancellation of registration—raise concerns about proportionality, civil society autonomy, and regulatory overreach.

1. Background and Objectives of FCRA

1. FCRA regulates foreign contributions to NGOs to ensure they do not affect national security or public interest.
2. It mandates registration, reporting, and compliance requirements for organisations receiving foreign funds.
3. Amendments seek to enhance transparency, prevent misuse, and tighten enforcement mechanisms.

2. Key Provision - Asset Vesting Clause

1. Proposed amendment allows the government to take control of assets created using foreign funds if an NGO's registration is cancelled.
2. Applies even in cases where violations may be procedural rather than intentional misuse.
3. Introduces a strong deterrent mechanism, but raises concerns about fairness and proportionality.

3. Rationale Behind the Amendment

Prevent Misuse of Funds

1. Ensures that assets funded by foreign contributions are not diverted for private or unlawful purposes.

Strengthen Regulatory Oversight

1. Enhances state capacity to enforce compliance and deter violations.

Protect Public Interest

1. Assets created through foreign funds are viewed as having a public purpose, justifying state intervention.

4. Key Concerns and Criticisms

Disproportionate Punishment

1. Asset confiscation may be excessive for minor or technical violations, violating principles of natural justice.

Chilling Effect on Civil Society

1. Fear of punitive action may discourage NGOs from engaging in developmental and advocacy activities.

Retrospective Implications

1. Provision could apply to assets created in the past, creating uncertainty and legal ambiguity.

Impact on Welfare Activities

1. NGOs involved in health, education, and social services may face disruptions, affecting beneficiaries and vulnerable groups.

5. Governance and Legal Issues

Proportionality Principle

1. Punishment must match the severity of the offence; blanket asset seizure may violate this principle.

Due Process Concerns

1. Need for clear procedures, appeal mechanisms, and safeguards to prevent arbitrary action.

Balancing Regulation and Freedom

1. Ensuring accountability without undermining freedom of association and civil society participation.

6. Broader Implications

Impact on NGO Ecosystem

1. Could reduce foreign funding inflows and limit the operational capacity of NGOs.

Trust Deficit

1. Stricter regulations may create distrust between government and civil society.

Developmental Consequences

1. NGOs play a critical role in last-mile delivery; weakening them could affect inclusive development outcomes.

7. Way Forward

Proportionate Enforcement

1. Differentiate between minor procedural lapses and serious violations.

Safeguards and Transparency

1. Establish clear guidelines, independent oversight, and appeal mechanisms.

Encouraging Compliance

1. Simplify procedures and provide capacity-building support for NGOs.

Balanced Regulatory Approach

1. Ensure regulation without stifling innovation and participation in development.

Conclusion

While strengthening accountability in foreign funding is essential, excessive regulatory measures may undermine civil society's role in development. A balanced, proportionate, and transparent framework is necessary to protect both national interests and democratic participation.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/lethal-injection-for-a-boil-anxiety-around-fcra-amendment-bill-justifiable-126040500668_1.html

Question

Q. *Critically examine the implications of recent amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) on civil society organisations in India. How can regulation be balanced with autonomy?* (250 words)

Introduction

The FCRA regulates foreign funding to NGOs to ensure transparency and national security. Recent amendments, particularly regarding asset vesting, have raised concerns about proportionality and civil society autonomy.

Implications of Amendments

1. Strengthened Regulatory Oversight

1. Enhances monitoring and prevents misuse of foreign funds.

2. Risk of Disproportionate Action

1. Asset confiscation for procedural violations may violate principles of fairness.

3. Chilling Effect on NGOs

1. Fear of stringent penalties may discourage civil society engagement.

4. Impact on Development Activities

1. Disruptions in NGO functioning can affect service delivery in key sectors like health and education.

Measures for Balance

1. Proportionate Enforcement

1. Differentiate between serious violations and minor compliance issues.

2. Strengthen Due Process

1. Ensure transparency, appeal mechanisms, and judicial oversight.

3. Facilitate Compliance

1. Simplify procedures and support NGOs in meeting regulatory requirements.

Conclusion

A balanced approach is essential to ensure accountability without undermining civil society. Strengthening safeguards while maintaining regulatory oversight will promote both transparency and democratic participation.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/lethal-injection-for-a-boil-anxiety-around-fcra-amendment-bill-justifiable-126040500668_1.html

4. LPG, energy crisis fuels reverse migration again (DC)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Inclusive growth and internal migration
Sub-Topic - Impact of global crises on domestic economy

Introduction

Rising LPG prices and supply constraints, exacerbated by global energy shocks, have significantly increased the cost of living for urban migrant workers. This has triggered reverse migration trends, exposing gaps in energy access, urban social protection, and labour policy frameworks.

1. Link between LPG Crisis and Migration

1. Sharp increase in LPG prices, especially for small cylinders used by migrants, has made clean cooking fuel unaffordable for low-income households.
2. Supply shortages and irregular availability further worsen access, forcing migrants to rely on costlier or unsafe alternatives like kerosene or biomass.
3. As urban living becomes economically unviable, many workers choose to return to rural areas, leading to reverse migration similar to pandemic trends.

2. Structural Vulnerabilities of Migrants

Dependence on Informal Economy

1. Migrants are largely employed in low-wage, informal jobs with no job security, making them highly sensitive to price shocks.

Inadequate Urban Living Conditions

1. Most migrants live in rented, congested settlements without proper kitchen infrastructure, increasing dependence on small LPG cylinders.

Absence of Safety Nets

1. Lack of access to subsidised fuel and welfare schemes in destination cities leaves migrants financially exposed during crises.

3. Energy Pricing and Policy Gaps

Reduction in Subsidies

1. Gradual withdrawal of LPG subsidies has increased the burden on economically weaker sections, especially migrants.

Urban Policy Blind Spot

1. Energy policies are largely household-centric, failing to account for mobile populations and informal housing arrangements.

Inadequate Focus on Small Cylinders

1. Limited policy attention to smaller LPG units restricts access for migrants who cannot afford or use standard cylinders.

4. Role of Global Energy Dynamics

Geopolitical Conflicts

1. Crises in oil-producing regions increase global crude prices, raising domestic LPG costs.

Import Dependence

1. India's heavy reliance on imported LPG exposes it to external volatility and price transmission effects.

Supply Chain Disruptions

1. Logistics constraints and global shortages further reduce availability in domestic markets.

5. Economic and Social Consequences

Urban Labour Shortages

1. Reverse migration leads to shortages in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and services, affecting productivity.

Rural Economic Pressure

1. Increased return migration puts stress on agriculture and rural employment schemes, reducing per capita incomes.

Health and Environmental Risks

1. Shift to biomass fuels increases indoor air pollution and health hazards, reversing gains of clean energy initiatives.

6. Policy Measures and Reforms

Targeted LPG Subsidies

1. Reintroduce or expand subsidies for vulnerable groups, especially migrant workers.

Improving Small Cylinder Access

1. Ensure availability and affordability of portable LPG units suited for urban migrants.

Urban Social Protection

1. Develop rental housing, food security, and fuel access programs for migrant populations.

Energy Diversification

1. Promote alternative clean energy solutions to reduce dependence on imported LPG.

7. Way Forward

Integrating Energy and Migration Policies

1. Recognise migrants as a distinct category in policy design.

Strengthening Welfare Portability

1. Expand portability of subsidies and benefits across states.

Enhancing Urban Resilience

1. Build inclusive urban systems that can absorb economic shocks without triggering migration reversals.

Conclusion

The LPG crisis highlights the deep interlinkage between energy affordability and migration patterns. Addressing these challenges requires targeted energy policies, inclusive urban governance, and stronger social protection systems to ensure sustainable and equitable development.

Source - https -//www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/bharat-bhushan-lpg-energy-crisis-fuels-reverse-migration-again-1948740

Question

Q. *Discuss how rising LPG prices and supply constraints contribute to reverse migration in India. Analyse the structural issues and suggest policy measures to address the problem.* (250 words)

Introduction

Rising LPG prices and supply shortages have increased the cost of urban living, disproportionately affecting migrant workers. This has led to reverse migration, reflecting deeper structural issues in energy access and urban policy.

Impact on Migration

1. Increased Cost of Living

1. Higher LPG prices significantly raise household expenditure, making urban survival difficult for low-income migrants.

2. Limited Access to Appropriate Fuel

1. Shortage of small LPG cylinders restricts access for migrants living in temporary or shared housing conditions.

3. Reverse Migration Trends

1. Economic stress compels migrants to return to rural areas, disrupting labour supply in urban economies.

Structural Issues

1. Informal Employment Vulnerability

1. Migrants lack stable incomes and are highly sensitive to price fluctuations.

2. Policy Exclusion

1. Energy subsidies and welfare schemes are not designed for mobile populations.

Policy Measures

1. Targeted Subsidies and Access

1. Ensure affordable LPG access for migrants, including small cylinders.

2. Strengthen Welfare Portability

1. Extend benefits like subsidised food and fuel across states.

3. Urban Support Systems

1. Provide housing, employment security, and essential services.

Conclusion

Addressing LPG-related migration challenges requires integrating energy policy with social protection. Ensuring affordability and accessibility will stabilise migration and support inclusive economic growth.

Source - https -//www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/bharat-bhushan-lpg-energy-crisis-fuels-reverse-migration-again-1948740

Editorial of the Day – 07.04.2026

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2. **Kalpakkam fast breeder reactor attains criticality - why this is a 'Defining step' in India's 3-stage n-programme (IE)** -03
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1. Illogical acts - On SIR adjudication, Malda gherao (TH)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance
Topic - Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary and the Executive; Appointment to various Constitutional posts.
Sub-Topic - Electoral Violence and Integrity.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Malda district of West Bengal became the centre of a constitutional crisis following the mob gherao (encirclement) of judicial officers during the election period. This incident, characterized by the Supreme Court as a direct assault on the adjudication process, reflects the extreme polarization and institutional breakdown currently plaguing the state's electoral landscape. The clash is rooted in the controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, which has sparked widespread fears of disenfranchisement among various communities.

2. The Malda Incident and Institutional Crisis

Attack on Adjudication - The gherao of judicial officers was seen not just as a law-and-order issue but as a deliberate attempt to obstruct the legal oversight of elections.
Supreme Court Intervention - The apex court expressed grave concern, emphasizing that such coercion undermines the "rule of law" and the independence of the judiciary.
The NIA Probe - In an unprecedented move, the Election Commission of India (ECI) transferred the investigation to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), bypassing state agencies due to the perceived sensitivity and potential "inter-state" or "anti-national" dimensions of the mob violence.
ECI-State Friction - The incident has exacerbated the existing conflict between the West Bengal government and the ECI regarding the management of the 2026 elections.

3. Persistent Electoral Violence in West Bengal

Structural Embedding - Unlike many other Indian states where election violence has declined, in West Bengal, violence has become an "embedded" feature of the political culture.
High-Stakes Rivalry - The intense competition between the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has turned every polling booth into a strategic battleground for "area dominance."
Grassroots Politicization - The state's robust Panchayati Raj system has ironically deepened political divides, as local government control is essential for managing rural patronage.

4. Historical Roots of Political Contestation

The "Area Dominance" Legacy - The current TMC-BJP rivalry inherited the older Left Front-TMC conflict dynamics, where political survival was tied to controlling physical territory and rural economic resources.
Patronage Distribution - Due to limited industrialization, the distribution of government schemes and patronage at the village level has made elections the primary means of economic survival for party cadres.

Evolution of the "Franchise Model" - The TMC operates on a "franchise model" centered on the charismatic leadership of Mamata Banerjee, while the BJP attempts a similar structure using ideological and organizational mobilization.

5. The SIR Controversy - A Trigger for Public Anger

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls has become the primary catalyst for the current unrest -

Mass Deletions - The revision process resulted in the voter base shrinking from 7.6 crore to 7.04 crore—a massive deletion of nearly 56 lakh voters.

Verification Errors - Approximately 60 lakh cases were placed under scrutiny. Frustration has mounted due to flawed software, technical glitches, and inadequate field verification by booth-level officers.

Minority Concerns - Allegations of targeted disenfranchisement, particularly among minority communities, have turned a technical administrative process into a highly charged communal and political issue.

Redressal Failure - Delays in the ECI's grievance redressal mechanism have pushed frustrated citizens toward unlawful protests and radicalization.

6. Way Forward - Restoring Democratic Integrity

Institutional Credibility - The ECI must ensure that the SIR process is transparent and that no genuine citizen is denied the right to vote due to technical errors.

Restrained Rhetoric - Political leaders from both sides must de-escalate inflammatory language that justifies violence as a means of "protection."

Judicial Protection - Strict protocols must be established to ensure the safety of judicial and electoral officers, preventing any form of physical coercion.

Cooperative Federalism - A "grand bargain" of engagement between the ECI, the state government, and the judiciary is necessary to rebuild public trust in the ballot.

Conclusion

The Malda gherao is a symptom of a deeper malaise in India's democratic fabric, where institutional mistrust and political polarization have reached a breaking point. While the NIA probe may provide immediate accountability, the long-term solution lies in ensuring an inclusive, error-free electoral roll and decoupling political survival from physical violence. For the 2026 elections to be truly "free and fair," the state must reclaim the "neutrality" of its democratic institutions from the grip of hyper-partisan contestation.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/illogical-acts-on-sir-adjudication-malda-gherao/article70830766.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The escalating friction between central electoral authorities and state administrative machinery, exemplified by the recent Malda incident, poses a significant threat to the sanctity of the Indian federal structure. Discuss the challenges of managing 'competitive' electoral politics in states with a history of structural violence." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Malda incident of 2026—involving the gherao of judicial officers and the subsequent NIA probe—highlights the fragile intersection of law, order, and electoral integrity. In West Bengal, the overlap of administrative processes like Special Intensive Revision (SIR) with high-stakes political rivalry has created a unique "Governance Crisis."

2. Challenges of Managing Competitive Politics in Violent Landscapes

Institutional Erosion - When the Election Commission of India (ECI) is viewed as a "partisan actor" by the state government, the neutrality of the entire electoral process is compromised. This lead to a "Refusal to Comply" by state machinery.

Voter Deletions as a Political Tool - Administrative errors in voter roll revisions (SIR) are easily framed as "deliberate disenfranchisement" in a polarized environment, leading to mass public unrest.
Patronage and Violence - Because the rural economy is tied to party-led patronage, elections are not just about "ideology" but about "survival." This makes "area dominance" a prerequisite for political parties, inevitably leading to violence.
Judicial Overreach vs. Protection - When judicial officers are targeted for adjudicating electoral disputes, it signifies a breakdown of the Separation of Powers, requiring intervention from higher courts which can further strain Centre-State relations.

3. Impact on the Federal Structure

Use of Central Agencies - Deploying the NIA to investigate election-related mob violence is a significant escalation that sidesteps the state's "Police" power, a subject under the State List (Schedule VII).
Mistrust in Institutions - The perception of bias leads to a "divided mandate," where a large section of the citizenry loses faith in the legitimacy of the winner.

4. Conclusion

Managing elections in volatile regions requires more than just "Security Forces." It requires a "Technology-plus-Trust" model—where software-led voter revisions are transparently audited, and grievance redressal is immediate. The goal must be to transition from a "Franchise Model" of politics to a "Governance Model," where the citizen's right to vote is protected by an impartial state.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/illogical-acts-on-sir-adjudication-malda-gherao/article70830766.ece#google_vignette

2. Kalpakkam fast breeder reactor attains criticality - why this is a 'defining step' in India's 3-stage n-programme (IE)

GS Paper III - Science and Technology
Topic - Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.
Sub-Topic - India's Three-Stage Nuclear Power Programme.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India officially lit the "second stage" of its nuclear dream as the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam attained first criticality. This milestone is not just a technical triumph but a sovereign achievement, making India only the second country after Russia to operate a commercial-scale FBR. By initiating a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, the PFBR moves India from being a consumer of uranium to a "breeder" of its own fuel, paving the way for the eventual utilization of its massive thorium reserves.

2. India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

Conceived by Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, this closed fuel cycle is designed to maximize India's modest uranium and abundant thorium resources.
Stage 1 – Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) - These reactors use natural uranium as fuel to produce electricity. A critical by-product of this stage is Plutonium-239 (Pu239), extracted from spent fuel, which serves as the "seed" for the next stage.
Stage 2 – Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) - The PFBR represents this stage. FBRs use a core of plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel. They "breed" more fuel than they burn by converting fertile Uranium-238 (U238) into fissile plutonium.
Stage 3 – Thorium-Based Reactors - The ultimate goal is to use Thorium-232 (Th232) in the blankets of FBRs to produce Uranium-233 (U233), which will eventually power Advanced Heavy Water Reactors (AHWRs), ensuring energy independence for centuries.

3. Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) - Key Features

Breeding Capability - Unlike thermal reactors, FBRs produce more fissile material (Pu239) than they consume (U235 or Pu239). This effectively "multiplies" the energy potential of available uranium by over 60 times.

Fast Neutrons & No Moderators - FBRs use "fast" neutrons to sustain fission. They do not require a moderator (like heavy water or graphite) to slow down neutrons, which allows for higher fuel utilization and less radioactive waste.

Liquid Sodium Coolant - The PFBR uses molten sodium as a coolant. Sodium has excellent heat transfer properties and a high boiling point (880°C), allowing the reactor to operate at high temperatures and atmospheric pressure, enhancing thermal efficiency.

Capacity - With a 500 MWe output, the Kalpakkam unit provides reliable, carbon-free base-load power to the southern grid.

4. Criticality - Scientific and Operational Significance

Defining Criticality - Criticality is the "operational birth" of a reactor. It is the state where the number of neutrons produced by fission is exactly equal to the number of neutrons lost (through absorption or leakage), resulting in a self-sustaining chain reaction.

The "First Approach" - Attaining first criticality confirms that the core geometry, fuel loading, and control rod mechanisms are perfectly synchronized.

Safety Validation - Controlled criticality proves that the reactor's "negative reactivity coefficients" are functioning, ensuring that if the temperature rises, the reaction naturally slows down.

Path to Power - Post-criticality, the reactor undergoes low-power physics experiments and phased power escalation before being synchronized with the electrical grid.

5. The Thorium Advantage and Energy Security

Resource Wealth - India holds roughly 25% of global thorium reserves, found largely in the monazite sands of coastal states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha.

Sustainability - Once Stage 3 is reached, thorium can provide thousands of gigawatts of electricity for centuries, effectively decoupling India's growth from global uranium price volatility.

Environmental Edge - Thorium-based cycles produce significantly less long-lived "Minor Actinides," reducing the burden of long-term radioactive waste management.

Strategic Autonomy - Mastering this complex cycle reduces dependence on the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for uranium imports.

6. Indigenization and Technological Self-Reliance

Atmanirbhar Nuclear Tech - The PFBR was designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) and built by BHAVINI. Over 200 Indian industries, including MSMEs, contributed to its construction.

Complex Engineering - The project involved fabricating massive stainless-steel structures (like the Main Vessel) to tolerate the corrosive nature of liquid sodium, showcasing India's advanced metallurgical prowess.

Indigenous Intellectual Property - By developing FBR technology without foreign assistance, India has strengthened its position as a "provider" of advanced nuclear technology in the global south.

7. Nuclear Energy in the National Mix & Challenges

Decarbonization Pillar - Nuclear power currently provides 3% of India's electricity. To reach Net Zero by 2070, India aims to scale nuclear capacity to 100 GW by 2047.

Base-Load Stability - Unlike intermittent solar and wind, nuclear provides 24/7 power, making it essential for grid stability.

Persistent Challenges -

1. High Capital Costs - Nuclear projects are "front-loaded" with massive investment and long gestation periods.

2. Waste & Liability - Managing spent fuel and navigating the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) remain hurdles for further expansion.
3. Public Perception - Post-Fukushima, safety concerns often lead to local opposition (as seen in Kudankulam).

Conclusion

The 2026 criticality of the PFBR is the "Sputnik moment" for Indian energy. It bridges the gap between current uranium reliance and a future powered by thorium. While challenges of cost and public acceptance persist, the successful operation of the FBR proves that India has the scientific depth to lead the world toward a sustainable, high-tech, and carbon-free future.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-fast-breeder-reactor-kalpakkam-criticality-10623094/

Question

"The attainment of criticality by the indigenously developed Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam is a definitive step toward India's three-stage nuclear energy vision. Analyse the strategic and scientific significance of this milestone for India's long-term energy security." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The attainment of first criticality by the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam on April 6, 2026, marks the transition of India's nuclear programme into its Second Stage. This achievement makes India only the second country globally to have a commercial-scale operating FBR, proving its capability to "breed" nuclear fuel.

2. Scientific Significance

Closed Fuel Cycle - The FBR utilizes Plutonium-239 from Stage 1 and converts fertile Uranium-238 into more plutonium. This "breeding" process ensures that fuel resources are recycled rather than wasted.

Technological Innovation - Operating with Liquid Sodium as a coolant and utilizing Fast Neutrons without moderators represents the pinnacle of nuclear engineering. It allows for higher thermal efficiency and a significant reduction in the volume of long-lived radioactive waste.

Validation of Indigenous Research - Designed by IGCAR and built by BHAVINI, the project validates India's mastery over complex metallurgy and reactor physics, achieved despite historical technology denial regimes.

3. Strategic Significance

Thorium Roadmap - The FBR is the vital bridge to Stage 3. By using thorium blankets, the FBR will produce Uranium-233, unlocking India's massive thorium reserves (~25% of global total) for centuries of energy.

Energy Sovereignty - It reduces dependence on imported uranium and the constraints of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). In an era of West Asian volatility, nuclear energy provides a stable, "home-grown" base-load power source.

Climate Commitments - As India strives for Net Zero by 2070, the FBR provides a low-carbon alternative that complements intermittent renewables like solar and wind by providing grid stability.

4. Conclusion

The Kalpakkam FBR is a testament to India's "Atmanirbhar" spirit in high-science. While high capital costs and long gestation periods remain challenges, the successful operation of the FBR ensures that India's growth story is powered by sustainable, clean, and indigenous energy, finally bringing Dr. Bhabha's vision of a thorium-powered India within reach.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-fast-breeder-reactor-kalpakkam-criticality-10623094/

3. Oil shocks and the rupee: The tricky 100s (BL)

General Studies Paper II – Governance
Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy
Sub-Topic: Effects of global economic developments on India

Introduction

In a rapidly changing technological and geopolitical environment, governments require institutions capable of responding quickly to evolving challenges. Strengthening the capacity of the permanent civil service through data-driven governance and artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming essential to ensure effective policymaking and administrative efficiency.

1. Changing Nature of Governance

1. Governance today operates in a dynamic and unpredictable global environment, shaped by technological disruption, geopolitical tensions, and economic volatility.
2. Traditional bureaucratic systems designed for stability often struggle to respond to rapid policy challenges requiring real-time decision-making.
3. Governments must therefore build institutions capable of continuous learning, adaptability, and evidence-based governance.

2. Importance of a Strong Permanent Civil Service

Institutional Continuity

1. The permanent bureaucracy ensures continuity of governance even when political leadership changes frequently.

Policy Implementation Capacity

1. Civil servants translate policy decisions into operational programs, regulatory frameworks, and public services.

Administrative Expertise

1. Long-term institutional memory and domain expertise allow governments to navigate complex policy challenges effectively.

3. Role of Data and Digital Systems

Data-Driven Governance

1. Modern governance increasingly relies on large datasets across sectors such as health, finance, and infrastructure to inform policy decisions.

Integration of Digital Platforms

1. Digital infrastructure allows governments to monitor service delivery, evaluate outcomes, and improve policy targeting.

Evidence-Based Decision Making

1. Access to accurate data enhances the ability of policymakers to design more precise and effective interventions.

4. Emerging Role of Artificial Intelligence in Governance

Policy Analytics and Forecasting

1. AI systems can analyse vast datasets to identify patterns, forecast trends, and support strategic planning.

Improving Administrative Efficiency

1. Automation of routine tasks reduces bureaucratic delays and improves public service delivery.

Strategic Intelligence for Governance

1. AI tools help governments anticipate risks, manage crises, and develop more responsive policy frameworks.

5. Challenges in Capacity Building

Skill Gaps in Civil Services

1. Many government officials lack training in data analytics, digital governance, and AI technologies.

Institutional Resistance to Change

1. Traditional administrative cultures may resist adoption of new technologies.

Infrastructure and Coordination Issues

1. Effective digital governance requires interdepartmental integration and robust digital infrastructure.

6. India's Initiatives in Capacity Building

Mission Karmayogi

1. Aims to transform civil services through continuous learning and competency-based training.

Digital Governance Platforms

1. Expansion of digital public infrastructure enables data-driven administration.

Technology Integration in Government

1. Increasing use of digital tools for policymaking, service delivery, and monitoring.

7. Way Forward

Strengthening Data Governance

1. Improve data quality, interoperability, and accessibility across government departments.

Capacity Building in Emerging Technologies

1. Train civil servants in AI, data science, and digital governance.

Institutional Innovation

1. Encourage collaborative policymaking and experimentation with new governance models.

Ethical and Responsible Use of AI

1. Ensure transparency, accountability, and safeguards against misuse.

Conclusion

Effective governance in a rapidly evolving world requires a skilled and technologically empowered permanent civil service. By integrating data, digital infrastructure, and AI into administrative processes, governments can enhance policy effectiveness and institutional resilience.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/oil-shocks-and-the-rupee-the-tricky-100s/article70831180.ece

Question

Q. *Discuss the role of technology and artificial intelligence in strengthening the capacity of the permanent civil service for effective governance.* (250 words)

Introduction

The complexity of modern governance requires administrative systems capable of responding to rapidly evolving challenges. Integrating technology and artificial intelligence can significantly enhance the capacity of the permanent civil service.

Role of Technology and AI

1. Data-Driven Policymaking

1. AI enables analysis of large datasets, helping governments design evidence-based policies.

2. Improved Administrative Efficiency

1. Automation of routine tasks reduces delays and enhances service delivery.

3. Predictive Governance

1. AI tools allow forecasting of economic, social, and environmental trends.

4. Strengthening Institutional Capacity

1. Digital platforms improve coordination across departments and enhance monitoring mechanisms.

Challenges

1. Skill Deficit

1. Limited expertise in data analytics and AI within government institutions.

2. Institutional Resistance

1. Traditional bureaucratic practices may slow technology adoption.

Conclusion

Harnessing technology and AI can transform governance by improving efficiency and policy responsiveness. Building digital capacity within the civil service will be essential for effective administration in the future.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/oil-shocks-and-the-rupee-the-tricky-100s/article70831180.ece

4. Why A Crude Oil Crisis Could Play Out Differently This Time Around (MT)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: External shocks and economic resilience
Sub-Topic: Effects of global economic developments on India

Introduction

Geopolitical conflicts, particularly in energy-producing regions, often create global supply shocks that affect inflation, growth, and macroeconomic stability. The ongoing West Asia conflict highlights how disruptions in oil and supply chains can transmit economic shocks to countries like India that depend heavily on global trade and energy imports.

1. Nature of Supply Shocks in the Global Economy

1. Supply shocks occur when sudden disruptions in production or supply chains reduce availability of key commodities, leading to price spikes.
2. Energy shocks are particularly influential because oil and gas are critical inputs across multiple sectors including transport, manufacturing, and agriculture.
3. In a highly interconnected global economy, supply disruptions in one region quickly propagate through global trade networks, affecting distant economies.

2. Impact of Energy Supply Shocks on India

Inflationary Pressures

1. Higher crude oil prices increase fuel and transportation costs, leading to cost-push inflation across sectors.

Rising Production Costs

1. Industries dependent on imported energy face higher operational expenses, reducing profitability and output.

Macroeconomic Instability

1. Higher import bills widen the current account deficit and fiscal pressures, affecting economic stability.

3. Policy Challenges during Supply Shocks

Limited Effectiveness of Conventional Policies

1. Monetary tightening may reduce demand but cannot directly increase supply of commodities.

Fiscal Policy Constraints

1. Governments face difficult choices between supporting growth through spending and controlling inflation.

Trade-offs between Inflation and Growth

1. Supply shocks simultaneously slow growth and increase prices, creating a stagflation-like environment.

4. Lessons from Historical Oil Crises

1970s Oil Shocks

1. The global oil crisis triggered high inflation and economic stagnation across many countries.

Policy Responses

1. Governments adopted measures such as energy diversification, strategic reserves, and efficiency improvements.

Long-Term Structural Adjustments

1. Economies gradually reduced energy intensity and improved resilience against future shocks.

5. India's Current Economic Resilience

Lower Energy Intensity

1. Compared to earlier decades, India's economy now uses energy more efficiently, reducing vulnerability.

Diversified Energy Sources

1. Expansion of renewable energy and diversified import partners helps mitigate risks.

Improved Policy Framework

1. Flexible monetary policy and fiscal management provide better tools to respond to external shocks.

6. Persistent Vulnerabilities

High Import Dependence

1. India imports a large share of its crude oil, exposing the economy to global price volatility.

Supply Chain Exposure

1. Disruptions in shipping routes and logistics can affect trade flows and production networks.

Global Economic Uncertainty

1. Prolonged conflicts or geopolitical tensions may sustain inflationary pressures.

7. Way Forward

Energy Diversification

1. Expand renewable energy and alternative fuels to reduce dependence on imported oil.

Strengthening Strategic Reserves

1. Maintain adequate petroleum reserves to cushion short-term supply disruptions.

Enhancing Domestic Production and Efficiency

1. Promote energy-efficient technologies and domestic energy exploration.

Improved Global Economic Cooperation

1. Strengthen international coordination to maintain stable energy markets and trade routes.

Conclusion

Global supply shocks remain a major risk to economic stability in an interconnected world. Strengthening resilience through energy diversification, efficient policy responses, and strategic planning is essential for India to navigate external economic disruptions.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/oil-shock-india-crude-demand-supply-strait-of-hormuz-iran-war-inflation-prices-rbi-currency-11775471657201.html

Question

Q. *Global supply shocks, particularly energy disruptions, pose significant challenges to macroeconomic stability. Discuss their impact on the Indian economy and suggest policy measures to enhance resilience.* (250 words)

Introduction

Supply shocks caused by geopolitical conflicts or disruptions in global trade can significantly affect economies dependent on imported energy. India, with its high crude oil import dependence, remains vulnerable to such external shocks.

Impact on the Indian Economy

1. Inflationary Pressures

1. Higher crude oil prices raise transportation and production costs, leading to widespread cost-push inflation.

2. Macroeconomic Imbalances

1. Increased import bills widen the current account deficit and exert pressure on fiscal balances.

3. Slower Economic Growth

1. Higher input costs reduce industrial output and dampen investment.

Policy Measures

1. Energy Diversification

1. Promote renewable energy and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

2. Strategic Reserves

1. Maintain petroleum reserves to stabilise supply during crises.

3. Energy Efficiency

1. Encourage efficient technologies and reduce energy intensity of production.

Conclusion

Enhancing resilience against global supply shocks requires structural reforms in energy policy and macroeconomic management. Diversification and strategic planning will help India mitigate risks and sustain economic stability.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/oil-shock-india-crude-demand-supply-strait-of-hormuz-iran-war-inflation-prices-rbi-currency-11775471657201.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 08.04.2026

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1. On India's updated climate pledges (TH)

GS Paper III - Environment and Ecology

Topic - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Sub-Topic - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India submitted its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC, marking a critical update in its decadal climate strategy. This revision, required every five years under the Paris Agreement "ratchet mechanism," reflects India's evolving role as a responsible global power while firmly grounding its commitments in the realities of a developing economy. By balancing aggressive renewable expansion with the necessity of energy security, the 2026 NDCs emphasize Climate Justice—ensuring that India's growth is sustainable without compromising the socio-economic upliftment of its billion-plus citizens.

2. India's Updated NDCs - A Balanced Step Forward

Measured Pragmatism - The 2026 update avoids radical "shock" shifts, choosing instead a path of continuity and gradual, achievable progress.

Primacy of Development - Policies are intentionally designed to prevent climate action from becoming a bottleneck for poverty alleviation and industrialization.

Global Equity - India continues to advocate for the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), aligning its pledges with its status as a lower-middle-income nation.

Institutional Confidence - The government has expressed high confidence in meeting these targets through domestic policy frameworks, even without immediate large-scale international climate finance.

3. The Three Key Climate Targets for 2035

The revised NDCs are anchored by three quantitative pillars -

Emission Intensity Reduction - India has raised its target to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 47% by 2035 (from 2005 levels). This is a significant leap from the previous 45% target for 2030.

Non-Fossil Fuel Power Capacity - India now aims to achieve 60% of its total installed electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources (Solar, Wind, Nuclear, and Large Hydro).

Enhanced Carbon Sink - A commitment to create an additional carbon sink of 3.5 to 4 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent through increased forest and tree cover—an upward revision from the previous 2.5–3 billion tonne target.

4. Expanding Sectoral Climate Action

While not all domestic actions are registered as formal NDCs (to maintain international accountability), India's climate effort is widening -

Mobility Transition - Aggressive promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs) through subsidies and charging infrastructure expansion.

Green Hydrogen - Launch of the National Green Hydrogen Mission to decarbonize "hard-to-abate" sectors like steel and fertilizers.

Energy Efficiency - Strengthening the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme for industrial energy efficiency.

Carbon Capture - Increased public-private R&D in Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) technologies.

5. Structural Constraints and Economic Realities

Coal Dependence - Despite the renewable push, India's energy baseload remains heavily reliant on coal for grid stability and industrial heat.

Financial Burden - The transition to a "Green Economy" involves trillions of dollars in capital expenditure, a massive burden for a country with limited per-capita resources.

Intermittency and Storage - Battery storage systems for solar and wind remain expensive, and grid balancing poses a significant technological and financial challenge.

Hydro-Regulatory Hurdles - Expanding large-scale hydropower is increasingly difficult due to environmental concerns in the Himalayan region and complex displacement regulations.

6. The Global Debate - Criticism vs. National Interest

The 1.5°C Tension - International critics argue that India's targets are not aligned with the global goal of limiting warming to 1.5° C$.

Metrics Matter - Some experts question the reliance on "capacity" targets (what is installed) versus "generation" targets (what is actually produced).

Defense of National Circumstances - The Indian government counters that "doing more" requires historical emitters to provide technology transfer and climate finance, as per the Paris Agreement's mandates.

Urbanization and Growth - Policy decisions remain cautious because India's peak energy demand is still expected to rise significantly due to rapid urbanization and the "Make in India" manufacturing push.

7. Conclusion

India's 2026 updated NDCs represent a strategic triumph of Sustainable Realism. By setting ambitious yet grounded targets for 2035, India has reinforced its commitment to the global climate fight without sacrificing its developmental sovereignty. The success of these pledges will ultimately depend on three factors - domestic technological innovation, the de-risking of green investments, and a fairer global financial architecture that supports developing nations. India has done its part; the focus must now shift to the "Climate Finance" promises of the developed world to enable even higher ambitions in the next cycle.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/on-indias-updated-climate-pledges/article70835668.ece

Question

"India's updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2026 highlight a shift from 'intent' to 'implementable pragmatism.' Analyse the revised targets in the context of India's developmental requirements and the global demand for higher climate ambition." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's 2026 update to its NDCs under the Paris Agreement signals a strategic recalibration. By targeting a 47% reduction in emissions intensity and 60% non-fossil capacity by 2035, India is attempting to reconcile its commitment to the global climate common with the non-negotiable requirement of providing energy access to a growing population.

2. Analysis of the Revised Targets

Emission Intensity (47% by 2035) - This target is "growth-decoupled," meaning India plans to grow its economy while reducing the carbon footprint per unit of GDP. It allows for industrial expansion but mandates higher efficiency.

Non-Fossil Capacity (60%) - Moving beyond the 50% target for 2030, this acknowledges the rapid maturity of India's solar and wind sectors. However, it relies on "capacity," which requires massive investment in Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to handle intermittency.

Carbon Sink (3.5–4 billion Tonnes) - This ambitious target emphasizes Nature-Based Solutions, which serve the dual purpose of carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

3. Balancing Development with Global Ambition

Structural Realism - As a lower-middle-income country, India's energy demand is set to double. The NDCs correctly identify that a total "phase-out" of coal is currently unfeasible for grid stability.

Climate Justice - By centering "Climate Justice," India pushes back against the global pressure to adopt "Net Zero" dates that do not account for the low historical emissions of developing nations.

Resource Constraints - The transition costs are estimated at billions of dollars. India's "measured" pledges reflect a hedge against the persistent failure of developed nations to provide the promised $100 billion annual climate finance.

4. Conclusion

India's 2026 NDCs are a testament to "Strategic Autonomy" in climate policy. They reflect a nation that is willing to lead by example but refuses to allow "Green Growth" to become a new form of "Developmental Colonialism." The focus must now shift to building domestic capacity in Green Hydrogen and CCUS to ensure these targets are not just met, but exceeded.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/on-indias-updated-climate-pledges/article70835668.ece

2. A nation's attachment to the soldier is virtue & weakness (IE)

GS Paper III - Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude; Internal Security.

Topic - Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders; Challenges to internal security through communication networks.

Sub-Topic - Ethical Dilemmas in Warfare and Decision Making.

1. Introduction

In the complex theatre of 21st-century conflict, the relationship between a state, its citizenry, and its soldiers has evolved into a "Moral-Strategic Paradox." While a nation's deep emotional attachment to its soldiers is a source of immense moral strength and national unity, it simultaneously creates a strategic soft spot that adversaries increasingly exploit. As evidenced in the global landscape of April 2026, warfare is no longer just about territorial gain but about winning the "psychological front," where an individual soldier can become a high-stakes pawn in international diplomacy.

2. Ethical Dilemmas in Warfare

War-time Decision Making - Military commanders often face "tragic choices" where they must weigh the lives of few against the security of many. The historical debate over the Coventry bombing (WWII)—where leaders allegedly allowed a city to be bombed to protect the secret that the Enigma code was broken—highlights this brutal calculus.

Utilitarian Calculus - Modern strategic thought often operates on a "greater good" approach. Saving a future population may require making peace with immediate losses, an idea that sits uncomfortably with traditional morality.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) - Frameworks like the Geneva Conventions provide a legal "floor" for ethical conduct, yet the high-pressure environment of modern combat often tests these principles to their breaking point.

Moral vs. Strategic Conflict - The core dilemma for a democratic leader is balancing the ethical obligation to protect every individual soldier with the cold, strategic necessity of national security.

3. Soldiers as Symbols of National Sovereignty

Emotional and Political Value - In a democracy, a soldier is not just a combatant but a "son/daughter of the soil." Their safety is tied to public sentiment, and their capture can lead to immediate political instability for the government in power.

Symbolic Power - The image of a captured or fallen soldier has a disproportionate impact on national morale. It serves as a visual representation of a state's inability to protect its own, affecting international prestige.

Media Amplification - In the digital age, a single video of a soldier can go viral in minutes, creating a "24-hour pressure cooker" for policymakers that forces hasty, and sometimes strategically unsound, decisions.

The Indian Experience - The 2019 return of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman demonstrated how public fervour can turn a tactical incident into a massive national event, influencing diplomatic de-escalation.

4. Strategic Exploitation by Adversaries

Hostage Diplomacy - Both rogue states and non-state actors use captured personnel as "bargaining chips" to extract concessions, such as the release of hardened terrorists or the lifting of sanctions.

Asymmetric Warfare Tactics - Weaker adversaries avoid direct military engagement with stronger powers like India or the US, instead opting to strike at the "emotional centre of gravity"—the public's intolerance for soldier casualties.

Case Study – Gilad Shalit - Israel's 2011 exchange of 1,027 prisoners for a single soldier showed the world the "exchange rate" of a democratic soldier, emboldening groups to prioritize kidnapping as a strategic tool.

Psychological Warfare - These tactics aim to create internal rifts in the target nation, turning the public against the military leadership for "failing" to bring their people home.

5. Military Doctrines and Strategic Responses

The Hannibal Directive - A controversial (and now defunct) Israeli doctrine that empowered the military to use maximum force to prevent the abduction of a soldier, even at the risk of the soldier's own life. It reflected a strategy where "a dead soldier is better than a kidnapped one" from a purely national security perspective.

Deterrence Logic - The goal of such harsh doctrines is to signal to the enemy that they will gain nothing from capturing a soldier, thereby removing the incentive for abduction.

Operational Risks - Such doctrines face heavy ethical criticism for potentially violating the state's duty of care toward its personnel and increasing the risk of collateral damage.

The Indian Approach - India has traditionally favored a mix of diplomatic restraint and quiet military pressure, adhering to the spirit of the 1971 Shimla Agreement and international norms

6. The Changing Nature of Modern Warfare

Individual Leverage - We have moved from the era of "Mass Warfare" to "Individualized Leverage." In 1971, 93,000 POWs were a collective diplomatic tool; today, one captured pilot can freeze an entire region's geopolitics.

Hybrid Warfare - This involves a blend of conventional arms and "Narrative Warfare." The soldier becomes a tool in a broader psychological narrative designed to weaken the adversary's resolve from within.

Cis-Lunar and Technology Influence - With instant satellite communication and AI-generated deepfakes, adversaries can now manufacture or amplify soldier-related crises to manipulate public opinion.

7. Indian Context - Lessons and Challenges

The 1971 War Example - India held 93,000 Pakistani POWs, which were used as a massive diplomatic lever to force political settlements. This was a "state-to-state" conventional dynamic.

Kandahar Hijacking (1999) - The release of terrorists in exchange for civilian and personnel hostages highlighted a critical vulnerability - the state's susceptibility to public and media pressure during a crisis.

The "Doctrine Gap" - India lacks a clearly articulated, publicly known doctrine on how it handles hostage or capture situations. This leads to "ad-hocism" or case-by-case responses, which can be unpredictable.

Democratic Security Balance - As a vibrant democracy, India must respect the emotional bond between the people and the "Jawan" while ensuring that this bond does not become a shackle that prevents the state from taking hard strategic decisions.

Conclusion

A nation's love for its soldiers is a virtue that defines its character and unity. However, in the ruthless arena of 21st-century geopolitics, this virtue must be shielded by Strategic Realism. India needs to develop institutionalized crisis response mechanisms and a clear public doctrine that minimizes an adversary's leverage. The goal is to build a republic where the soldier is honored not just through emotion, but through a strategy that ensures their sacrifice is never used as a tool for national blackmail.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-nations-attachment-to-the-soldier-is-virtue-weakness-10624678/

Question

"In modern asymmetric warfare, the soldier is often reduced to a 'strategic commodity' by adversaries. Discuss the ethical dilemmas faced by a democratic state when balancing the 'Duty of Care' toward its soldiers with the imperatives of National Interest." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Warfare is no longer confined to the physical battlefield; it is increasingly fought in the "moral and psychological" domain. For a democratic state, the soldier represents the ultimate symbol of national sovereignty. This creates an ethical tension between the Deontological duty (duty of care to the individual) and the Utilitarian necessity (the greater good of the nation).

2. Ethical Dilemmas

Duty of Care vs. National Interest - A state has a moral contract with its soldiers to protect them. However, when an adversary uses a captured soldier to demand the release of terrorists, the state faces the dilemma of saving one life versus potentially endangering thousands of others through future terror acts.

Utilitarian Calculus - Strategists argue that "giving in" to hostage demands encourages more abductions. Ethically, the state must decide if "sacrificing" the individual's safety is a justifiable means to the end of national deterrence.

Public Sentiment vs. Strategic Autonomy - In democracies, media-driven public pressure for the "safe return" of a soldier often forces the government into ethically compromised positions, where tactical concessions are made that weaken long-term security.

3. The "Hannibal" Paradigm

Doctrines like the Hannibal Directive (preventing capture at all costs) highlight the extreme end of this dilemma. While they protect national interest by denying the enemy a "bargaining chip," they raise profound ethical questions about the state's betrayal of its own defenders.

4. Conclusion

A mature democracy must resolve this by building Institutional Resilience. This involves transparent doctrines that manage public expectations and a commitment to international norms. Ultimately, the state must uphold the "Dignity of the Soldier" by ensuring that their life and sacrifice are never commodified by the enemy, nor treated as a mere statistic by the state.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-nations-attachment-to-the-soldier-is-virtue-weakness-10624678/

3. Oil shocks and the rupee - The tricky 100s (bl)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - External sector and exchange rate
Sub-Topic - Impact of global events on domestic economy

Introduction

Oil price shocks have historically exerted significant pressure on India's macroeconomic stability and exchange rate. However, evolving global energy dynamics, diversification strategies, and policy responses have altered the intensity and transmission of such shocks, making the rupee's response more nuanced.

1. Nature of Oil Shocks and Transmission Channels

1. Oil shocks arise from geopolitical conflicts, supply disruptions, or cartel decisions, leading to sharp price increases.
2. For an import-dependent economy like India, higher oil prices increase the import bill, widening the current account deficit (CAD).
3. This creates downward pressure on the rupee due to higher demand for foreign currency (especially US dollars).

2. Impact on Inflation and Domestic Economy

Cost-Push Inflation

1. Higher fuel prices raise transportation and production costs, transmitting inflation across sectors.

Reduced Consumption Demand

1. Increased household expenditure on energy reduces disposable income, affecting demand.

Macroeconomic Trade-offs

1. Policymakers face a dilemma between controlling inflation and sustaining growth.

3. Changing Dynamics of Oil–Rupee Relationship

Diversification of Energy Sources

1. Expansion of renewables and diversified oil import sources reduces vulnerability.

Energy Substitution Possibilities

1. Shift towards alternatives like natural gas and renewables moderates long-term price pressures.

Global Market Adjustments

1. Increased global supply flexibility and strategic reserves have reduced the persistence of shocks.

4. Policy Response and Challenges

Monetary Policy Constraints

1. Interest rate hikes can control inflation but cannot address supply-side shocks directly.

Fiscal Policy Pressures

1. Governments may reduce taxes or increase subsidies, impacting fiscal balances.

Exchange Rate Management

1. RBI interventions help stabilise the rupee but may deplete foreign exchange reserves.

5. Capital Flows and External Stability

1. Oil shocks influence foreign investor sentiment, leading to capital outflows during uncertainty.
2. A stronger US dollar during global crises further weakens the rupee.
3. However, improved macro fundamentals and reserves provide a buffer against excessive volatility.

6. Limits of Overreaction

Temporary Nature of Shocks

1. Many oil shocks are short-lived due to market adjustments and supply responses.

Policy Prudence Required

1. Excessive tightening or subsidy expansion may create long-term distortions.

Focus on Structural Stability

1. Maintaining macroeconomic fundamentals is more effective than reactive measures.

7. Way Forward

Energy Diversification

1. Accelerate transition to renewables and alternative fuels.

Strengthening External Buffers

1. Maintain adequate forex reserves and manage CAD sustainably.

Prudent Macroeconomic Management

1. Balance inflation control with growth objectives.

Enhancing Energy Efficiency

1. Reduce energy intensity of the economy to limit vulnerability.

Conclusion

Oil shocks remain a critical external risk for India, but their impact is increasingly moderated by structural changes and policy frameworks. A balanced and forward-looking approach is essential to ensure exchange rate stability and macroeconomic resilience.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/oil-shocks-and-the-rupee-the-tricky-100s/article70831180.ece

Question

Q. *Oil price shocks significantly influence exchange rate dynamics in India. Analyse the impact of oil shocks on the rupee and evaluate the effectiveness of policy responses in mitigating these effects.* (250 words)

Introduction

Oil price shocks affect India's economy through higher import costs, inflation, and external imbalances. As a major oil importer, India's exchange rate is particularly sensitive to such shocks.

Impact on the Rupee

1. Widening Current Account Deficit

1. Higher oil import bills increase demand for foreign currency, exerting downward pressure on the rupee.

2. Inflationary Pressures

1. Rising fuel prices lead to cost-push inflation, affecting macroeconomic stability.

3. Capital Flow Volatility

1. Global uncertainty during oil shocks leads to capital outflows, further weakening the currency.

Policy Responses

1. Monetary Measures

1. Interest rate adjustments help control inflation but have limited impact on supply-side shocks.

2. Exchange Rate Intervention

1. RBI uses forex reserves to stabilise excessive volatility.

3. Fiscal Adjustments

1. Reduction in fuel taxes or subsidies helps cushion consumers but affects fiscal balance.

Conclusion

While oil shocks continue to influence the rupee, improved macroeconomic management and diversification strategies have enhanced resilience. A balanced policy approach is essential to mitigate risks without overreacting.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/oil-shocks-and-the-rupee-the-tricky-100s/article70831180.ece

4. Polavaram Project And Its Progress (HI)

General Studies Paper III – Infrastructure / Water Resources
Topic - Irrigation and water resource management
Sub-Topic - Environmental impact assessment

Introduction

Large irrigation projects are critical for agricultural growth, water security, and regional development. However, implementation challenges such as delays, cost overruns, and governance inefficiencies often undermine their outcomes, as seen in major projects like Polavaram.

1. Importance of Large Irrigation Projects

1. Enable agricultural expansion and irrigation coverage, improving farm productivity and rural incomes.
2. Provide drinking water supply and flood control, enhancing water security.
3. Support hydropower generation and regional economic development.

2. Key Implementation Challenges

Project Delays

1. Multi-decade timelines due to administrative, financial, and technical hurdles.

Cost Overruns

1. Escalation in project costs caused by delays, design changes, and inflation.

Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Issues

1. Slow progress in resettlement and compensation for displaced populations creates social and legal bottlenecks.

3. Governance and Institutional Issues

Skewed Resource Allocation

1. Excessive focus on construction activities while neglecting rehabilitation and social components.

Lack of Dedicated Oversight Mechanisms

1. Absence of specialised agencies for flood management and coordination leads to inefficiencies.

Irregular Contracting Practices

1. Nomination-based contracts, frequent contractor changes, and weak tendering processes disrupt project continuity.

4. Technical and Planning Deficiencies

Failure in Flood Management Planning

1. Inadequate adherence to flood diversion schedules leads to damage of partially built structures.

Design and Execution Gaps

1. Poor coordination between planning and execution results in structural vulnerabilities and delays.

Monitoring and Evaluation Weaknesses

1. Limited use of real-time monitoring tools affects project tracking and accountability.

5. Financial and Administrative Concerns

Low Budget Utilisation Efficiency

1. Mismatch between allocated funds and actual project progress.

Reporting Discrepancies

1. Inconsistencies in financial and physical progress reporting reduce transparency.

Inter-Governmental Coordination Issues

1. Projects involving multiple states face coordination challenges and delays.

6. Socio-Environmental Concerns

Displacement and Rehabilitation

1. Inadequate attention to displaced communities leads to social unrest and ethical concerns.

Ecological Impact

1. Large dams affect ecosystems, biodiversity, and river flows.

7. Recent Progress and Positive Developments

1. Acceleration in construction activities and completion of key structural components.
2. Improved institutional focus and monitoring mechanisms.
3. Renewed emphasis on completing pending phases and delivering intended benefits.

8. Way Forward

Balanced Resource Allocation

1. Ensure equal focus on construction, rehabilitation, and environmental safeguards.

Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms

1. Create dedicated agencies for project monitoring and flood management.

Transparent Contracting Processes

1. Adopt competitive bidding and minimise discretionary contract awards.

Use of Technology

1. Implement real-time monitoring systems and digital project management tools.

Prioritising Rehabilitation

1. Ensure timely and fair compensation and resettlement for affected populations.

Conclusion

Large irrigation projects hold immense potential for transforming water management and regional development. However, achieving their objectives requires efficient governance, transparent processes, and balanced implementation strategies that address both technical and social dimensions.
Source - https -//www.thehansindia.com/andhra-pradesh/polavaram-hydro-project-to-boost-aps-energy-security-1064773

Question

Q. *Large irrigation projects in India often face delays and cost overruns due to governance and implementation challenges. Analyse these issues and suggest measures for effective project execution.* (250 words)

Introduction

Large irrigation projects are essential for water security and agricultural growth. However, delays, cost overruns, and governance inefficiencies often limit their effectiveness.

Challenges

1. Project Delays and Cost Overruns

1. Administrative inefficiencies and design changes lead to prolonged timelines and increased costs.

2. Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Issues

1. Slow resettlement processes create social resistance and legal challenges.

3. Weak Governance and Contracting Practices

1. Lack of transparency in tendering and coordination issues disrupt project execution.

4. Technical and Planning Deficiencies

1. Poor flood management and monitoring lead to structural risks and inefficiencies.

Measures

1. Strengthen Institutional Frameworks

1. Establish dedicated agencies for monitoring and coordination.

2. Improve Transparency and Accountability

1. Adopt competitive bidding and robust auditing mechanisms.

3. Use Technology for Monitoring

1. Implement real-time project tracking systems.

4. Prioritise Social and Environmental Aspects

1. Ensure effective rehabilitation and ecological safeguards.

Conclusion

Effective execution of irrigation projects requires integrated planning, strong governance, and balanced attention to technical and social dimensions to ensure sustainable development.

Source - https -//www.thehansindia.com/andhra-pradesh/polavaram-hydro-project-to-boost-aps-energy-security-1064773

Editorial of the Day – 09.004.2026

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1. The Other Side of Sport — Mastering Manufacturing (TH)

GS Paper II& III: Governance; Indian Economy.
Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
Sub-Topic: NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India).

1. Introduction: The 2026 Sports Export Report

In April 2026, a joint report by NITI Aayog and the Foundation for Economic Development highlighted a stark reality: despite India's immense sports culture, its share in the global sports equipment export market stands at a meager 0.5%. The report identifies structural bottlenecks—such as fragmented production and limited technological adoption—as the primary hurdles. This serves as a recent example of NITI Aayog's role as a "strategic think tank" that diagnoses industrial gaps and provides evidence-based solutions for national growth.

2. Introduction to NITI Aayog

Evolution: Established on January 1, 2015, NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) replaced the decades-old Planning Commission.
Shift in Philosophy: It moved India away from the "top-down" centralized planning model to a "bottom-up" approach.
Core Identity: Functions as the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, providing both directional and strategic inputs.
Federal Mandate: Designed specifically to foster Cooperative Federalism, recognizing that "strong states make a strong nation."

3. Objectives of NITI Aayog

Federalism: To promote cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives with States on a continuous basis.
Bottom-Up Planning: To develop mechanisms to formulate credible plans at the village level and aggregate these progressively at higher levels of government.
Inclusive Growth: To pay special attention to sections of society that may be at risk of not benefiting adequately from economic progress.
Innovation Ecosystem: To create a "knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurial support system" through a collaborative community of national and international experts.
Evidence-Based Policy: To maintain a state-of-the-art Resource Centre for research on good governance and sustainable development.

4. Composition of NITI Aayog

Chairperson: The Prime Minister of India.
Vice-Chairperson: Appointed by the Prime Minister (enjoys the rank of a Cabinet Minister).

Governing Council: Comprises the Chief Ministers of all States and Lt. Governors of Union Territories. This is the platform for Cooperative Federalism.
Regional Councils: Formed to address specific issues and contingencies impacting more than one state or a region.
Full-time & Part-time Members: Includes experts, specialists, and practitioners with relevant domain knowledge.
Ex-officio Members: Maximum of four members from the Union Council of Ministers, nominated by the PM.

5. Key Functions and Role

Policy Frameworks: Formulates long-term, strategic policy and program frameworks and monitors their progress and efficacy.
Knowledge Hub: Acts as a repository of best practices and a facilitator of technology dissemination.
Inter-sectoral Resolution: Provides a platform for resolution of inter-sectoral and inter-departmental issues to accelerate the implementation of the development agenda.
Capacity Building: Focuses on technology upgradation and capacity building for the implementation of programs and initiatives.
Three-Year Action Agenda: Replaced the old Five-Year Plans with more dynamic documents like the 3-year Action Agenda, 7-year Strategy, and 15-year Vision document.

6. Major Initiatives and Indices

NITI Aayog uses "Competitive Federalism" to drive state performance through data-driven rankings:
Aspirational Districts Programme: Focuses on transforming 112 of India's most backward districts through a mass movement.
Atal Innovation Mission (AIM): Promotes a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, including the establishment of Atal Tinkering Labs.
National SDG Index: Tracks the progress of all States and UTs on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
India Innovation Index: Ranks states on their innovation capabilities to identify strengths and weaknesses.
Sectoral Indices: Includes the School Education Quality Index (SEQI), Composite Water Management Index, and State Health Index.

7. Significance in Modern Governance

Data-Driven Governance: Shifted the focus from "outlays" (money spent) to "outcomes" (actual results on the ground).
Dynamic Policy-Making: Unlike the rigid Planning Commission, NITI Aayog allows for rapid policy course-corrections based on real-time monitoring.
Public-Private Partnership (PPP): Plays a critical role in drafting model concession agreements and policies to encourage private investment in infrastructure.
Global Alignment: Aligns domestic policies with international benchmarks and global development goals (SDGs).

8. Challenges and Criticisms

Non-Statutory Status: It was created by an executive resolution and is neither a constitutional nor a statutory body, leading to concerns about its long-term stability.
Financial Constraints: Unlike the Planning Commission, it has no power to allocate funds to states, which some argue reduces its influence over state policy.
Dependency on States: Its success is entirely dependent on the willingness of state governments to cooperate and implement its recommendations.
Complexity of Coordination: In a diverse country like India, harmonizing the conflicting interests of 28 states and 8 UTs remains a monumental task.

Conclusion: The Path to Export Growth

The NITI Aayog report on sports equipment manufacturing serves as a microcosm of India's broader industrial challenge. By highlighting that India holds only a 0.5% share in a multi-billion dollar global market, NITI Aayog has provided the "diagnostic" required for a "cure." Addressing structural bottlenecks through targeted policy support, improved logistics, and export-oriented clusters can transform India into a global manufacturing hub. As India strives for a $5 trillion economy, NITI Aayog's role as a catalyst for structural reform remains indispensable.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-other-side-of-sport-mastering-manufacturing/article70839236.ece

Question

"NITI Aayog has successfully transitioned India from a regime of 'command planning' to one of 'cooperative and competitive federalism.' Critically analyze this statement with reference to its role in diagnosing structural bottlenecks in the Indian economy." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Model Answer

1. Introduction

Established in 2015, NITI Aayog represents a paradigm shift in Indian governance. By replacing the Planning Commission, it moved the nation away from a "one-size-fits-all" approach to a more inclusive model where states are active partners in national development.

2. Shift from Command Planning to Cooperative Federalism

Bottom-Up Approach: Unlike the Planning Commission's top-down mandates, NITI Aayog's Governing Council involves Chief Ministers in the decision-making process, ensuring that state-specific concerns are integrated into national policy.

Competitive Federalism: Through indices like the SDG Index and India Innovation Index, NITI Aayog creates a healthy "race to the top," encouraging states to learn from each other's best practices.

Knowledge Hub: It serves as a consultant to the states, providing technical expertise rather than just financial outlays.

3. Role in Diagnosing Structural Bottlenecks

NITI Aayog acts as the "economic doctor" of the country. For instance:

Sports Equipment Report (2026): It identified that India's low global export share (0.5%) is due to fragmented production and low tech-adoption, providing a roadmap for sector-specific reforms.

Aspirational Districts: By identifying lagging districts based on data, it has targeted "pockets of poverty" that were previously overlooked by centralized schemes.

Infrastructure Bottlenecks: Through its work on PPP models and asset monetization, it addresses the "financing gap" in Indian infrastructure.

4. Critical Limitations

Lack of "Financial Teeth": Critics argue that without the power to allocate resources, NITI Aayog is a "talk shop" that lacks the authority to enforce its recommendations on recalcitrant states.

Advisory Status: Its recommendations are not binding, and the implementation remains at the mercy of the political will of state and central ministries.

5. Conclusion

NITI Aayog has redefined the Centre-State relationship by moving from "patronage" to "partnership." While the lack of financial powers is a constraint, its strength lies in "Power of Ideas" and "Data-Driven Accountability." To truly transform India, NITI Aayog must continue to bridge the gap between policy intent and ground-level implementation through sustained cooperative engagement.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-other-side-of-sport-mastering-manufacturing/article70839236.ece

2. RBI Keeps Interest Rates Unchanged, Says Upside Risks To Inflation Have Increased(IE)

GS Paper III : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.
Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
Sub-Topic: Monetary Policy Framework (MPC and FIT).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) signaled a posture of "cautious stability" by maintaining the repo rate at 5.25%. While the Indian economy showed remarkable resilience with a 7.6% growth in FY26, the central bank's latest projections indicate a cooling off to 6.9% in FY27. This decision comes at a time when the global economy is grappling with "imported inflation" triggered by the Iran–West Asia conflict, pushing crude oil prices past the $100 mark and testing the limits of India's Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework.

2. Monetary Policy Framework in India

Inflation Targeting Mechanism: Since 2016, the RBI has operated under a FIT framework, legally mandated to maintain CPI inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of ±2%.
Role of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): A 6-member statutory committee—comprising three internal RBI members and three external experts—decides the policy rates through a majority vote.
Policy Instruments: The primary tool is the Repo Rate (the rate at which RBI lends to banks). Other tools include the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR), Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR), and Open Market Operations (OMO) to manage liquidity.
Transmission Mechanism: Changes in the repo rate are intended to trickle down to bank lending and deposit rates, influencing investment and consumption behaviors.

3. Repo Rate Status Quo: Rationale and Impact

Stable Borrowing Costs: By holding the rate at 5.25%, the RBI has ensured that interest rates on home, vehicle, and personal loans remain steady, preventing a sudden spike in EMIs.
Investment Sentiment: Stability in rates provides a predictable environment for corporate India and MSMEs to plan capital expenditures (CAPEX).
Market Predictability: The "pause" reduces volatility in the bond and equity markets, signaling that the RBI is not in a hurry to tighten further despite global headwinds.
Wait-and-Watch Stance: The status quo reflects the RBI's need to assess the full impact of previous rate hikes before taking further action in a volatile global environment.

4. Growth Projections and Macroeconomic Concerns

GDP Growth Moderation: The revision from 7.6% (FY26) to 6.9% (FY27) reflects a cooling economy.
External Sector Pressures: Global trade fragmentation and the delayed finalization of major trade agreements have started impacting India's export trajectory.
Input Cost Pressure: While domestic consumption is strong, the rising cost of industrial inputs (due to energy shocks) is squeezing corporate margins.
Stability Pillars: High GST collections, a robust digital payment ecosystem, and sustained government infrastructure spending continue to act as "macro-cushions."

5. Inflation Dynamics and Supply-Side Shocks

The Oil Factor: With crude oil prices surging beyond $100 per barrel due to the West Asia crisis, the risk of "cost-push" inflation has intensified.

Imported Inflation: India's high dependence on imported energy means global price hikes directly translate into higher transport, logistics, and manufacturing costs.
CPI Projections: Inflation is currently projected at 4.6%. While within the 2%-6% band, the RBI remains vigilant about the "last mile" of disinflation toward the 4% target.
Chokepoint Risks: The potential closure or disruption of the Strait of Hormuz remains the biggest "wildcard" for India's inflation outlook in 2026.

6. Exchange Rate and External Sector Stability

Currency Pressure: The RBI assumes the Indian Rupee (INR) at around ₹94 per dollar for its FY27 projections, reflecting global risk aversion and capital outflows.
Forex Management: The RBI continues its policy of "intervening to check volatility" rather than defending a specific level of the currency.
Trade Implications: While a weaker rupee makes imports (especially oil) more expensive, it provides a competitive edge to Indian exporters in sectors like textiles and software services.
Capital Outflows: Heightened geopolitical tensions often lead to "flight to safety," where foreign investors pull capital out of emerging markets like India.

7. The Growth-Inflation Trade-off

The Policy Dilemma: The RBI is caught in a "Growth-Inflation" pincer. Raising rates would curb inflation but kill the 6.9% growth; lowering rates would boost growth but risk an inflation spiral.
Current Strategy: The RBI has chosen a "Neutral" stance—holding rates while maintaining a hawk-eyed focus on the withdrawal of accommodation to ensure inflation aligns with the target.

8. Way Forward: Strengthening Resilience

Energy Decoupling: Accelerating the transition to renewables and green hydrogen to reduce the "petro-shackle" on the Indian economy.
Logistics Efficiency: Reducing the cost of internal transport (National Logistics Policy) to offset the spike in global energy prices.
Fiscal-Monetary Synergy: The government's fiscal prudence must complement the RBI's monetary caution to prevent an "overheating" of the economy.
Export Diversification: Finding new markets to compensate for the slowdown in traditional Western and West Asian trade routes.

Conclusion

The RBI's April 2026 policy review is a testament to "stability in the face of volatility." By holding the repo rate at 5.25%, the central bank has prioritized domestic economic continuity while acknowledging the severe headwinds from the West Asia conflict. As India navigates a projected growth of 6.9%, the focus must remain on supply-side reforms and energy security to ensure that the "imported" shocks of 2026 do not derail the long-term vision of a $5 trillion economy.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/business/rbi-interest-inflation-have-increased-10625034/

Question

"The current monetary policy stance of the RBI reflects a delicate balancing act between 'Imported Inflation' and 'Growth Resilience.' Analyze the impact of global energy shocks on India's monetary policy dynamics and its growth projections for FY27." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) maintained the repo rate at 5.25%. This decision highlights the challenge of navigating an economy that is growing at a resilient 7.6% (FY26) but faces a projected slowdown to 6.9% (FY27) due to unprecedented energy shocks and geopolitical volatility in West Asia.

2. Impact of Global Energy Shocks on Monetary Policy

Imported Inflation: With crude oil prices exceeding $100/barrel, India faces "cost-push" inflation. Since energy is a universal input, it raises costs in transport, agriculture (fertilizers), and manufacturing.

Constraint on Rate Cuts: Despite a growth slowdown, the RBI cannot easily cut rates. Lowering rates would weaken the Rupee further (currently assumed at ₹94/$), making oil imports even more expensive and fueling a "vicious cycle" of inflation.

Currency Stability: Global energy shocks lead to capital outflows as investors seek "safe havens." The RBI's policy rates must remain high enough to maintain a "yield differential" that attracts foreign portfolio investment.

3. Growth Projections for FY27 (6.9%)

The projected slowdown from 7.6% to 6.9% is a result of:

Weakened External Demand: Global energy crises reduce the purchasing power of India's trading partners, leading to a contraction in exports.

Margin Compression: High input costs (energy and petrochemicals) squeeze the profit margins of Indian firms, leading to a potential slowdown in private capital investment.

Consumption Dampening: High fuel and food prices act as a "regressive tax" on the middle and lower-income classes, potentially slowing down rural and urban discretionary spending.

4. Conclusion

The RBI's "Wait and Watch" strategy is a response to Supply-Side Inflation, which cannot be solved by monetary policy alone. While the RBI ensures financial stability through interest rate management, the 6.9% growth target can only be secured if the government accelerates supply-side reforms, enhances energy security, and maintains fiscal discipline. The 2026 economic landscape proves that in a globalized world, India's "internal" growth is deeply tethered to "external" energy stability.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/business/rbi-interest-inflation-have-increased-10625034/

3. Beyond The Illusion of Normalcy (Bs)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic: Fiscal policy and macroeconomic stability.

Sub-Topic: Impact of global crises on India

Introduction

India's macroeconomic stability is increasingly tested by global shocks such as the West Asia crisis. While the economy has shown resilience, limited fiscal space and high external dependence constrain the government's ability to respond effectively to such disruptions.

1. Nature of the Current Crisis

1. Geopolitical tensions in West Asia have disrupted energy supplies, trade routes, and global logistics networks.
2. Oil price volatility directly impacts India due to its high import dependence on crude oil.
3. Spillover effects include supply chain disruptions, higher freight costs, and financial market instability.

2. Macroeconomic Transmission Channels

Inflationary Pressures-Rising fuel prices trigger cost-push inflation, affecting food, transport, and manufacturing sectors.

External Sector Stress-Higher import bills widen the current account deficit (CAD) and pressure the rupee.

Growth Slowdown-Increased input costs and uncertainty reduce investment and consumption demand.

3. India's Fiscal Constraints

Limited Fiscal Buffer-Fiscal deficit remains elevated, restricting the government's ability to increase spending or subsidies.

Revenue Limitations-Tax revenues may not grow sufficiently during economic slowdown.

Expenditure Pressures-Increased need for welfare spending and subsidies strains public finances.

4. Policy Trade-offs

Inflation vs Growth Dilemma-Tight monetary policy can control inflation but may slow economic growth.

Subsidy vs Fiscal Discipline-Expanding subsidies helps consumers but worsens fiscal deficit.

Short-term Relief vs Long-term Stability-Immediate interventions may create long-term fiscal imbalances.

5. Sectoral Impacts

Manufacturing Sector-Higher energy costs reduce competitiveness and output.

Agriculture Sector-Rising input costs (fertilizers, fuel) affect farm productivity and prices.

Households-Increased cost of living reduces disposable income and consumption.

6. Structural Vulnerabilities

High Energy Import Dependence-Makes India susceptible to global price shocks.

Global Financial Integration-Exposure to capital flow volatility and currency fluctuations.

Supply Chain Dependence-Disruptions in global logistics affect domestic production.

7. Way Forward

Strengthening Fiscal Discipline-Improve tax buoyancy and rationalise expenditure.

Energy Diversification-Accelerate renewable energy adoption and reduce oil dependence.

Building External Buffers-Maintain adequate forex reserves and manage CAD sustainably.

Targeted Welfare Measures-Focus on vulnerable groups rather than broad-based subsidies.

Conclusion

India's economic resilience is being tested by global uncertainties and limited fiscal space. A balanced approach combining fiscal prudence, structural reforms, and targeted interventions is essential to navigate these challenges effectively.

Source: https://www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/beyond-the-optics-of-stability-india-s-economy-faces-rising-external-risks-126040801509_1.html

Question

Q. *India's limited fiscal buffer increases its vulnerability to external shocks. Examine the impact of global crises on India's macroeconomic stability and suggest policy measures to strengthen resilience.* (250 words)

Introduction

Global crises such as geopolitical conflicts and energy shocks significantly impact India's macroeconomic stability. Limited fiscal space constrains the government's ability to respond effectively.

Impact of External Shocks

1. Inflationary Pressures-Rising oil prices increase cost-push inflation across sectors.

2. External Sector Stress-Higher import bills widen the current account deficit and weaken the rupee.

3. Growth Slowdown-Increased uncertainty reduces investment and consumption demand.

Challenges Due to Limited Fiscal Buffer

1. Restricted Government Spending-High fiscal deficit limits expansionary fiscal policy.

2. Subsidy Burden-Increased welfare spending strains public finances.

Policy Measures

1. Fiscal Consolidation-Improve revenue mobilisation and rationalise expenditure.

2. Energy Diversification-Promote renewables to reduce dependence on imported oil.
3. Targeted Interventions-Focus on vulnerable sections rather than universal subsidies.

Conclusion

Strengthening macroeconomic resilience requires balancing fiscal discipline with growth objectives. Structural reforms and prudent policy responses are key to managing external shocks effectively.

Source: https://www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/beyond-the-optics-of-stability-india-s-economy-faces-rising-external-risks-126040801509_1.html

4. Together, Let Us Empower Our Nari Shakti Date (BI)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper I – Society
Topic: Role of women in society.
Sub-Topic: Social empowerment and inclusive governance

Introduction

Women's empowerment is central to achieving inclusive growth and democratic deepening. Enhancing women's participation in political institutions, particularly through legislative representation, is a critical step toward ensuring gender equality and responsive governance.

1. Significance of Women's Empowerment

1. Women constitute nearly half of the population, making their inclusion essential for balanced development.
2. Empowerment improves outcomes in education, health, nutrition, and economic productivity.
3. Greater participation leads to more inclusive and equitable policymaking.

2. Political Representation and Democracy

Democratic Legitimacy-Representation of women strengthens the representative nature of democracy.
Inclusive Decision-Making-Women leaders bring diverse perspectives, improving governance outcomes.
Correcting Historical Exclusion-Women have been underrepresented in legislatures due to structural and socio-cultural barriers.

3. Women's Reservation in Legislatures

1. Proposal to ensure adequate representation of women in Parliament and State Assemblies.
2. Builds on success of reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, which has improved grassroots governance.
3. Aims to institutionalise gender inclusion in higher political decision-making.

4. Challenges to Women's Political Participation

Socio-Cultural Barriers-Patriarchal norms restrict women's entry into politics.
Economic Constraints

1. Limited access to financial resources affects electoral participation.

Political Party Dynamics-Parties often hesitate to field women candidates in winnable constituencies.

5. Broader Dimensions of Nari Shakti

Economic Empowerment-Access to credit, entrepreneurship opportunities, and employment.
Social Empowerment-Education, healthcare, and safety measures.
Legal and Institutional Support-Laws ensuring rights, protection, and equal opportunities.

6. Constitutional and Policy Framework

1. Constitutional provisions under Articles 14, 15, and 16 ensure equality.
2. Government initiatives promote education, financial inclusion, and leadership development for women.

3. Emphasis on creating an enabling environment for participation across sectors.

7. Way Forward

Effective Implementation of Reservation-Ensure timely operationalisation of women's reservation in legislatures.
Capacity Building-Train and support women leaders for effective governance roles.
Changing Social Attitudes-Promote gender equality through awareness and education.
Strengthening Institutional Support-Encourage political parties to increase women's representation.

Conclusion

Empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for sustainable development and robust democracy. Strengthening women's participation in governance will ensure a more inclusive and equitable future.

Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/together-let-us-empower-our-nari-shakti/articleshow/130127981.cms

Question

Q. *Discuss the significance of women's representation in legislatures for strengthening democracy in India. What challenges hinder effective participation and how can they be addressed?* (250 words)

Introduction

Women's representation in legislatures is crucial for ensuring inclusive governance and democratic legitimacy. Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in political institutions.

Significance

Strengthening Democracy-Enhances representation and legitimacy of democratic institutions.
Inclusive Policymaking-Women bring diverse perspectives, improving policy outcomes in social sectors.
Social Transformation-Encourages greater participation of women in public life.

Challenges

Socio-Cultural Barriers-Patriarchal norms limit women's participation.
Economic Constraints-Lack of financial resources affects electoral competitiveness.
Political Barriers-Limited support from political parties.

Measures

Implement Reservation-Ensure timely enforcement of women's reservation in legislatures.
Capacity Building-Provide training and leadership development.
Institutional Support-Encourage parties to field more women candidates.

Conclusion

Enhancing women's representation is essential for inclusive democracy. Addressing structural barriers and strengthening institutional support will enable meaningful participation and empowerment.

Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/together-let-us-empower-our-nari-shakti/articleshow/130127981.cms

Editorial of the Day – 10.04.2026

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1. Timely inaction: On RBI's decision to hold repo rate (TH)

GS Paper III: Indian Economy.
Topic: Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
Sub-Topic: Monetary Policy Framework (MPC).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) opted for "Timely Inaction," maintaining a status quo on the repo rate at 5.25%. This "wait and watch" stance is a strategic response to a highly volatile global environment, specifically the escalating West Asia conflict. By choosing not to move the needle, the RBI aims to navigate the delicate balance between supporting a projected 6.9% GDP growth and managing supply-driven inflationary pressures that remain largely outside the influence of domestic interest rates.

2. The Logic of "Wait and Watch"

Cautious Prudence: The RBI's decision reflects a refusal to commit to a direction (hiking or cutting) when the global economic landscape is shifting rapidly.
Shock Absorption: A measured, stable response helps avoid delivering unnecessary shocks to financial markets, corporate investors, and household budgets.
Strategic Patience: In times of high uncertainty, "doing nothing" is often an active policy choice to allow clearer economic signals to emerge.

3. The Policy Dilemma: Growth vs. Inflation

Opposing Effects: The repo rate acts as a lever with inverse consequences.

1. Raising Rates: Can curb inflation but risks stifling economic growth and increasing the cost of borrowing.
2. Lowering Rates: Can stimulate growth but risks igniting inflationary pressures and weakening the currency.

Risk of Premature Action: Any hasty change before the full impact of global shocks is understood could worsen the current economic trajectory.

4. Impact of the West Asia Conflict

Supply Chain Disruptions: The ongoing friction has led to increased costs and slower logistics, contributing to "cost-push" inflation.
Stagnation Risks: Higher energy costs and supply bottlenecks simultaneously raise prices and slow down industrial output.
Geopolitical Chokepoints: Uncertainty surrounding strategic routes like the Strait of Hormuz adds a layer of risk that monetary policy cannot directly solve.
Policy Neutrality: A rate change at this juncture would likely fail to fix supply issues while potentially aggravating growth or inflation.

5. Growth Projections and Macroeconomic Uncertainty

Projected Slowdown: RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra has projected GDP growth at 6.9% for FY2026–27, a moderation from previous years.

Historical Variation: Past data shows that early-year forecasts are often subject to significant revision (e.g., FY26 was projected at 6.5% but realized 7.6%), highlighting the difficulty of long-term planning in the current climate.

Headwinds:

1. Industrial Slowdown: The World Bank anticipates a cooling off in the manufacturing and industrial sectors.
2. Weakening Demand: Both consumer discretionary spending and government demand are expected to show signs of fatigue.

6. Inflation Outlook: A Supply-Side Challenge

Projections: Inflation is expected to rise toward 4.6%.

The Nature of Inflation: Crucially, current inflation is driven by supply-side factors (energy, logistics, raw materials) rather than excessive consumer demand.

Ineffectiveness of Rate Hikes: Since people aren't overspending, raising interest rates would not fix the underlying cause of rising prices (supply scarcity). Instead, it would only harm the productive sectors of the economy by making capital more expensive.

7. Factors Requiring Policy Patience

The RBI is monitoring several external "wildcards" before making its next move:

Geopolitics: The duration and intensity of the West Asia conflict.

US Trade Policy: Potential tariff-related developments and their impact on global trade flows.

Climate Risks: The possible impact of El Niño on the Indian monsoon, which directly influences food inflation and rural demand.

Conclusion

The RBI's decision to maintain the status quo is a testament to prudent monetary management. By identifying that inflation is currently a supply-side problem, the MPC has correctly deduced that rate hikes are not the appropriate tool. As India faces a projected growth of 6.9%, the focus remains on maintaining stability while waiting for global volatility to subside. A flexible, data-driven approach will be essential as the RBI continues to safeguard the Indian economy from "imported" instability in 2026–27.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/timely-inaction-the-hindu-editorial-on-rbis-decision-to-hold-repo-rate/article70844455.ece

Question

"Monetary policy is often constrained when inflation is driven by supply-side shocks rather than demand-side pressures. In this context, analyze the RBI's decision to maintain the status quo on interest rates despite rising inflationary risks in 2026." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) chose to maintain the repo rate at 5.25%. This decision represents "Strategic Patience," acknowledging that while inflation is projected at 4.6%, its origins are rooted in global supply disruptions and geopolitical tensions in West Asia rather than domestic overheating.

2. The Constraint of Supply-Side Inflation

Tool Mismatch: Traditional monetary policy (adjusting interest rates) primarily manages "Demand-Pull" inflation by making borrowing more expensive.

Inefficacy in 2026: Current inflation is "Cost-Push," driven by high energy prices and chokepoints in global trade. Raising rates would not increase the supply of oil or fix the Strait of Hormuz; it would only penalize domestic manufacturers, leading to a "Growth-Inflation" trap.

Protecting Growth: With GDP growth projected to moderate to 6.9%, the RBI must ensure that the "cost of capital" does not become a secondary shock to the industrial sector.

3. Rationale for the Status Quo

Global Uncertainty: The RBI is waiting for clarity on US trade tariffs and the trajectory of the West Asia conflict.

Monsoon Risks: Potential El Niño impacts on the 2026 monsoon necessitate a "wait and watch" approach to see if food inflation becomes a structural issue.

Transmission Lag: Previous policy actions are still working their way through the banking system; the RBI prefers to see the full impact before layering on new changes.

4. Conclusion

The RBI's decision is a pragmatic realization that Monetary Policy cannot be the only answer to Geopolitical problems**.** By maintaining stability, the RBI provides a cushion for growth while urging the government to handle inflation through supply-side measures (e.g., logistics, energy diversification). This balanced approach is critical for sustaining India's macroeconomic resilience in an era of global volatility.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/timely-inaction-the-hindu-editorial-on-rbis-decision-to-hold-repo-rate/article70844455.ece

2. Public morality must govern matters of faith: Centre to Supreme Court on Sabarimala (IE)

GS Paper II: Indian Polity and Governance.

Topic: Separation of powers between various organs, dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions; Salient features of the Constitution.

Sub-Topic: Fundamental Rights vs. Religious Freedom (Articles 14, 15, 21 vs. 25, 26).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the ongoing review of the Sabarimala Temple Entry case before a 9-judge Constitution Bench has brought a fundamental tension to the forefront: the clash between Constitutional Morality and Traditional Faith. The Union Government has recently argued that "public morality"—rooted in tradition and collective conscience—should hold primacy in matters of faith, rather than a strictly judicial interpretation of constitutional morality. This case is no longer just about temple entry; it has evolved into a meta-debate on how a secular republic should interact with its ancient, diverse religious civilizations.

2. Constitutional Provisions: Articles 25 and 26

The debate sits at the intersection of individual rights and group autonomy:

Freedom of Religion (Article 25): Guarantees individuals the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. However, this is subject to public order, morality, and health, and the state's power to make laws for social reform.

Denominational Rights (Article 26): Grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion. Unlike Article 25, it is not explicitly subject to other fundamental rights, creating a loophole for autonomy.

The Balancing Act: The core challenge for the 2026 bench is determining whether the individual's right to equality (Article 14) and dignity (Article 21) can override the collective right of a denomination to maintain its specific rituals.

3. The Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine

Originating in the Shirr Mutt Case (1954), the ERP test has been the standard for decades:

Definition: The Court held that only those practices which are "essential" to a religion are protected from state interference.

Judicial Theology: Critics, including the Centre, argue that the ERP test forces judges to act as "theologians," deciding which rituals are core to a faith—a task for which the judiciary is often ill-equipped.
Current Critique: The government argues that the ERP test is inconsistent and fails to respect India's vast pluralism, where a practice may be "essential" to one localized sub-sect but not to the religion as a whole.

4. Public Morality vs. Constitutional Morality

The current hearings have highlighted a deep philosophical divide:
Constitutional Morality: A concept championed in cases like *Navtej Singh Johar*, it refers to adherence to the spirit of the Constitution—values of equality, liberty, and non-discrimination—even if they contradict the "majority view."
Public Morality: As argued by the Centre in 2026, this reflects the societal values and collective conscience of a community. The argument is that in matters of faith, the "internal logic" of the religion and its traditional morality should be respected.
The Risk Factor: Relying on public morality risks reinforcing majoritarianism or exclusionary practices (like the 10–50 age ban), while absolute constitutional morality may be perceived as "judicial overreach" into private spiritual matters.

5. Religious Denomination and Autonomy

The Denomination Question: If Ayyappa devotees are categorized as a "separate religious denomination," they gain higher protection under Article 26 to exclude others based on ritual purity.
Legal Precedents: Historically, the Venkataramana Degaru Case (1958) held that while a denomination can manage its affairs, it cannot exclude entire classes of Hindus from a public temple, as this would defeat the state's goal of social reform.
The Autonomy Paradox: Absolute autonomy allows for the preservation of diverse rituals but can provide a shield for discriminatory practices based on gender or caste.

6. Gender Justice and the 2018 Milestone

The 2018 Ruling: The original 4:1 judgment struck down the ban on women of menstruating age, calling it a form of **"physiological patriarchy"** that violates the dignity of women.
Milestone for Equality: It established that the right to pray is not a "Favor" from the state or a denomination, but a fundamental right regardless of gender.
Societal Resistance: The widespread protests following the 2018 order highlighted the "implementation gap," where judicial "progressivism" met fierce "traditionalist" resistance on the ground.

7. Contemporary Context: The "Swadeshi" Interpretation

In 2026, the Centre has introduced a "Swadeshi" or indigenous jurisprudence argument:
Civilizational Ethos: The government advocates for interpreting the Constitution through India's own civilizational lens rather than using "Western" secularist templates.
Respect for Pluralism: This approach suggests that a uniform standard for "correct" religious practice is impossible in a land of millions of localized traditions.
The Counter-Argument: Constitutional experts warn that a "civilizational" interpretation must not become a cover for the erosion of hard-won fundamental rights like gender equality.

8. Way Forward

The 9-judge bench has a monumental task in redefining the social contract for the next century:
Refining ERP: Moving toward a "Rights-Centric Approach"—where the court asks if a practice violates human dignity, rather than if it is "essential" to the religion.
Promoting Constitutional Literacy: Strengthening the understanding that the Constitution is a "living document" meant to transform society, not just reflect its existing prejudices.

Dialogue and Reform: Encouraging internal reforms within religious communities to align tradition with modern democratic ideals, reducing the need for judicial intervention.
Balanced Adjudication: Adopting a middle path that protects a denomination's "diversity" while ensuring it does not become a site of "exclusion."

Conclusion

The struggle between Constitutional Morality and Faith is the defining judicial challenge of modern India. While religious freedom is a cornerstone of the republic, it cannot exist as an island isolated from the sea of equality and dignity. The 2026 review is a vital opportunity to harmonize India's deep spiritual heritage with its progressive constitutional future, ensuring that the "Right to Faith" and the "Right to Equality" are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/public-morality-must-govern-matters-of-faith-centre-to-supreme-court-on-sabarimala-10628605/\

Question

"The conflict between Constitutional Morality and Public Morality in matters of faith underscores the tension between judicial progressivism and societal tradition. Critically analyse the 'Essential Religious Practices' doctrine in light of the ongoing Sabarimala review." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 review of the Sabarimala Temple Entry case serves as a constitutional crossroads. At its heart is the contest between Constitutional Morality—which prioritizes equality and dignity—and Public Morality, which emphasizes tradition and collective religious sentiment.

2. The Critique of the 'Essential Religious Practices' (ERP) Doctrine

The ERP doctrine, used since 1954, allows courts to protect only those religious rituals that are deemed "core" to a faith.
Judicial Overreach: By defining "essentiality," the judiciary often enters the realm of theology, potentially misinterpreting localized traditions.
Lack of Consistency: Critics argue the ERP test is applied unevenly, sometimes protecting rituals that violate equality while striking down others.
Disregard for Plurality: India's religious landscape is characterized by diverse sub-sects. A "one-size-fits-all" essentiality test can erase minority practices within a larger religion.

3. Constitutional vs. Public Morality

Constitutional Morality: This is a transformative tool. As seen in the 2018 judgment, it seeks to eliminate exclusionary practices (like the ban on women of a certain age) by upholding Articles 14 and 15.
Public Morality: The Centre's 2026 stance argues that "societal morality" must be considered to maintain social cohesion and respect the "internal autonomy" of religious denominations under Article 26.
The Tension: While constitutional morality prevents majoritarianism, public morality acts as a check against judicial intervention that might be seen as alien to the civilizational ethos of the people.

4. Conclusion

The way forward lies in a "Rights-based test" rather than an "Essentiality test." Instead of asking if a practice is essential to a religion, the Court should ask if it violates the fundamental dignity of an individual. For India to remain a vibrant secular republic, its religious traditions must eventually be harmonized with the non-negotiable values of equality and justice enshrined in the Constitution.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/public-morality-must-govern-matters-of-faith-centre-to-supreme-court-on-sabarimala-10628605/\

3. Large Corporates and The Sustainability Transition of MSMEs (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Economy
Topic - MSMEs and industrial growth.
Sub-Topic - Green finance and ESG frameworks

Introduction

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of India's economy but face constraints in adopting sustainable practices. Integrating MSMEs into the green transition is essential for achieving climate goals while ensuring inclusive industrial growth.

1. Importance of MSMEs in India's Economy

1. MSMEs contribute significantly to GDP, employment, and exports, making them central to economic resilience.
2. They are deeply integrated into supply chains of large corporates, especially in manufacturing and services.
3. Their transition to sustainability is crucial for achieving economy-wide decarbonisation.

2. Structural Challenges in MSME Sustainability Transition

Financial Constraints

1. MSMEs often lack access to affordable credit for investing in green technologies and energy-efficient systems.

Technological Limitations

1. Limited capacity to adopt modern, low-carbon production processes.

Awareness and Capability Gaps

1. Insufficient knowledge about ESG standards and sustainability compliance requirements.

3. Role of Large Corporates in Driving Transition

Supply Chain Influence

1. Large firms can enforce sustainability standards across their vendor networks, encouraging MSMEs to adopt green practices.

Knowledge and Technology Transfer

1. Corporates can provide technical assistance, training, and access to clean technologies.

Market Incentives

1. Preference for sustainable suppliers creates economic incentives for MSMEs to transition.

4. Green Finance as a Key Enabler

Need for Dedicated Financing Mechanisms

1. MSMEs require access to low-cost, long-term financing for green investments.

Green MSME Guarantee Facility

1. A corporate-backed guarantee mechanism can reduce risk for lenders and improve credit access.

Blended Finance Models

1. Combining public and private capital can mobilise resources for sustainable investments.

5. Benefits of MSME Green Transition

Environmental Gains

1. Reduction in emissions, resource efficiency, and alignment with climate targets.

Economic Competitiveness

1. Sustainable practices improve efficiency and open access to global markets with ESG standards.

Resilience and Risk Reduction

1. Lower exposure to regulatory risks and supply chain disruptions.

6. Policy and Institutional Support

Government Initiatives

1. Policies promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable manufacturing.

Regulatory Frameworks

1. Increasing emphasis on ESG compliance and sustainability reporting.

Public-Private Partnerships

1. Collaboration between government, corporates, and financial institutions to support MSMEs.

7. Way Forward

Strengthening Green Finance Ecosystem

1. Expand guarantee mechanisms and incentivise banks to lend for green projects.

Capacity Building for MSMEs

1. Provide training, technical support, and awareness programs.

Integration into Global Value Chains

1. Align MSMEs with international sustainability standards.

Corporate Responsibility and Collaboration

1. Encourage large firms to actively support MSME transition through partnerships.

Conclusion

The sustainability transition of MSMEs is critical for achieving India's climate and economic goals. Leveraging corporate leadership and green finance can ensure a just, inclusive, and efficient transition.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/large-corporates-and-the-sustainability-transition-of-msmes/article70843780.ece

Question

Q. *Discuss the role of large corporates and green finance in enabling the sustainability transition of MSMEs in India. What challenges must be addressed for effective implementation?* (250 words)

Introduction

MSMEs are central to India's economy but face challenges in adopting sustainable practices. Their transition is essential for achieving climate goals and maintaining competitiveness.

Role of Corporates and Green Finance

1. Supply Chain Influence

1. Large corporates can enforce sustainability standards across MSMEs.

2. Technology and Knowledge Support

1. Facilitate adoption of green technologies through training and collaboration.

3. Green Financing Mechanisms

1. Guarantee facilities and blended finance improve access to credit.

4. Market Incentives

1. Preference for sustainable suppliers enhances MSME competitiveness.

Challenges

1. Financial Constraints

1. Limited access to affordable green credit.

2. Technological Gaps

1. Lack of capacity to adopt advanced sustainable technologies.

3. Awareness Issues

1. Limited understanding of ESG requirements.

Conclusion

A collaborative approach involving corporates, financial institutions, and government is essential to enable MSMEs' green transition. Strengthening financial access and capacity building will ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/large-corporates-and-the-sustainability-transition-of-msmes/article70843780.ece

4. From access to agency - Reset THE GOAL for women's empowerment (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – ECONOMY
Topic - Inclusive growth and women's empowerment.
Sub-Topic - Inclusive growth and women's empowerment

Introduction

India's development trajectory increasingly recognises women as key drivers of economic growth. However, mere access to opportunities is insufficient; the focus must shift towards agency—women's ability to make decisions and influence outcomes in economic and social spheres.

1. From Access to Agency - Conceptual Shift

1. Traditional policies emphasised access to education, jobs, and financial services.
2. The current paradigm stresses agency—control over income, assets, and decision-making.
3. True empowerment requires women to move from passive participants to active economic agents.

2. Current Status and Gaps

Low Labour Force Participation

1. Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) remains relatively low despite improvements.

Quality of Employment

1. Women are concentrated in informal, low-paying, and insecure jobs.

Unpaid Care Burden

1. Disproportionate responsibility for household work limits women's economic engagement.

3. Structural Barriers to Agency

Social Norms and Patriarchy

1. Cultural constraints restrict mobility, decision-making, and employment choices.

Asset Ownership Gap

1. Limited ownership of land, property, and financial assets reduces bargaining power.

Digital and Financial Divide

1. Unequal access to technology and financial systems limits participation in modern economy.

4. Economic Implications

Underutilised Human Capital

1. Low female participation reduces India's potential GDP growth.

Inefficient Resource Allocation

1. Lack of agency leads to suboptimal use of skills and productivity.

Impact on Household Welfare

1. Women's empowerment improves outcomes in health, education, and nutrition.

5. Role of Policy and Institutions

Legal and Policy Frameworks

1. Initiatives like women's reservation and financial inclusion schemes aim to enhance participation.

Skill Development and Employment Programs

1. Focus on improving employability and entrepreneurship among women.

Social Protection Measures

1. Schemes addressing childcare, safety, and welfare support participation.

6. Enablers of Women's Agency

Education and Skill Development

1. Enhances autonomy and economic decision-making capacity.

Access to Finance and Digital Tools

1. Enables entrepreneurship and integration into markets.

Collective Platforms

1. Self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives strengthen bargaining power.

7. Way Forward

Focus on Quality Employment

1. Shift from mere job creation to decent, secure, and well-paying jobs.

Reduce Care Burden

1. Invest in childcare infrastructure and shared domestic responsibilities.

Strengthen Asset Ownership

1. Promote women's ownership of land and financial assets.

Behavioural Change

1. Address deep-rooted social norms through awareness and education.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment must go beyond access to opportunities and focus on agency. Enabling women to exercise control over resources and decisions is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/women-empowerment-access-agency-india-ambitious-goals-gender-equality-income-wage-gap-workforce-economy-11775562945939.html

Question

Q. *"Women's empowerment in India must move from access to agency." Examine the structural barriers limiting women's agency and suggest policy measures to enhance their economic participation.* (250 words)

Introduction

Women's empowerment is critical for inclusive development. While access to education and employment has improved, true empowerment requires enhancing women's agency in economic and social decision-making.

Structural Barriers

1. Social Norms and Patriarchy

1. Restrict mobility, employment choices, and decision-making power.

2. Low Labour Force Participation

1. Limited opportunities and concentration in informal jobs.

3. Unpaid Care Burden

1. Reduces time available for economic activities.

4. Asset Ownership Gap

1. Weak bargaining power due to lack of ownership of assets.

Policy Measures

1. Promote Quality Employment

1. Ensure decent wages, job security, and formalisation.

2. Strengthen Financial and Digital Inclusion

1. Expand access to credit, banking, and digital tools.

3. Invest in Care Infrastructure

1. Provide childcare services to reduce unpaid work burden.

4. Behavioural Change Initiatives

1. Address gender norms through education and awareness.

Conclusion

Empowering women through agency will unlock economic potential and improve social outcomes. A multidimensional approach addressing structural barriers is essential for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/women-empowerment-access-agency-india-ambitious-goals-gender-equality-income-wage-gap-workforce-economy-11775562945939.html

Editorial of the Day – 11.04.2026

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1. **Bolstering deterrence through submarine dominance (TH)** -01
2. **New measure for heat stress reframes climate challenge (IE)** -03
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1. Bolstering deterrence through submarine dominance (TH)

GS Paper III: Internal Security.
Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Security challenges and their management in border areas.
Sub-Topic: India's Nuclear Submarine Programme (SSBNs).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India's strategic depth reached a new milestone with the imminent commissioning of INS Aridhaman. As the third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) of the Arihant-class, its entry into service—hinted at by Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and confirmed by Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh Tripathi—signals a "coming of age" for the Indian Navy. In an era where maritime zones like the Strait of Hormuz are becoming geopolitical flashpoints, INS Aridhaman provides the silent, survivable, and lethal "second-strike" capability essential for India's credible minimum deterrence.

2. The Evolution of the Arihant-Class Fleet

Continuous Progression: INS Aridhaman follows the successful operationalization of INS Arihant (2016) and INS Arighat (2024).
Strategic Expansion: The commissioning of the third vessel indicates that India is moving away from a "technology demonstrator" phase toward maintaining a Continuous At-Sea Deterrence (CASD) posture.
Final Trials: Admiral Dinesh Tripathi noted that trials are in the final stages, suggesting the vessel will be fully operational by the second half of 2026.

3. Enhanced Firepower and Technological Capability

INS Aridhaman represents a significant "force multiplier" over its predecessors:
Increased Displacement: A larger vessel (approximately 7,000 tonnes), allowing for improved stealth and endurance.
Missile Capacity:

1. Can carry up to 24 K-15 Sagarika short-range missiles (range: ~750 km).
2. Alternatively, it can deploy 8 nuclear-tipped K-4 or K-5 intermediate-range missiles (range: 3,500 km to 5,000+ km).

Technological Leap: This higher firepower ensures that India can strike deep into adversarial territory while remaining hidden in the deep waters of the Indian Ocean.

4. Strengthening India's Nuclear Triad

The nuclear triad is the ability to launch nuclear weapons from land, air, and sea.
The Sea Pillar: While land-based missiles (Agni) and aircraft (Rafale/Mirage) are visible and vulnerable to pre-emptive strikes, SSBNs are nearly impossible to track, making them the most survivable leg of the triad.
Second-Strike Deterrence: As a nation with a "No First Use" (NFU) policy, India's deterrence is only credible if it can survive an initial nuclear attack and retaliate with devastating force.
Elite Grouping: With the commissioning of Aridhaman, India solidifies its place among an elite group of nations (USA, Russia, China, France, UK) capable of designing and operating a nuclear-powered fleet.

5. Changing Nature of Modern Warfare & Geopolitics

Multi-Domain Interconnectivity: Modern conflicts (such as those in West Asia) demonstrate that land-based tensions rapidly spill over into maritime corridors.

Indian Ocean Security: Rising Chinese presence in the IOR and the strategic importance of chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz necessitate a permanent, high-tech naval presence.

Operation Sindoor & Naval Roles: Recent naval operations highlight that a strong sea-based deterrence is now a prerequisite for national security, preventing adversaries from considering naval blockades or maritime escalation.

6. Self-Reliance & The Future Roadmap

Indigenous Defense Manufacturing: The SSBN program is a crown jewel of Atmanirbhar Bharat, reducing dependence on foreign suppliers like Russia or the West during global supply chain disruptions.

Upcoming Projects:

1. Work on the fourth Arihant-class submarine is already underway.
2. A longer-term plan aims to develop indigenous nuclear attack submarines (SSNs)—which are faster and meant for hunting enemy ships—by 2036–38.

Strategic Autonomy: By building its own nuclear submarines, India ensures its strategic decisions are not influenced by external technology-denial regimes.

Conclusion

The commissioning of INS Aridhaman is a definitive moment in India's journey toward becoming a maritime superpower. By bolstering its "second-strike" capability, India reinforces its commitment to Credible Minimum Deterrence while ensuring regional stability. As warfare shifts toward the sea, submarine dominance will remain the most critical pillar of India's national security strategy, providing the silent shield necessary for the nation's continued growth and sovereignty.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/bolsteringdeterrence-through-submarine-dominance/article70848344.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The induction of larger, more lethal SSBNs like INS Aridhaman marks a paradigm shift in India's maritime security strategy. Analyze the significance of sea-based nuclear deterrence in the context of India's 'No First Use' doctrine." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

With the commissioning of INS Aridhaman in 2026, India's nuclear triad has moved from a nascent stage to a mature, credible deterrent. As a 7,000-tonne vessel capable of carrying K-4 and K-5 missiles, it represents the vital sea-based leg of India's nuclear strategy, ensuring stability in a volatile Indo-Pacific region.

2. Significance for 'No First Use' (NFU) Doctrine

India's nuclear policy is anchored in "Credible Minimum Deterrence" and "No First Use." This posture places a premium on Second-Strike Capability:

Survivability: Land-based silos and airfields are fixed targets. SSBNs, being mobile and submerged, provide the only "invulnerable" platform that can survive a first strike.

Assured Retaliation: The presence of Aridhaman ensures that an adversary faces certain, massive retaliation even if India's land-based assets are neutralized.

Strategic Patience: A sea-based deterrent allows the political leadership time to assess the situation before authorizing a retaliatory strike, preventing accidental escalations.

3. Maritime Security and Regional Deterrence

Countering Asymmetric Threats: As the PLAN (Chinese Navy) expands its footprint in the Indian Ocean, India's SSBNs act as a check against maritime coercion.

Securing Chokepoints: Strategic zones like the Strait of Hormuz are critical for India's energy security. Submarine dominance ensures these lanes remain open and deterred from hostile interference.
Indigenous Resilience: By building these vessels indigenously, India maintains Strategic Autonomy, ensuring that its nuclear "umbrella" is not subject to foreign sanctions or technological dependence.

4. Conclusion

INS Aridhaman is not just a weapon system; it is a diplomatic instrument of peace. By providing a credible second-strike capability, it discourages adversaries from nuclear misadventur. As India moves toward developing SSNs by 2038, submarine dominance will continue to be the cornerstone of its defense, ensuring that its NFU commitment remains a position of strength, not a vulnerability.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/bolsteringdeterrence-through-submarine-dominance/article70848344.ece#google_vignette

2. New measure for heat stress reframes climate challenge (IE)

GS Paper I & III: Geography / Disaster management.
Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena (Heatwaves); Disaster and disaster management.
Sub-Topic: Wet-Bulb Temperature and Human Survivability.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, a groundbreaking study published in *Nature Communications* has shifted the global discourse on climate safety. The research suggests that human tolerance to heat stress—measured via Wet-Bulb Temperature—is significantly lower than the previously accepted threshold of 35°C. For a tropical nation like India, where humidity and temperature often peak simultaneously, this finding transforms heatwaves from a seasonal discomfort into an existential public health crisis, necessitating an immediate recalibration of India's climate adaptation strategies.

2. Wet-Bulb Temperature & The Science of Heat Stress

The Concept: Wet-bulb temperature measures the combined effect of heat and humidity. It indicates the lowest temperature achievable through evaporative cooling.
Human Cooling Mechanism: The human body maintains a core temperature of approximately 37°C primarily through sweating. However, when humidity is high, sweat cannot evaporate efficiently.
Revised Survival Thresholds: * **Old Standard:** 35°C wet-bulb was traditionally considered the limit of human survivability.
New Evidence: Studies now indicate that 31°C wet-bulb can be critical, particularly for the elderly, children, and those with underlying health conditions.
Heat Index vs. Ambient Temperature: A dry temperature of 35°C can feel like 45–50°C if the humidity is high, making the "Real Feel" (Heat Index) a far more accurate risk indicator than a standard thermometer.

3. India's High Vulnerability Profile

Geographical Exposure: India's tropical location subjects its northern and central plains to intense solar radiation, while coastal regions suffer from high humidity, creating a "lethal cocktail" of heat stress.
Urban Heat Islands (UHI): Concrete-heavy cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad experience temperatures 2–5°C higher than surrounding rural areas due to heat-trapping buildings, lack of vegetation, and vehicular pollution.
The Navi Mumbai Lesson: A 2023 tragedy where 13 people died of heatstroke at an ambient temperature of only 35°C proved that exposure duration and humidity are more lethal than absolute temperature.
Chronic Night-time Stress: In urban areas, concrete structures release stored heat at night, preventing the body from recovering and leading to increased cumulative mortality.

4. Socio-Economic Dimensions of the Heat Crisis

The "Outdoor" Vulnerability: Laborers in construction, agriculture, street vendors, and "gig workers" face the highest risk as their livelihoods prevent them from seeking shade.
Cooling Inequality: Adaptive capacity is divided by income. Poor households lack access to air conditioning, proper ventilation, or even adequate hydration, making heat a "social justice" issue.
Economic Productivity: Heat stress is an occupational hazard that leads to significant losses in man-hours, particularly in labour-intensive sectors that drive India's GDP.
Gendered Impact: In rural India, women often spend hours outdoors for water collection and fuel wood, increasing their exposure to extreme thermal conditions.

5. Urban Planning and Environmental Factors

Infrastructural Deficits: Rapid, unplanned urbanization has replaced "blue-green" spaces (water bodies and parks) with heat-absorbing asphalt and concrete.
Decline in Green Cover: The loss of trees reduces natural "evapotranspiration" cooling and removes the buffer of shade that protects pedestrians.
Poor Housing Design: Low-income informal settlements often feature tin roofs and lack of cross-ventilation, turning homes into "ovens" during heatwaves.
Climate Change Multiplier: Global warming (currently 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels) has made heatwaves in India 30 times more likely and significantly longer in duration.

6. Policy Response: Heat Action Plans (HAPs) and Gaps

The Pioneer Model: Ahmedabad was the first South Asian city to launch a HAP in 2013, focusing on early warnings and emergency medical responses.
The "Dry Heat" Bias: Most existing HAPs are flawed because they trigger alerts based only on temperature, ignoring the humidity factor that defines the "wet-bulb" risk.
Generic vs. Localized: Plans often lack city-specific data, failing to identify "heat hotspots" or account for the specific demographic needs of a local population.
Implementation Hurdles: Weak inter-agency coordination, inconsistent funding, and a lack of real-time health data hamper the effectiveness of these plans.

7. Global Frameworks and Institutional Support

IPCC Guidance: Recent reports emphasize that urban resilience through "nature-based solutions" is the primary defense against heat extremes.
NDMA Role: The National Disaster Management Authority provides guidelines, but there is an urgent need to mandate Wet-Bulb metrics as the official standard for declaring heatwaves.
SDG Alignment: Addressing the heat crisis is essential to achieving SDG 3 (Health), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
International Best Practices: Paris and New York utilize "cool roofs" (reflective paint) and "cooling centers" (public air-conditioned spaces) to protect citizens.

8. Way Forward: A Strategy for Resilience

Scientific Recalibration: Transition from temperature-based alerts to Wet-Bulb and Heat Index-based warning systems.
Urban Greening: Massive investment in urban forests, green roofs, and the restoration of wetlands to break the Urban Heat Island effect.
Labor Protection Laws: Implement mandatory heat-safe work hours, shade requirements, and "hydration breaks" for all outdoor workers.
Passive Cooling Architecture: Update building codes to promote reflective materials, traditional cooling techniques, and better ventilation in affordable housing.
Hyper-Local Early Warnings: Use mobile technology and local radio to provide "street-level" heat advisories to vulnerable groups.

Conclusion

The realization that human heat tolerance is lower than previously estimated is a clarion call for India. The heat crisis is no longer just an environmental issue; it is a profound public health, economic, and social justice challenge. Protecting the republic's citizens in 2026 and beyond requires moving past generic advisories toward scientific, inclusive, and infrastructure-led adaptation. Only by acknowledging the "Wet-Bulb" reality can India ensure that its growth is not withered by an increasingly hostile climate.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/new-measure-heat-stress-reframes-climate-challenge-10630296/

Question

"The concept of Wet-Bulb temperature has redefined our understanding of heatwaves in the tropics. Analyze why India's existing Heat Action Plans (HAPs) need a paradigm shift to account for the combined impact of heat and humidity." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Traditional heatwave assessments in India have relied on ambient "dry" temperatures. However, the emergence of Wet-Bulb Temperature—which accounts for both heat and humidity—reveals that the survival threshold is closer to 31°C than the earlier estimated 35°C. This shift is critical for India's 2026 climate policy.

2. Limitations of Existing Heat Action Plans (HAPs)

Single-Variable Focus: Most HAPs are triggered at temperature thresholds (e.g., 40°C or 45°C), ignoring that a 35°C day with high humidity can be more lethal due to the failure of the human sweating mechanism.

The UHI Blindspot: Plans often ignore the Urban Heat Island effect, where concrete-dense areas remain dangerously hot at night, preventing physiological recovery.

Data Gaps: There is a lack of real-time monitoring of humidity at the neighborhood level, leading to "under-reporting" of heat stress in coastal and high-humidity inland regions.

3. Required Paradigm Shift

Metric Transition: HAPs must adopt the Heat Index or Wet-Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) to issue red alerts.

Socio-Economic Inclusivity: Shift from "general awareness" to "occupational safety," mandating changes in work hours for the 75% of India's workforce that is exposed to heat.

Nature-Based Urbanism: Moving from "cooling through ACs" (which increases outdoor heat) to "cooling through ecology" (urban forests and reflective "cool roofs").

4. Conclusion

India's HAPs must evolve from emergency medical responses to long-term structural adaptations. By integrating Wet-Bulb science into governance, India can transition from a reactive state to a climate-resilient republic, safeguarding the lives and productivity of its most vulnerable citizens.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/new-measure-heat-stress-reframes-climate-challenge-10630296/

3. The tongue-in-cheek world of India's early poets (MT)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Culture
Topic: Indian literature and cultural traditions
Sub-Topic: Role of art and literature in society

Introduction

Early Indian poetic traditions, particularly in the Bhakti period, were not merely devotional but also deeply expressive, often incorporating humour, irony, and playful irreverence. These literary forms reveal a nuanced cultural landscape where spirituality coexisted with critique, creativity, and emotional depth.

1. Nature of Early Indian Poetic Traditions

1. Early Indian poetry was not confined to rigid religious expression but displayed rich diversity in tone, including satire, humour, and wit.
2. Poets used everyday language and imagery, making literature accessible and relatable to common people.
3. The blending of devotion with playful expression reflected a dynamic and evolving cultural ethos.

2. Bhakti Movement and Literary Innovation

1. Bhakti poets transformed religious expression by emphasising personal devotion over ritualism.
2. They often addressed deities in informal, intimate, and sometimes teasing tones, breaking hierarchical barriers.
3. This approach democratised spirituality and made literature a medium of social and emotional connection.

3. Use of Humour and Irony

1. Poets employed humour and irony to question orthodoxy and rigid social norms.
2. Playful narratives allowed subtle critique of power structures, patriarchy, and religious dogma.
3. Such expressions demonstrate that devotion in Indian traditions was not devoid of intellectual engagement or dissent.

4. Representation of Women and Gender

1. Women poets and female perspectives in literature brought unique emotional depth and agency.
2. Some compositions challenged traditional gender roles and highlighted women's voices in spiritual discourse.
3. However, patriarchal structures still influenced literary representation, creating a complex interplay of empowerment and constraint.

5. Cultural and Social Significance

1. These poetic traditions acted as a bridge between elite and popular culture, fostering inclusivity.
2. They contributed to the vernacularisation of literature, promoting regional languages and identities.
3. Literature became a tool for social reform and cultural continuity, preserving traditions while enabling change.

6. Relevance in Contemporary Context

1. The blend of devotion, humour, and critique reflects India's tradition of pluralism and intellectual freedom.
2. These works continue to influence modern literature, theatre, and cultural discourse.
3. They highlight the importance of creative expression as a means of questioning and understanding society.

Conclusion

Early Indian poetry exemplifies a rich interplay of devotion, creativity, and critique. Its tongue-in-cheek style reflects a vibrant cultural tradition that values both spirituality and intellectual freedom, making it relevant even in contemporary times.

Source: https://www.pressreader.com/india/mint-delhi/20260411/281706916248044

Question

Q. *Early Indian devotional poetry was not merely spiritual but also reflected humour, critique, and social commentary. Examine its significance in shaping India's cultural traditions.* (250 words)

Introduction

Early Indian devotional poetry, particularly during the Bhakti movement, went beyond mere spiritual expression and incorporated elements of humour, irony, and social critique. This distinctive feature made it a powerful medium for cultural and social transformation.

Significance in Cultural Traditions

1. Early devotional poetry played a crucial role in democratising religion by emphasising personal devotion and reducing the dominance of ritualistic practices and priestly hierarchies.
2. The use of humour and playful irreverence enabled poets to question rigid social norms and challenge established power structures without direct confrontation.
3. These poetic traditions promoted the use of vernacular languages, thereby making literature accessible to the masses and strengthening regional cultural identities.
4. The inclusion of diverse voices, including those of women and marginalised communities, enriched the cultural narrative and expanded the scope of spiritual discourse.
5. By blending devotion with emotional and intellectual engagement, these works fostered a culture of pluralism, tolerance, and open expression.

Conclusion

Thus, early Indian devotional poetry significantly shaped India's cultural traditions by combining spirituality with creativity and critique. Its legacy continues to influence contemporary cultural expressions and underscores the importance of inclusive and dynamic traditions.

Source: https://www.pressreader.com/india/mint-delhi/20260411/281706916248044

4. Tourism Renaissance (TS)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Tourism sector and economic development
Sub-Topic: Cultural economy and heritage resources

Introduction

Tourism in India is increasingly being recognised not merely as a service industry but as a strategic engine of economic growth and civilisational projection. The Union Budget 2026-27 reflects a paradigm shift towards institutionalising tourism as a key pillar of inclusive and sustainable development.

1. Tourism as an Engine of Growth

1. Tourism contributes significantly to GDP, employment generation, and foreign exchange earnings, making it a vital component of India's service sector.
2. It generates strong multiplier effects by stimulating allied sectors such as transport, hospitality, handicrafts, and local services.
3. The sector supports millions of livelihoods, particularly in rural and informal economies, thereby enhancing economic inclusivity.

2. Civilisational Dimension of Tourism

1. India's tourism strength lies in its deep civilisational heritage, including spirituality, culture, architecture, and knowledge traditions.
2. Historic centres such as Varanasi and heritage sites like Mahabalipuram serve as repositories of intellectual and cultural capital.
3. Tourism thus functions as an instrument of soft power, enhancing India's global cultural influence.

3. Budget 2026-27: Key Policy Shifts

1. The budget recognises tourism as a long-term developmental priority rather than a peripheral service sector.
2. It promotes cluster-based development through integrated tourism circuits combining infrastructure, heritage, and local economies.
3. There is a clear emphasis on decentralisation by promoting tourism in Tier-2, Tier-3, and rural regions.
4. Investments in connectivity and amenities aim to improve the overall visitor experience.

4. Human Capital and Institutional Gaps

1. The tourism sector continues to face shortages of skilled manpower, particularly in hospitality and service delivery.
2. Strengthening institutions for training and capacity building is essential to improve service quality.
3. Enhancing visitor satisfaction requires consistent improvements in professionalism and standards.

5. Experiential and Sustainable Tourism

1. The sector is shifting towards an experience-based model that emphasises culture, traditions, and immersive engagement.
2. Sustainable tourism practices, including eco-tourism and heritage conservation, are increasingly prioritised.
3. Community participation is essential to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and authenticity of experiences.

6. Regional Development and Inclusivity

1. Tourism can act as a catalyst for development in underdeveloped and remote regions by creating local employment opportunities.
2. It promotes balanced regional growth and reduces migration pressures from rural areas.
3. The sector strengthens local economies by integrating them into broader economic networks.

7. Challenges

1. Infrastructure gaps, including poor connectivity and inadequate tourist facilities, continue to constrain growth.
2. Fragmented governance and lack of coordination among stakeholders hinder effective implementation.
3. Increasing global competition necessitates higher standards and innovation in tourism services.

8. Way Forward

1. An integrated policy approach aligning tourism with infrastructure, culture, and economic planning is required.
2. Skill development initiatives must be strengthened to enhance service quality and competitiveness.
3. Digital tools should be leveraged for marketing, management, and improving tourist experiences.
4. Sustainability and conservation must remain central to tourism development strategies.

Conclusion

India's tourism strategy must combine economic objectives with its civilisational strengths. A holistic, sustainable, and decentralised approach can transform tourism into a powerful driver of inclusive growth and global influence.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/tourism-renaissance-1503580228.html

Question

Q. *Tourism in India is not merely a service sector but a strategic tool for economic growth and civilisational projection. Discuss in the context of recent policy initiatives.* (250 words)

Introduction

Tourism in India plays a dual role as both an economic driver and a medium for civilisational projection. In recent years, policy initiatives, particularly in the Union Budget 2026-27, have increasingly recognised tourism as a strategic sector capable of contributing to inclusive growth, employment generation, and global cultural influence.

Economic and Strategic Importance

1. Tourism contributes significantly to India's GDP and serves as a major source of employment, particularly for semi-skilled and unskilled workers across rural and urban areas.

2. It generates strong multiplier effects by boosting demand in related sectors such as transportation, hospitality, handicrafts, and local services, thereby stimulating overall economic activity.
3. Additionally, tourism acts as an important instrument of soft power by showcasing India's rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical legacy to the global community.

Policy Initiatives

1. The Union Budget 2026-27 emphasises cluster-based tourism development by promoting integrated circuits that combine infrastructure development with cultural and heritage preservation.
2. There is a clear focus on decentralisation, with efforts to promote tourism in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities as well as rural areas, thereby ensuring balanced regional development.
3. The government has also prioritised sustainable tourism practices, including eco-tourism and heritage conservation, to ensure long-term viability of the sector.

Challenges

1. Despite policy efforts, infrastructure deficits such as inadequate connectivity, poor sanitation, and limited tourist facilities continue to hinder growth.
2. The sector also faces a shortage of skilled manpower, which affects service quality and overall visitor experience.
3. Furthermore, increasing global competition requires India to continuously upgrade its tourism offerings and maintain high standards.

Conclusion

Tourism has the potential to emerge as a key pillar of India's development strategy by combining economic growth with cultural diplomacy. However, this requires sustained policy support, improved infrastructure, skill development, and a strong focus on sustainability to fully realise its potential.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/tourism-renaissance-1503580228.html


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Editorial of the Day – 13.04.2026

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1. Tourism and trade: On the Great Nicobar mega-infrastructure project (TH)

GS Paper II: International Relations
Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations
Sub-Topic: Maritime Chokepoints and Global Trade.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Malacca Strait has regained centre stage in India's strategic calculus following significant progress on the Great Nicobar Island Development Project. This narrow waterway, separating the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, is not just a geographical feature but the world's most critical maritime artery. As India seeks to transform the Andaman and Nicobar Islands into a "maritime bastion," the Malacca Strait serves as the primary gateway for India's economic and naval expansion into the Indo-Pacific.

2. Geographical and Strategic Profile

The Connector: A 930 km-long funnel-shaped waterway connecting the Indian Ocean (via the Andaman Sea) to the Pacific Ocean (via the South China Sea).
Global Chokepoint: At its narrowest point—the Phillips Channel—it is only 2.7 km wide, making it one of the most sensitive maritime chokepoints in the world.
Efficiency: It offers the shortest and most cost-effective sea route between the Middle East/Africa and the booming economies of East Asia.

3. Role in Global Trade and Energy Security

Trade Volume: Approximately 25% of all traded goods globally pass through the strait, including massive shipments of manufactured goods from China, Japan, and South Korea.
The Energy Lifeline: It is the primary transit point for oil from the Persian Gulf to East Asian markets. It handles roughly one-third of global oil shipments and nearly all of China's maritime energy imports.
Economic Impact: Any blockage or disruption in the strait would lead to an immediate spike in global energy prices and a paralysis of international supply chains, particularly in the electronics and automotive sectors.

4. India's Strategic Pivot: The Great Nicobar Project

India is leveraging its geography to increase its "net security provider" status in the region:
Proximity Advantage: The Great Nicobar Island is located barely 90 nautical miles from the mouth of the Malacca Strait (Sabang, Indonesia).
International Transshipment Terminal (ICTT): The project aims to build a world-class port that can capture the traffic of the Malacca Strait, allowing India to become a hub for global logistics.
Naval Presence: Upgrading military infrastructure in the islands allows the Indian Navy to monitor the entry and exit of vessels—including submarines and warships of adversarial powers—into the Indian Ocean.
Strategic Leverage: By holding the "key" to the strait, India gains significant diplomatic and strategic leverage in the Indo-Pacific, aligning with the "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.

5. The "Malacca Dilemma" and Geopolitics

China's Vulnerability: The term "Malacca Dilemma" refers to China's fear that in the event of a conflict, adversarial powers (like India or the US) could blockade the strait, cutting off China's energy supply and crashing its economy.

Alternative Routes: This fear has driven China to invest in the CPEC (Gwadar Port) and the Northern Sea Route to bypass the strait, though none are currently as efficient.

Global Monitoring: Major powers, including the US, Japan, and Australia (QUAD members), maintain a constant watch over the strait to ensure "Freedom of Navigation."

6. Challenges and Vulnerabilities

Piracy and Armed Robbery: Despite coordinated patrols by littoral states (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia), the strait remains a hotspot for piracy due to its high traffic and narrow navigation lanes.

Navigational Hazards: The strait is shallow in parts (25 meters) and prone to heavy haze from Indonesian forest fires, increasing the risk of maritime accidents and oil spills.

Congestion: It is the world's busiest lane, with over 100,000 vessels annually. The increasing size of "Post-Panamax" ships makes maneuvering through the narrow channel difficult.

Militarization: Rising tensions in the South China Sea have led to increased naval patrols, turning a commercial artery into a potential military flashpoint.

Conclusion

The Malacca Strait remains the "beating heart" of global maritime commerce. For India, the strait is no longer just a transit point but a strategic opportunity to project power and economic influence. Through the Great Nicobar project, India is finally putting its "maritime geography" to work. However, the future of the strait depends on the delicate balance between regional development and the avoidance of geopolitical conflict. Sustaining its status as a free and open corridor is essential for the stability of the 21st-century global economy.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/tourism-and-trade-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-great-nicobar-mega-infrastructure-project/article70855087.ece

Question

"The Malacca Strait is the epicenter of the 'Indo-Pacific' narrative. Analyze how India's strategic infrastructure projects in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands aim to mitigate regional security challenges and leverage the 'Malacca Dilemma'." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Malacca Strait, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is the world's most vital maritime chokepoint. With the Great Nicobar Island Development Project in 2026, India is shifting from being a passive observer of this waterway to an active strategic stakeholder, aiming to secure its economic interests and enhance its naval footprint.

2. Leveraging the 'Malacca Dilemma'

The 'Malacca Dilemma' refers to the high dependence of East Asian economies, especially China, on this narrow strait for energy imports. India's proximity provides:

Surveillance Capability: By stationing advanced maritime reconnaissance assets in the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Islands, India can monitor every naval movement entering the Indian Ocean.

Strategic Deterrence: In times of conflict, the ability to potentially interdict energy supplies through the strait provides India with a "non-kinetic" deterrent against maritime aggression.

Regional Balancing: It allows India to act as a counter-weight to rising naval assertiveness in the South China Sea.

3. Mitigating Security Challenges

Maritime Security: The A&N command facilitates coordinated patrols with Indonesia and Thailand, tackling piracy and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
HADR Operations: The islands serve as a launchpad for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia, enhancing India's soft power.
Economic Resilience: The proposed Transshipment Port at Great Nicobar will reduce India's dependence on foreign ports (like Colombo or Singapore) for handling its own cargo, ensuring "Atmanirbhar" maritime logistics.

4. Conclusion

The Malacca Strait is the bridge between India's 'Act East' and 'Indo-Pacific' policies. By developing the A&N Islands into a strategic hub, India is not just securing its own borders but ensuring the stability of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." The challenge lies in balancing this military-economic expansion with the fragile ecological sensitivity of the Nicobar archipelago.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/tourism-and-trade-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-great-nicobar-mega-infrastructure-project/article70855087.ece

2. Himalayan Oak Forests: Keystone of Ecology and Livelihood (IE)

GS Paper III: Environment, Ecology, and Disaster Management.
Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
Sub-Topic: Himalayan Ecosystem and its vulnerability.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Uttarakhand High Court issued a landmark stay on the felling of oak trees in Mussoorie, intervening in a civic construction project. This judicial action underscores a critical environmental reality: the Himalayan oak is not just a tree but the "ecological heartbeat" of the region. As developmental pressures mount, the court's decision highlights the non-negotiable need to protect native broad-leaved forests, which are increasingly under threat from infrastructure expansion and the invasive spread of fire-prone species.

2. Oak Forests as Keystone Ecosystems

Genus Quercus: Dominates the mid-altitude Himalayan belt (800–3000 m).
Ecological Backbone: Acting as a keystone species, oaks support a vast web of life that would collapse in their absence.
Biodiversity Hotspots:

1. Flora: Sustain a rich variety of orchids, mosses, ferns, and shrubs.
2. Fauna: Provide critical food (acorns) and habitat for Himalayan langurs, Asiatic black bears, and various bird species like jays and woodpeckers.
3. Micro-life: Maintain soil health through complex microbial and insect networks that drive nutrient cycling.

3. Critical Ecosystem Services

Water Conservation: Oak forests act as "sponge" ecosystems, improving soil infiltration and facilitating the recharge of Himalayan springs, which are the primary water source for rural communities.
Soil Stability: Their extensive and deep root systems anchor the steep Himalayan slopes, acting as a natural defense against soil erosion and landslides.
Climate Regulation: They serve as efficient carbon sinks and regulate local microclimates by maintaining moisture levels and reducing ambient temperatures.
Socio-Economic Value: Local communities depend heavily on oak for high-quality fodder, fuelwood, and minor forest produce, making them central to the Himalayan rural economy.

4. Diversity and Altitudinal Zonation

Species Richness: India is home to approximately 35 species of oak.
Key Species in Uttarakhand: Major varieties include Banj (*Quercus leucotrichophora*), Moru, Kharsu, Rianj, and Phalyant oaks.
Ecological Belt: They form a vital transition zone between subtropical forests and alpine meadows.
Health Indicators: A flourishing oak forest is a primary indicator of a stable, moisture-rich, and resilient ecosystem.

5. Threats: Degradation and Anthropogenic Pressure

Developmental Clash: Infrastructure projects (roads, tourism, civic construction) often lead to large-scale felling.
The Degradation Rate: Scientific studies indicate a loss/degradation rate of approximately 0.36 sq km per year in the Himalayan region.
Over-Exploitation: Excessive lopping for fodder and fuel reduces the canopy, hindering natural seed production and regeneration.
Slow Recovery: Unlike some species, oaks regenerate slowly; once an area is degraded, it often fails to recover without intensive intervention.

6. Invasive Species and the "Chir Pine" Shift

Ecological Imbalance: There is a documented shift where Chir Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) is replacing native oak forests due to its ability to thrive in degraded, drier soils.
Fire Hazard: Unlike the moisture-retaining oak, Chir Pine is highly inflammable due to its resin content and needle litter, leading to frequent and intense forest fires.
Biodiversity Desert: Pine forests are relatively "biological deserts," supporting significantly fewer species compared to the multi-layered oak forests.
Pathogen Stress: Fire-weakened oak stands become easy targets for pathogens, further accelerating forest mortality.

7. Legal and Policy Framework

Judicial Activism: The High Court's intervention aligns with the expanded scope of Article 21 (Right to Life), which includes the right to a healthy environment.
Statutory Protection: Oak conservation falls under the ambit of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and the National Forest Policy.
Climate Commitments: Protecting these forests is essential for India to meet its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, specifically the creation of additional carbon sinks.

8. Way Forward: Strategies for Resilience

Native Afforestation: Shifting policy away from monoculture plantations toward oak-based restoration using native species.
Strict EIA: Ensuring that Environmental Impact Assessments for Himalayan projects prioritize "minimal felling" and "avoidance" over mere "compensatory afforestation."
Community-Led Management: Strengthening Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Van Panchayats to involve locals in the sustainable protection of oak stands.
Advanced Monitoring: Utilizing GIS mapping and remote sensing to track degradation and invasive pine spread in real-time.
Fire Mitigation: Implementing scientific fire lines and early warning systems, particularly at the ecotone where oak and pine meet.

Conclusion

The Uttarakhand High Court's stay on oak felling is a timely reminder that the Himalayas cannot sustain further ecological debt in the name of development. Oak forests are the guardians of Himalayan

water and soil; their loss is irreversible in human timescales. Protecting these ecosystems is a cornerstone for climate resilience and sustainable development, ensuring that the "Water Tower of Asia" remains functional for future generations.

Source: https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260413/282325391541825?srsltid=AfmBOootIxXIUvSYXVEr_EnJa3GpDYhImJSnSOLTjVOH4YRA9_jWyRtk

Question

"The Himalayan oak forest is a keystone ecosystem whose degradation has cascading effects on water security and disaster vulnerability in the region. In light of recent judicial interventions, discuss the ecological and socio-economic significance of protecting oak forests in the Himalayas." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The recent intervention by the Uttarakhand High Court in April 2026, staying the felling of oak trees in Mussoorie, underscores the critical role of native broad-leaved forests in mountain ecology. As a keystone species, the Himalayan oak (Genus *Quercus*) maintains the structural and functional integrity of the mid-Himalayan belt. Its protection is not merely an environmental choice but a necessity for the survival of the "Water Tower of Asia."

2. Ecological Significance: The Keystone Role

Oak forests serve as the biological foundation of the Himalayas through several critical functions:

Water Security and Spring Recharge: Oak forests act as natural "sponges." Their dense leaf litter improves soil porosity, facilitating the slow percolation of rainwater. This process is vital for the recharge of Himalayan springs, which sustain thousands of mountain villages.

Soil Binding and Disaster Mitigation: With deep and extensive root systems, oaks anchor the fragile, steep slopes of the Himalayas. This biological engineering is the primary defense against landslides and soil erosion, particularly during the increasingly erratic monsoon seasons.

Biodiversity Support: As a keystone species, the oak supports a multi-layered ecosystem. It provides habitat for epiphytic orchids, mosses, and fauna such as the Himalayan langur, black bears, and various endemic bird species.

3. Socio-Economic Significance

The survival of the Himalayan "Pahar" (hill) community is intricately linked to the oak ecosystem:

Fodder and Livestock: Oak leaves are highly nutritious and available year-round, making them the primary source of green fodder for livestock, which forms the backbone of the rural economy.

Fuelwood and Local Energy: High-calorific value wood from dead or managed oak branches provides essential heating and cooking fuel for high-altitude populations.

Spring-Based Economy: Since traditional Himalayan agriculture depends on spring-fed irrigation, the degradation of oak forests directly leads to "water poverty," prompting large-scale migration from the hills.

4. Cascading Effects of Degradation

The replacement of oak forests by Chir Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*)—often termed "Pine-ification"—has led to severe ecological imbalances:

Increased Forest Fires: Unlike the moisture-retaining oak, Chir Pine is highly inflammable due to its resin content. This shift has led to a dramatic increase in the frequency and intensity of forest fires.

Hydrological Crisis: Pine needles do not allow for efficient water infiltration, leading to the drying up of traditional springs and increasing surface runoff.

5. Judicial Intervention and Policy Roadmap

The judiciary's role in protecting oak forests reflects the expanded interpretation of Article 21 (Right to a Healthy Environment). However, long-term stability requires:

Native-centric Afforestation: Shifting from monoculture pine plantations to mixed-oak restoration.
Community-Led Conservation: Strengthening Van Panchayats and Joint Forest Management (JFM) to involve locals in sustainable harvesting.
Strict Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA): Ensuring infrastructure projects prioritize the "Avoidance Principle" regarding old-growth oak stands.

Conclusion

The protection of Himalayan oak forests is central to India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and its "Net Zero" goals. By safeguarding these keystone ecosystems, India ensures water security for the Indo-Gangetic plains and reduces the disaster vulnerability of the Himalayan states. The judicial stay in 2026 is a vital step toward a "Himalayan-centric" development model that respects the limits of the mountain ecology.

Source: https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260413/282325391541825?srsltid=AfmBOootIxXIUvSYXVEr_EnJa3GpDYhImJSnSOLTjVOH4YRA9_jWyRtk

3. Nice countries come last (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Government budgeting and welfare vs capital expenditure.
Sub-Topic: Role of resources in national power

Introduction

A nation's global standing depends not only on its moral positioning but also on its economic strength, state capacity, and strategic investments. India's development trajectory raises important questions about the balance between welfare spending and long-term power-building capabilities.

1. Welfare Orientation vs Capital Formation

1. India allocates a significant portion of public expenditure towards welfare and social sector schemes aimed at equity and inclusion.
2. While such spending improves social indicators, it may limit resources available for capital formation and productive investments.
3. Excessive emphasis on redistribution can constrain the creation of long-term economic assets and competitiveness.

2. State Capacity and National Power

1. National power is derived from economic strength, technological capability, and military preparedness.
2. Limited investment in infrastructure, industry, and innovation reduces a country's ability to influence global affairs.
3. Welfare-heavy budgets may weaken state capacity to respond to external challenges.

3. Trade-offs in Public Spending

Equity vs Efficiency

1. Redistribution promotes social justice but may reduce incentives for productivity and investment.

Short-term Gains vs Long-term Growth

1. Welfare schemes provide immediate relief but may not generate sustainable economic growth.

Consumption vs Investment

1. High consumption expenditure crowds out investment in infrastructure and industry.

4. Comparative Perspective

1. Developed economies often prioritise capital investment, industrial growth, and technological advancement.

2. India's model emphasises inclusive development, but may lag in building strategic economic capabilities.
3. The absence of sufficient capital accumulation limits India's ability to compete globally.

5. Implications for India

Economic Growth Constraints

1. Lower investment in productive sectors may slow long-term growth.

Limited Global Influence

1. Economic weakness reduces bargaining power in international relations.

Sustainability Concerns

1. Persistent welfare expenditure without adequate revenue generation can strain fiscal stability.

6. Need for Balanced Approach

1. Welfare spending is essential for social stability and human development.
2. However, it must be complemented by investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, and innovation.
3. A balanced strategy ensures both equity and economic strength.

7. Way Forward

Rationalising Welfare Expenditure

1. Target subsidies more efficiently to reduce fiscal burden.

Boosting Capital Investment

1. Increase spending on infrastructure, industry, and technology.

Enhancing Revenue Generation

1. Improve tax compliance and broaden the tax base.

Strengthening State Capacity

1. Invest in institutions, governance, and human capital.

Conclusion

India's development strategy must strike a balance between welfare and wealth creation. Sustainable growth and global influence require a shift towards productive investments while maintaining social equity.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/nice-countries-come-last/article70854743.ece

Question

Q. *"Excessive focus on welfare spending can weaken a nation's long-term economic and strategic capacity." Critically examine in the context of India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Public expenditure plays a crucial role in shaping a nation's development trajectory. In India, a significant focus on welfare spending has improved social outcomes, but it also raises concerns about its impact on long-term economic and strategic capacity.

Arguments Supporting the View

1. Excessive welfare spending can reduce fiscal space available for capital investment in infrastructure, manufacturing, and technology, which are essential for sustained economic growth.
2. High consumption-oriented expenditure may crowd out productive investments, thereby limiting the creation of long-term assets.
3. A welfare-heavy approach can weaken state capacity by reducing resources available for defence, innovation, and institutional strengthening.
4. Overemphasis on redistribution may create dependency and reduce incentives for productivity and private sector participation.

Counter-Arguments

1. Welfare spending is essential for reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, which are critical for inclusive development.
2. Investments in health, education, and social protection enhance human capital, which in turn supports long-term economic growth.
3. Social stability achieved through welfare measures creates a conducive environment for investment and development.

Way Forward

1. India must adopt a balanced approach by rationalising subsidies and ensuring that welfare spending is targeted and efficient.
2. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on capital expenditure in infrastructure, industrial development, and technological innovation.
3. Strengthening revenue mobilisation and improving governance can help create fiscal space for both welfare and investment.

Conclusion

While welfare spending is indispensable for inclusive development, excessive reliance on it without adequate investment in productive sectors can constrain long-term growth and national power. A balanced and strategic approach is essential for sustainable development.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/nice-countries-come-last/article70854743.ece

4. Fake Degree Factories (TS)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Governance
Topic: Issues relating to development and management of education.
Sub-Topic: Transparency and accountability in institutions

Introduction

The proliferation of fake degree institutions in India reflects deep structural weaknesses in the higher education regulatory framework. These entities exploit legal loopholes and digital platforms to undermine academic integrity, posing serious challenges to governance, employability, and public trust.

1. Nature and Modus Operandi of Fake Degree Factories

1. Fake institutions operate by impersonating recognised universities or affiliating bodies, often using misleading names and websites.
2. They exploit regulatory gaps by functioning as "vocational" or "training" centres while issuing fraudulent academic credentials.
3. Digital tools and online platforms have made it easier to scale operations and reach unsuspecting students.

2. Structural Weaknesses in Regulation

Fragmented Regulatory Framework

1. Multiple authorities such as UGC, AICTE, and state bodies create overlaps and gaps in enforcement.

Weak Monitoring Mechanisms

1. Lack of real-time verification systems allows fake institutions to operate undetected for long periods.

Legal Loopholes

- Ambiguities in classification of institutions enable fraudulent entities to evade strict scrutiny.

3. Impact on Education and Economy

Erosion of Academic Credibility

1. The presence of fake degrees undermines the value of legitimate qualifications.

Employment Risks

1. Graduates with fraudulent credentials face rejection in job markets, affecting employability.

Economic Losses

1. Students and families incur financial losses, while the economy suffers from poor quality human capital.

4. Ethical and Governance Concerns

Fraud and Exploitation

1. Vulnerable students are misled through false promises of recognition and career prospects.

Accountability Deficit

1. Weak enforcement mechanisms reduce the accountability of both institutions and regulators.

Loss of Public Trust

1. The credibility of the entire higher education system is questioned.

5. Role of Technology: Double-Edged Sword

1. Technology enables fake institutions to create convincing digital identities and marketing channels.
2. At the same time, it can be leveraged for centralised verification systems, digital registries, and authentication tools.

6. Measures Taken and Limitations

1. Regulatory bodies have issued warnings and lists of fake universities.
2. However, enforcement remains reactive rather than proactive, and penalties are often insufficient to deter fraud.

7. Way Forward

Unified Regulatory Framework

1. Streamline overlapping authorities to ensure clear accountability and coordination.

Digital Verification Systems

1. Develop real-time platforms for verifying institutional legitimacy and academic credentials.

Stronger Legal Enforcement

1. Introduce stricter penalties and faster judicial processes to deter fraudulent practices.

Awareness and Transparency

1. Educate students and parents about verification mechanisms and risks.

Simple Conclusion

Fake degree factories represent a serious governance failure in India's education system. Strengthening regulation, leveraging technology, and enhancing accountability are essential to safeguard academic integrity and restore trust.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/fake-degree-factories-1503580885.html

Question

Q. *The rise of fake degree institutions highlights critical gaps in India's higher education governance. Examine the causes and suggest measures to address this challenge.* (250 words)

Introduction

The emergence of fake degree institutions in India reflects systemic weaknesses in the regulatory framework governing higher education. These institutions exploit legal and technological gaps, undermining academic integrity and public trust.

Causes

1. Fragmentation of regulatory authorities leads to overlapping jurisdictions and gaps in enforcement, allowing fraudulent institutions to operate without effective oversight.
2. Weak monitoring and verification mechanisms fail to detect fake institutions in a timely manner, enabling them to expand their operations.
3. Legal ambiguities regarding the classification of institutions, especially in vocational and training sectors, provide opportunities for misuse.

4. The rapid growth of digital platforms has facilitated the creation of misleading websites and marketing channels, making it easier to deceive students.

Measures

1. Establishing a unified and coordinated regulatory framework will ensure better oversight and accountability across institutions.
2. Developing robust digital verification systems, including centralised databases of recognised institutions and degrees, will help students and employers verify authenticity.
3. Strengthening legal provisions with stricter penalties and faster enforcement mechanisms will act as a deterrent against fraudulent practices.
4. Increasing awareness among students and parents about verification processes will reduce vulnerability to such scams.

Conclusion

Addressing the issue of fake degree institutions requires a combination of regulatory reform, technological intervention, and public awareness. Strengthening governance mechanisms will be crucial to preserving the credibility and effectiveness of India's higher education system.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/fake-degree-factories-1503580885.html

Editorial of the Day – 14.04.2026

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1. A strategic ethanol shift amid West Asia tensions (TH)

GS Paper III: Economy; Environment; Science & Technology.
Topic: Infrastructure: Energy; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices.
Sub-Topic: Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) and E20 Target.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the intensifying geopolitical friction in West Asia has once again exposed India's "petro-vulnerability." With the global oil supply chain under constant threat, India's strategic pivot toward Ethanol Blending has evolved from an environmental initiative into a core pillar of national security. By substituting imported crude with domestically produced biofuel, India is attempting to insulate its economy from external price shocks while simultaneously supporting its massive agricultural base.

2. Energy Vulnerability and Import Dependence

The 85% Shackle: India currently imports approximately 85% of its crude oil, making the domestic economy a hostage to global price volatility.
Macro-Economic Risks: Supply disruptions in West Asia led to a "triple whammy":

1. Inflation: Rising transport costs increase the price of essential commodities.
2. Fiscal Stress: Higher subsidy burdens for the government.
3. Current Account Deficit (CAD): Outflow of precious foreign exchange to pay for expensive oil.

Security Imperative: Reducing this dependence is no longer optional; it is a prerequisite for sustaining India's projected 7%+ GDP growth.

3. Rising Energy Demand and Strategic Need

NITI Aayog Projections: India's energy demand is expected to grow at the fastest rate globally over the next two decades due to rapid urbanization and industrialization.
Exposure to Volatility: Every $10 increase in the price of a barrel of crude significantly impacts India's fiscal health.
Diversification Strategy: Ethanol acts as an immediate "stabilizer," providing a domestic buffer against the unpredictability of West Asian geopolitics.

4. Growth of Ethanol Blending in India

The Decadal Leap: Ethanol blending in petrol has surged from a mere 1.5% in 2013 to approximately 18% in 2024, with India on the cusp of the 20% (E20) target for 2025–26.
Quantifiable Gains:

1. Forex Savings: Over ₹30,000 crore saved annually in foreign exchange.
2. Carbon Mitigation: Reduction of approximately 10 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions.

Dual Objectives: The program simultaneously addresses the "Energy Trilemma": Security, Equity, and Sustainability.

5. Global Models and Strategic Importance

India's roadmap is informed by successful international precedents:

Brazil: The global leader with ~27% blending and a massive fleet of "Flex-Fuel" vehicles that can run on any ratio of ethanol and petrol.
United States: Utilizes a standard E10 blend, leveraging its vast corn production to maintain energy independence.
Lessons for India: Success requires a "Three-Pillar" approach: Strong Policy Support (pricing), Efficient Supply Chains (distilleries), and Technological Readiness (E20 compliant engines).

6. Benefits to Agriculture and Emerging Challenges

Rural Wealth Creation: The program has funneled over ₹90,000 crore to farmers, primarily in the sugarcane and grain belts.
Price Stability: It provides a guaranteed "off-take" for surplus sugarcane and damaged food grains, preventing price crashes for farmers.
The Sustainability Challenge: Water Stress**:** Sugarcane is highly water-intensive, raising concerns in water-scarce regions of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

1. The Feedstock Shift**:** To ensure food security, India is pivoting toward maize, damaged grains, and 2nd-Generation (2G) Biofuels (made from crop residues like rice straw/parali).

7. Infrastructure, Sustainability, and the Future Path

Hard Infrastructure: India needs significant investment in specialized storage tanks, dedicated transport corridors, and retail distribution systems for E20 fuel.
The "Bridge Fuel" Concept: While Electric Vehicles (EVs) scale up, ethanol provides an immediate solution for the existing internal combustion engine (ICE) fleet.
Long-term Focus:

1. Advanced Biofuels: Transitioning to 2G (Cellulosic) and 3G (Algal) biofuels to avoid the "Food vs. Fuel" debate.
2. Resource Independence: Reducing reliance on both fossil fuels and the "critical minerals" (lithium, cobalt) required for batteries, which are also subject to geopolitical risks.

Conclusion

India's ethanol shift is a pragmatic masterstroke in an era of global instability. By converting agricultural surplus into "Green Gold," India is building a resilient energy ecosystem that safeguards the economy, empowers the farmer, and protects the environment. However, the final mile of this journey—reaching and sustaining 20% blending—requires balancing the water needs of agriculture with the energy needs of the nation.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-strategic-ethanol-shift-amid-west-asia-tensions/article70858978.ece

Question

"The strategic shift toward ethanol blending is India's most potent shield against the geopolitical volatility of West Asia. Discuss the economic and environmental significance of the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) and analyze the challenges in ensuring its long-term sustainability." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

With India importing 85% of its crude oil, West Asian tensions in 2026 have underscored the fragility of the nation's energy security. The Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), which has achieved ~18% blending, serves as a strategic intervention to reduce this external dependence through indigenous biofuel production.

2. Economic and Environmental Significance

Economic Resilience: EBP has saved over ₹30,000 crore in foreign exchange and provided ₹90,000 crore in direct payments to farmers, acting as a stabilizer for the rural economy.
Macro-stability: By reducing the oil import bill, it helps manage the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and mitigates "imported inflation."

Environmental Impact: It contributes to a 10-million-tonne reduction in carbon emissions, aiding India's "Net Zero 2070" goal and improving air quality by reducing tailpipe emissions of Carbon Monoxide and hydrocarbons.

3. Challenges to Long-term Sustainability

Water-Energy Nexus: High reliance on sugarcane (1G ethanol) exacerbates water scarcity in tropical states.

Food vs. Fuel Debate: Diversion of fertile land or food grains for fuel could impact food prices and availability during drought years.

Infrastructure Gaps: The transition to E20 (20% blend) requires massive retrofitting of the existing vehicle fleet and specialized storage infrastructure at petrol pumps.

Feedstock Volatility: Dependence on weather-sensitive crops makes the ethanol supply chain vulnerable to climate change.

4. Conclusion

To ensure sustainability, India must transition toward 2nd-Generation (2G) biofuels using agricultural waste and promote Flex-Fuel Vehicles. A balanced "Energy-Mix" that integrates ethanol with electrification will ensure that India's growth is both self-reliant and ecologically sound, transforming a geopolitical vulnerability into a domestic strength.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-strategic-ethanol-shift-amid-west-asia-tensions/article70858978.ece

2. Why farmers in Haryana are protesting against biometric verification in mandis (IE)

GS Paper III: Indian Economy and Agriculture.

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; Economics of animal-rearing.

Sub-Topic: Agricultural Marketing and APMC Reforms.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the agricultural landscape in Haryana became a flashpoint for a debate on "Digital Governance vs. Ground Realities." The introduction of a mandatory biometric verification system in *mandis* (wholesale markets) sparked widespread farmer protests. While the state government frames this move as a technological shield against systemic fraud—referencing the 2025 Karnal paddy scam—farmers view the procedural hurdles as a form of administrative harassment. This development highlights the friction involved in transitioning traditional agricultural value chains into a fully digitized, transparent ecosystem.

2. The Indian Agricultural Marketing Framework

APMC Mandis: The primary infrastructure for agricultural trade, where state-regulated markets facilitate price discovery and procurement.

MSP Dependence: In the "Breadbasket" states like Haryana and Punjab, government procurement via the Food Corporation of India (FCI) at Minimum Support Price (MSP) is the bedrock of rural income security.

Systemic Inefficiencies: Historically, the *mandi* system has been plagued by:

1. Middlemen Dominance: Arhtiyas (commission agents) often wield disproportionate control over the process.
2. Manual Opacity: Paper-based records and manual gate passes allow for duplication and "ghost" entries.
3. Procurement Fraud: Unauthorized entry of crops from other states to claim MSP benefits intended for local farmers.

3. Haryana's Biometric Procurement Mechanism (2026)

The new system represents an end-to-end digital integration designed to close loopholes:
Aadhaar-Based Authentication: Farmers are required to verify their identity via fingerprint-based biometric scanners at the point of sale to ensure they are the genuine registered beneficiaries.
Integration with "Meri Fasal-Mera Byora": This portal acts as the single source of truth, cross-referencing a farmer's identity with their specific land records and sowed crop details.
Geofencing and Logistics Tracking: Over 400 *mandis* and 1,300 storage points have been geofenced. Coupled with vehicle tracking, this ensures that produce moves only along authorized corridors.
Implementation Status: As of April 2026, the government reported that 75% of wheat arrivals were verified through this system, claiming a successful large-scale rollout.

4. Rationale: Why Reform Now?

The push for biometric verification was triggered by a collapse in trust and fiscal accountability:
The 2025 Karnal Paddy Scam: An investigation revealed that "fake" procurement was being logged using paddy illegally brought in from other states, resulting in a massive financial fraud involving a nexus of officials and traders.
Subsidy Leakage: Policy reports indicated that without precise tracking, a significant portion of the agricultural subsidy was being diverted to "ghost beneficiaries."
Digital India Mandate: The reform is a localized execution of the broader national goal of data-driven governance, ensuring that every rupee of state expenditure is accounted for through "Direct Benefit Transfer" (DBT) principles.

5. Farmer Concerns and Ground-Level Friction

Despite the goals of transparency, the implementation has faced severe backlash:
Technical Glitches: Farmers report frequent server downs, slow biometric response times, and a lack of reliable internet in remote *mandi* locations, leading to massive queues.
Exclusion Risks: The "Physical Presence" requirement is a major hurdle for elderly, sick, or disabled farmers who cannot easily travel to *mandis* to provide biometrics.
Displaced Accountability: Farmers argue that the system "penalizes the victim." They contend that scams are a result of official-trader collusion and that placing the burden of proof on farmers is unjust.
The Trust Deficit: Following the 2020-21 farm law protests, there remains a deep-seated suspicion regarding any state intervention that increases the complexity of the traditional *mandi* system.

6. The Governance vs. Welfare Debate

Transparency vs. Ease of Farming: Digitization aims for "Zero Leakage," but if the "Compliance Cost" (time lost in queues, travel) exceeds the benefit, it risks making farming unviable for smallholders.
The Digital Divide: The policy assumes a level of digital infrastructure and literacy that is still uneven across rural India.
Lessons in Stakeholder Engagement: The 2026 protests emphasize that technological solutions cannot succeed in a vacuum. A "Top-Down" implementation without adequate training and buffer mechanisms often leads to social friction.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/haryana-biometric-crop-sale-rule-protests-10633794/

Question

"The digitisation of agricultural procurement through biometric verification and geofencing is a double-edged sword for the Indian agrarian economy. Critically analyze how such reforms balance fiscal accountability with the 'ease of doing farming' in the context of recent systemic disruptions." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The transition toward a Digital Agri-Value Chain in India is driven by the need to eliminate structural leakages and ensure that state-funded support reaches the intended beneficiaries. The 2026 introduction of Aadhaar-based biometric verification and geofencing in states like Haryana represents a

bold attempt to secure the procurement process. However, this shift highlights a significant tension between the fiscal imperative of transparency and the socio-economic reality of the farmer.

2. Enhancing Fiscal Accountability: The Positive Dimension

Digital interventions serve as a technological shield against systemic corruption:

Curbing Procurement Fraud: Following incidents like the 2025 Karnal Paddy Scam, biometric verification prevents "ghost procurement," where traders illegally claim MSP benefits by routing produce from other states or using fake identities.

Eliminating Middlemen: Platforms integrated with portals like 'Meri Fasal-Mera Byora' ensure that payments are made through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to the verified owner's bank account, bypassing the traditional dominance of commission agents (*Arhtiyas*).

Data-Driven Governance: Geofencing and GPS-enabled vehicle tracking provide real-time data on crop movement, helping the state manage buffer stocks and logistics with unprecedented precision.

3. Challenges to the 'Ease of Doing Farming': The Critical Perspective

While technically sound, the implementation often encounters the "last-mile friction" of rural India:

The Digital Divide and Technical Glitches: Frequent server failures, poor internet connectivity in remote *mandis*, and slow biometric response times lead to massive queues, increasing the **"Transaction Cost"** for farmers in terms of time and labor.

Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups: The mandatory physical presence for biometric authentication creates a barrier for the elderly, the sick, and female farmers who may rely on family members or hired help for the physical transport of crops.

Accountability Imbalance: Farmers argue that while technology targets them for verification, the root of large-scale scams often lies in official-trader collusion, which digital tools alone may not resolve.

Operational Hardships: Agriculture is a time-sensitive activity. Delays at the *mandi* during peak harvest periods can lead to crop spoilage and financial losses, turning a governance reform into a logistical nightmare.

4. Achieving the Balance: The Way Forward

To transform digitisation from a hurdle into a facilitator, the state must adopt a more inclusive approach:

Hybrid Verification Models: Allowing for "Nominated Authentications" or facial recognition can reduce the burden on elderly farmers.

Infrastructural Resilience: Investing in high-speed connectivity and backup power at all *mandi* points is essential to minimize technical downtime.

Stakeholder Consultation: Reforms must be "Co-designed" with farmer unions to ensure that the transition period is gradual and supported by adequate training.

5. Conclusion

Technology in agriculture must be viewed as a means to an end, not the end itself. While biometric verification is vital for fiscal hygiene and preventing the drain of public funds, its success depends on its empathy toward the user. A balanced reform is one where the drive for transparency does not compromise the dignity and ease of the farmer, ensuring that the Digital Green Revolution is as inclusive as it is efficient.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/haryana-biometric-crop-sale-rule-protests-10633794/

3. How India is funding Silicon Valley's rise (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Digital economy and data governance
Sub-Topic: Balance of payments and invisibles

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping global economic power structures. However, India's growing use of foreign AI platforms raises concerns about a "digital value drain", where data and payments flow outward, creating a hidden economic cost and strategic dependency.

1. The "Token Tax" Concept (Hidden Digital Drain)

1. Every AI interaction involves API-based pricing, where users pay per query or usage.
2. Indian consumers, startups, and firms indirectly transfer value to foreign AI companies.
3. This creates a continuous outflow of digital payments, similar to an invisible tax on domestic economic activity.

2. Shift from Physical to Digital Extraction

1. Earlier, value extraction was linked to physical resources or manufacturing.
2. In the AI era, extraction occurs through data flows, algorithms, and digital services.
3. India generates massive datasets but lacks ownership of AI infrastructure and models, leading to asymmetric benefits.

3. Balance of Payments Implications

1. Payments for AI services fall under invisibles (services imports) in the current account.
2. Persistent outflows for digital services can widen the Current Account Deficit (CAD).
3. Unlike oil imports, these outflows are less visible but can become structurally significant.

4. Structural Disadvantages for India

Lack of Domestic AI Models

1. India primarily consumes AI services rather than producing them at scale.

Data Without Ownership

1. Indian data is processed by foreign firms, limiting domestic value capture.

High Compute Dependency

1. AI requires advanced computing infrastructure (GPUs, cloud), largely controlled by global firms.

5. Economic and Strategic Risks

1. Continuous value outflows reduce domestic capital accumulation.
2. Dependence on foreign AI systems creates risks to digital sovereignty and national security.
3. Domestic firms face disadvantages due to high costs of accessing AI tools.

6. Need for a Sovereign AI Strategy

Domestic AI Ecosystem

1. Build indigenous large language models (LLMs) and AI platforms.

Compute Infrastructure

1. Invest in data centres, semiconductor capabilities, and high-performance computing.

Data Governance Framework

1. Ensure data localisation and fair value extraction from domestic data.

Public Digital Infrastructure

1. Expand initiatives like India Stack to include AI infrastructure layers.

7. Way Forward

1. Encourage public-private partnerships to develop homegrown AI solutions.
2. Provide incentives for startups in AI research and development.
3. Strengthen regulatory frameworks to ensure data sovereignty and fair competition.
4. Promote skill development in AI and advanced computing.

Conclusion

India's digital future depends not just on consuming AI but on owning and building it. Without strategic intervention, the country risks becoming a passive participant in the global AI economy rather than a value creator.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/how-india-is-funding-silicon-valleys-rise/article70862072.ece#:~:text=We%20are%20investing%20massive%20capital,graphics%20processing%20units)%20for%20startups.

Question

Q. *"In the age of Artificial Intelligence, data and digital services have become new sources of economic extraction." Examine this statement in the context of India's digital economy and suggest measures to address emerging challenges.* (250 words)

Introduction

The rise of Artificial Intelligence has transformed the nature of economic value creation, shifting it from physical resources to data and digital services. In India's context, increasing reliance on foreign AI platforms has led to concerns about digital value extraction and economic dependency.

Nature of Digital Economic Extraction

1. AI services operate on a usage-based model where payments are made to foreign firms, leading to continuous outflows under the services account of the balance of payments.
2. India generates vast amounts of data, but the processing and monetisation of this data are largely controlled by global technology companies.
3. The shift from physical trade to digital services has created a new form of economic asymmetry, where value is extracted without traditional trade visibility.

Challenges

1. Persistent outflows for AI services can contribute to a widening current account deficit.
2. Dependence on foreign AI infrastructure and platforms undermines digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy.
3. Domestic firms face high costs and limited access to advanced AI tools, affecting competitiveness.
4. Lack of indigenous AI models and computing infrastructure restricts India's ability to capture value from its own data.

Measures to Address the Issue

1. India must invest in developing indigenous AI capabilities, including large language models and computing infrastructure.
2. Strengthening data governance frameworks, including data localisation, can help retain value within the domestic economy.
3. Public digital infrastructure should be expanded to include AI ecosystems that support innovation and accessibility.
4. Encouraging research, innovation, and skill development in AI will enhance domestic capacity and reduce dependence on foreign platforms.

Conclusion

In the AI-driven global economy, control over data and digital infrastructure is crucial for economic and strategic power. India must transition from being a consumer of AI services to a producer, ensuring sustainable growth and digital sovereignty.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/how-india-is-funding-silicon-valleys-rise/article70862072.ece#:~:text=We%20are%20investing%20massive%20capital,graphics%20processing%20units)%20for%20startups.

4. Case for an atmanirbhar cyber suraksha mission (HT)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Cyber security and emerging threats.
Sub-Topic: Critical information infrastructure protection

Introduction

India's rapid digitalisation has expanded its economic and governance capabilities but has also exposed it to complex and evolving cyber threats. In this context, the need for an Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) cyber suraksha mission becomes critical to safeguard national security and digital sovereignty.

1. Emerging Cyber Threat Landscape

1. Cyber threats have evolved from isolated attacks to coordinated, large-scale operations targeting critical infrastructure.
2. Advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence are enabling automated and sophisticated cyberattacks.
3. Key sectors such as banking, power grids, telecom, and defence systems are increasingly vulnerable to cyber espionage, ransomware, and data breaches.

2. Vulnerabilities in India's Cyber Ecosystem

Dependence on Foreign Technology

1. Heavy reliance on imported hardware and software creates risks of supply chain vulnerabilities and hidden backdoors.

Critical Infrastructure Exposure

1. Essential services such as electricity, finance, and communication systems are interconnected, increasing systemic risk.

Skill and Capacity Gaps

1. Shortage of trained cybersecurity professionals limits effective threat detection and response.

3. Need for an Atmanirbhar Cyber Suraksha Mission

1. Self-reliance in cybersecurity technologies is essential to ensure strategic autonomy and national security.
2. Indigenous development of hardware, software, and encryption systems can reduce external dependencies.
3. A mission-mode approach can integrate efforts across government, industry, and academia.

4. Key Components of the Mission

Indigenisation of Technology

1. Development of domestic capabilities in cybersecurity tools, hardware, and secure communication systems.

Strengthening Institutional Frameworks

1. Enhancing coordination among agencies responsible for cyber security and critical infrastructure protection.

Capacity Building

1. Training and upskilling professionals to address the growing demand for cybersecurity expertise.

Public-Private Collaboration

1. Leveraging private sector innovation and expertise in developing robust security solutions.

5. Strategic and Economic Benefits

Enhanced National Security

1. Reduced vulnerability to external cyber threats and geopolitical risks.

Economic Resilience

1. Protection of digital economy and prevention of financial losses due to cyber incidents.

Technological Advancement

1. Promotion of domestic innovation and growth of cybersecurity industry.

6. Challenges

High Investment Requirements

1. Developing indigenous capabilities requires significant financial and institutional investment.

Rapidly Evolving Threats

1. Cyber threats evolve faster than policy and technological responses.

Coordination Issues

1. Fragmented governance structures hinder effective implementation.

7. Way Forward

Mission-Mode Implementation

1. Establish a national-level mission with clear objectives, timelines, and accountability.

Focus on Research and Innovation

1. Invest in advanced technologies such as AI-driven cybersecurity solutions.

Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks

1. Develop robust laws and standards for data protection and cyber resilience.

International Cooperation

1. Engage in global partnerships while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Conclusion

An Atmanirbhar cyber suraksha mission is essential for securing India's digital future. Building indigenous capabilities, strengthening institutions, and fostering collaboration will be key to ensuring cyber resilience and national security.

Source: https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/case-for-an-atmanirbhar-cyber-suraksha-mission-101776181174470.html

Question

Q. *Discuss the need for an Atmanirbhar cyber suraksha mission in India. What challenges must be addressed to achieve cyber resilience?* (250 words)

Introduction

India's increasing digitalisation has significantly enhanced its economic and governance capabilities, but it has also exposed the country to complex and evolving cyber threats. In this context, an Atmanirbhar cyber suraksha mission is essential to ensure national security and digital sovereignty.

Need for the Mission

1. The growing scale and sophistication of cyberattacks, particularly on critical infrastructure such as banking, power grids, and telecom networks, necessitate a robust and coordinated response.
2. India's dependence on foreign hardware and software increases the risk of supply chain vulnerabilities and potential security breaches.
3. Developing indigenous cybersecurity capabilities will enhance strategic autonomy and reduce reliance on external technologies.
4. A mission-mode approach can integrate efforts across government, industry, and academia, ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated strategy.

Challenges

1. Establishing indigenous cybersecurity infrastructure requires significant financial investment and long-term commitment.
2. The rapidly evolving nature of cyber threats makes it difficult to keep pace with emerging risks and technologies.
3. Fragmented institutional frameworks and lack of coordination among stakeholders hinder effective implementation.

4. There is also a shortage of skilled cybersecurity professionals, which limits the country's capacity to respond to threats.

Conclusion

An Atmanirbhar cyber suraksha mission is crucial for safeguarding India's digital ecosystem and ensuring long-term national security. Addressing challenges related to investment, capacity building, and coordination will be essential to achieving a resilient and secure cyber infrastructure.

Source: https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/case-for-an-atmanirbhar-cyber-suraksha-mission-101776181174470.html


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Editorial of the Day – 15.04.2026

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1. Reservation ruse: On women's quota and delimitation (TH)

GS Paper II: Indian Polity and Governance.
Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.
Sub-Topic: Women's Representation in Legislatures.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the discourse on gender parity in Indian politics has shifted from "if" to "when." The passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam marks a watershed moment in India's constitutional history, promising to rectify a decades-old structural imbalance. While the law is enacted, its realization is uniquely tethered to the post-2026 delimitation exercise, making it a "deferred dream" that is finally nearing its horizon. By mandating a 33% quota for women, India seeks to move beyond symbolic presence to substantive participation in the highest decision-making bodies of the land.

2. Background: The Long Road to Parity

Historical Under-representation: Despite being nearly half the population, women's representation in the Lok Sabha has traditionally hovered around 14–15%.
A Thirty-Year Struggle: Legislative attempts to reserve seats for women began in the mid-1990s but repeatedly failed due to a lack of political consensus and demands for a "quota within a quota."
The Catalyst: The success of women's reservation at the Panchayati Raj level (73rd and 74th Amendments) served as a proven laboratory for gender-inclusive governance, eventually paving the way for the national mandate.

3. Constitutional Framework: The 106th Amendment Act

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 (formally known as the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*) introduced several pivotal changes:
New Articles: It inserted/amended provisions to facilitate reservation in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
Article 330A: Specifically mandates the reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha.
Article 332A: Mandates the reservation of seats for women in every State Legislative Assembly.
Article 239AA: Amended to include women's reservation in the Delhi Assembly.

4. The 33% Quota: Structure and Scope

The Quantitative Mandate: 33% (one-third) of all seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are to be reserved for women.
The Sub-Quota: The law includes a "quota within a quota" for women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
Horizontal Reservation: The 33% includes the seats reserved for women within the existing SC/ST quotas, ensuring that intersectional representation is maintained.

5. The Implementation Clause: The Census-Delimitation Link

One of the most debated aspects of the law is its "sunset" or "conditional" implementation:
The Trigger: The reservation will only come into effect after a new delimitation exercise is conducted.

The Dependency: This delimitation is itself dependent on the publication of the figures of the first **Census** conducted after the enactment of the law.
The 2026 Perspective: Since the freeze on delimitation expires in 2026, the actual implementation of women's reservation is expected to coincide with the redrawing of the national electoral map.

6. Operational Details: Rotation and Duration

Rotational Seats: To ensure that the reservation does not "freeze" specific constituencies forever, the reserved seats will be rotated across different constituencies after each delimitation exercise.
The Sunset Clause: The reservation is initially set for a period of 15 years.
Parliamentary Oversight: Parliament retains the power to extend this duration through subsequent legislation, depending on the status of gender parity at that time.

7. Significance: Why This Matters

Gender Justice: It breaks the "glass ceiling" of the male-dominated legislative culture.
Inclusive Policymaking: Studies suggest that women legislators often prioritize "soft infrastructure" like health, education, and nutrition, leading to more balanced developmental outcomes.
Democratic Legitimacy: A legislature that reflects its demographics is inherently more legitimate and representative of the "General Will."

8. Challenges and Concerns

Implementation Lag: The delay caused by the linkage to the Census and Delimitation has been criticized as a "postdated cheque."
The "Sarpanch-Pati" Syndrome: There are fears of proxy representation, where male relatives might influence the decisions of elected women.
Lack of Upper House Quota: The reservation does not apply to the Rajya Sabha or the State Legislative Councils, which is seen by many as a significant omission.
Impact on Accountability: Critics argue that the rotation of seats might discourage incumbents from working for their constituency, as they may not be able to contest from the same seat in the next term.

Conclusion

The implementation of women's reservation is a transformative leap toward a more equitable Indian democracy. While the technical hurdles of Census and Delimitation provide a waiting period, the legal framework is now unshakeable. For this reform to be truly substantive, it must be accompanied by internal party reforms, the elimination of patriarchal gatekeeping, and the continued empowerment of women at the grassroots. As the 2026 delimitation approaches, India is poised to welcome a more inclusive Parliament that finally mirrors the aspirations of all its citizens.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/reservation-ruse-the-hindu-editorial-on-womens-quota-and-delimitation/article70862476.ece

Question

"The implementation of the 106th Constitutional Amendment is fundamentally tethered to the post-2026 delimitation exercise. Critically analyze the federal and democratic challenges arising from this linkage and its implications for gender-inclusive governance in India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, also known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, seeks to reserve 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. However, its operationalization is uniquely linked to a two-step process: the conduct of a Census followed by a Delimitation exercise. As India crosses the 2026 threshold, this linkage places the goal of gender parity at the center of a complex federal and demographic debate.

2. The Constitutional Linkage: A Procedural Hurdle

The Act stipulates that the reservation will only come into effect after the delimitation of constituencies is carried out based on the first Census conducted after the Act's commencement.

The Rationale: Linking reservation to delimitation ensures that the 33% quota is applied to an updated electoral map that reflects current population densities.
The Implementational Gap: This creates a significant "time-lag," as the 2021 Census was delayed and the freeze on redrawing seats expires only after 2026. This has led to criticism of the reform being a "post-dated cheque."

3. Federal Challenges: The North-South Divide

Delimitation is not a neutral administrative act; it carries heavy federal implications:
The Population Penalty: Southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh) have successfully implemented population control, while Northern states (UP, Bihar) have seen high growth.
Seat Redistribution: If seats are redistributed purely on population, the South risks losing relative political weight. Linking women's reservation to this exercise means that the gender-inclusive goal is now entangled with a regional equity conflict.
Federal Equilibrium: Any perceived "injustice" in seat allocation during delimitation could lead to political friction, potentially further delaying the actual rollout of the women's quota.

4. Social and Democratic Challenges

The "Proxy" Representation: A major concern remains the "Sarpanch-Pati" syndrome, where male relatives might wield actual power. Without simultaneous internal party reforms, the 33% quota may initially yield only symbolic presence.
Rotation and Accountability: The law mandates the rotation of reserved seats after every delimitation. This may discourage incumbents from long-term constituency development, as they may not be able to seek re-election from the same seat.
Exclusion of the Upper House: The reservation does not apply to the Rajya Sabha or State Legislative Councils, leaving a gap in gender representation in the houses of elder statesmen and experts.

5. Implications for Gender-Inclusive Governance

Shift in Policy Priorities: International evidence suggests that increased women's representation leads to higher investments in "human capital"—health, education, and sanitation.
Institutionalizing Parity: Beyond numbers, this law creates a "new normal" for Indian democracy, forcing political parties to move away from patriarchal gatekeeping to remain electorally competitive.

Conclusion

While the linkage to the post-2026 delimitation creates a hurdle of delay, it also provides an opportunity to resolve India's demographic and federal imbalances in one go. For the 106th Amendment to achieve its true spirit, the state must ensure a transparent and consensus-based delimitation that respects the efforts of states in population control while prioritizing the urgent need for women's voices in the highest corridors of power.

2. The wages of neglect: Why Noida's streets erupted in protest (IE)

GS Paper III: Indian Economy and Issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development, and Employment.
Topic: Employment; Infrastructure: Energy; Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.
Sub-Topic: Labour Reforms (New Labour Codes 2025).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the industrial belts of Noida and Manesar witnessed significant labour unrest, characterized by factory worker protests against a widening socio-economic gap. This crisis is rooted in the "scissors effect": a sharp rise in the cost of living (inflation) paired with stagnant minimum wages. As India transitions into a new legal regime under the Labour Codes (2025), the disconnect between real income and market prices has reached a breaking point, posing a challenge to India's goal of becoming a global manufacturing powerhouse.

2. Minimum Wages in India: Concepts and Framework

Legal Mandate: Minimum wages are governed by the Code on Wages, 2019, designed to ensure a basic standard of living.

Wage Structure: It comprises two distinct parts:

1. Fixed Base Wage: Ideally revised every 5 years to reflect changes in productivity and standard of living.
2. Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA): Revised semi-annually, linked directly to the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW).

The Federal Role: Labour falls under the Concurrent List. While the Centre sets a "National Floor Wage," States are responsible for setting their specific rates, leading to significant regional disparities.

3. The Core Crisis: Inflation vs. Wage Growth

The Inflation Surge: Between 2021 and 2026, CPI-IW inflation rose by 24.8%. In hyper-industrialized zones like Gurugram and Noida, the "local inflation" reached 27–28%.

Stagnant Real Wages: Minimum wages in key manufacturing states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh grew by only 15–24%, resulting in a negative real income effect.

Erosion of Purchasing Power: As wages lag behind the cost of essential commodities, workers' ability to save or sustain basic nutrition is compromised.

Specific Cost Pressures: The burden is intensified by the rising costs of housing rent, food, and energy (with LPG prices reaching ₹4000 in informal/black markets during shortages).

4. Industrial Protests and Labour Unrest

Systemic Dissatisfaction: Recent protests in Noida and Manesar are not isolated incidents but reflect deep-seated grievances regarding overtime payments and poor working conditions.

Institutional Delays:

1. Haryana: Revised base wages after a 10-year gap.
2. Uttar Pradesh: Significant delays in revision since 2012.

Job Insecurity: Global economic shocks have squeezed industrial margins, leading to delayed salary disbursements and layoffs, further aggravating worker frustration.

5. Impact of Global Economic Factors (2026)

West Asia Conflict: Escalations near the Strait of Hormuz have driven up global energy prices. This "imported inflation" increases both factory production costs and individual living expenses.

Supply Chain Disruptions: Increased costs for fuel and raw materials have reduced corporate profitability, making employers resistant to wage hikes.

US Trade Pressures: New tariff regimes and protectionist policies have impacted Indian exports, indirectly causing wage suppression in export-oriented manufacturing units.

6. Labour Codes 2025: Reforms and Implementation Challenges

India has consolidated 29 labour laws into Four Comprehensive Codes:

1. Code on Wages
2. Industrial Relations Code
3. Code on Social Security
4. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code

Key Challenges:

Working Hours Controversy: While the codes define an 8-hour day, provisions for "flexibility" (e.g., 12-hour shifts) are viewed by workers as potential tools for exploitation.

Implementation Gap: The delay in finalising state-level rules and notifications has created a "legal vacuum," causing confusion for both industry and labour unions.

7. Structural Issues in the Labour Market

Informalisation: Approximately 90% of the workforce remains in the informal sector, largely excluded from formal wage protections and social security.

Migrant Vulnerability: High concentration of migrant labour in hubs like Noida leads to a lack of local bargaining power and social support networks.

Weak Collective Bargaining: Inconsistent recognition of trade unions prevents institutional dialogue, leaving workers with no recourse but to protest.

8. Way Forward

Regular Indexation: Link minimum wages more tightly to real-time CPI-IW data to prevent the erosion of real income.

Statutory Compliance: Enforce the 5-year mandatory revision of the base wage without political or administrative delays.

Uniformity through Labour Codes: Expedite state-level notifications to provide a clear, standardized legal framework across India.

Social Security Net: Expand the coverage of ESIC and Provident Fund to include gig workers and the informal sector to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for health and emergencies.

Institutional Dialogue: Promote a tripartite communication model between the Government, Industry, and Trade Unions to resolve disputes before they escalate to unrest.

Conclusion

The 2026 wage crisis is a stark reminder that sustainable industrial growth cannot be achieved at the expense of worker welfare. To realize the "Make in India" vision, the state must transition from a low-wage model to a productivity-led model that protects the purchasing power of its most vulnerable citizens. Balancing flexibility for employers with security for workers is the only path toward a resilient and equitable industrial economy.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-wages-of-neglect-why-noidas-streets-erupted-in-protest-10638508/

Question

"Industrial unrest is often a symptom of the widening gap between macroeconomic growth and microeconomic welfare." Discuss the factors responsible for the recent labour dissatisfaction in India's industrial corridors and suggest measures to harmonize industrial growth with worker well-being. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The resurgence of industrial protests in manufacturing hubs like Noida and Manesar in April 2026 highlights a growing disconnect in India's economic trajectory. While the nation pursues ambitious manufacturing targets, the "Real Wage" of the industrial workforce has faced a steady erosion. This dissatisfaction is a manifestation of the "Scissors Effect", where rising costs of living have outpaced the growth of nominal minimum wages.

2. Factors Responsible for Labour Dissatisfaction

The current unrest is driven by a combination of domestic structural delays and external economic shocks:

The Real Wage Gap: While the CPI-IW (Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers) rose by approximately 24.8% between 2021 and 2026, minimum wage revisions in states like Uttar Pradesh and Haryana lagged significantly at 15-24%. This has resulted in a net decline in the purchasing power of workers.

Institutional Delays: Minimum wage structures require a base wage revision every five years. However, administrative delays (extending over a decade in some states) have forced workers to rely on the Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA), which often fails to capture the hyper-local inflation of industrial cities.

Global Energy Shocks: Geopolitical tensions in West Asia and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have driven up fuel and LPG prices. This "imported inflation" disproportionately affects migrant workers who lack access to subsidized domestic energy networks.

Legal Uncertainty: The transition to the New Labour Codes (2025) has created a "Communication Gap." Workers fear that provisions for flexible 12-hour shifts may lead to exploitation without a corresponding increase in overtime compensation.

3. Structural Vulnerabilities

Informalization: Over 90% of the workforce lacks formal contracts or social security, leaving them with zero bargaining power during economic downturns.

The Housing Crisis: Rapid urbanization without affordable industrial housing has led to a surge in rents, which now consume a major portion of a worker's stagnant salary.

4. Measures to Harmonize Growth with Well-being

To sustain industrial peace and boost productivity, a multi-pronged approach is required:

Automatic Indexation: Minimum wages must be more dynamically linked to real-time CPI-IW data to ensure that "Dearness Allowance" keeps pace with market prices.

Strict Statutory Compliance: The state must enforce the mandatory five-year revision of base wages to reflect changes in the standard of living.

Social Security Universalization: Implementing the Code on Social Security to provide health insurance (ESIC) and provident funds to gig and informal workers will reduce their out-of-pocket emergency expenses.

Institutionalized Tripartite Dialogue: Strengthening the role of trade unions and creating platforms for regular dialogue between the government, employers, and workers to resolve grievances before they escalate into protests.

Conclusion

For India to become a "Global Manufacturing Hub," the welfare of the worker must be viewed as an investment, not a cost. Harmonizing industrial growth with worker well-being requires moving toward a "Living Wage" model that ensures the fruits of macroeconomic growth are equitably distributed. Only by securing the purchasing power and dignity of the industrial workforce can India ensure long-term domestic demand and social stability.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-wages-of-neglect-why-noidas-streets-erupted-in-protest-10638508/

3. Economic competence in judiciary (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Polity & Governance

Topic: Judiciary and its role in governance

Sub-Topic: Separation of powers and judicial reforms

Introduction

In a modern market economy, courts are not merely dispute-resolution bodies but critical institutions shaping economic outcomes, investor confidence, and capital allocation. The effectiveness of insolvency frameworks like the IBC increasingly depends on the judiciary's economic competence and interpretative clarity.

1. Courts as Economic Institutions

1. Economic laws such as the IBC function as market infrastructure, influencing credit flows and business viability.
2. Judicial decisions directly affect capital allocation, risk assessment, and investor behaviour.
3. Courts must therefore interpret laws with an understanding of economic consequences, not just legal formalism.

2. Judicial Interpretation under IBC

Balancing Law and Economics

1. Courts have oscillated between strict statutory interpretation and economic pragmatism in insolvency cases.

Committee of Creditors (CoC) vs Judicial Oversight

1. While CoC decisions are based on commercial wisdom, judicial interventions can reshape resolution timelines and recovery outcomes.

Thresholds and Admission Issues

1. Interpretations of default thresholds and admission criteria impact timely resolution and value maximisation.

3. Key Challenges

Delay vs Value Erosion

1. Legal delays reduce asset value, weakening recovery prospects and discouraging investment.

Uncertainty in Interpretation

1. Frequent changes in judicial interpretation create policy unpredictability, affecting credit markets.

Tension between Equity and Efficiency

1. Courts often attempt to balance fairness with efficiency, but excessive intervention may distort market signals.

4. Economic Implications

Credit Market Stability

1. Predictable and efficient adjudication improves lender confidence and reduces cost of capital.

Capital Allocation Efficiency

1. Clear rules enable capital to flow towards productive and viable enterprises.

Investor Confidence

1. Consistent judicial decisions enhance trust in the legal system, attracting domestic and foreign investment.

5. Need for Economic Competence in Judiciary

1. Judges must understand concepts such as time value of money, asset valuation, and market behaviour.
2. Economic literacy ensures that decisions support value maximisation rather than procedural rigidity.
3. Specialised benches and training can improve quality and consistency of adjudication.

6. Legislative and Institutional Gaps

1. Ambiguities in the IBC framework leave room for conflicting interpretations.
2. Lack of specialised institutional capacity leads to delays and inefficiencies.
3. Over-reliance on judicial interpretation highlights the need for clear legislative design.

7. Way Forward

Specialised Adjudication

1. Strengthen National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) with domain expertise.

Judicial Capacity Building

1. Provide training in economic and financial principles.

Clear Legislative Framework

1. Reduce ambiguities to limit excessive judicial intervention.

Balancing Oversight and Autonomy

1. Maintain a balance between judicial review and CoC's commercial wisdom.

Conclusion

Economic competence in the judiciary is essential for ensuring that insolvency laws achieve their objective of efficient resolution and value maximisation. Strengthening judicial capacity and clarity in legal frameworks will enhance the stability of India's financial system.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/economic-competence-in-judiciary/article70858583.ece

Question

Q. *"Judicial competence in economic matters is crucial for the success of insolvency frameworks like the IBC." Discuss with reference to India.* (250 words)

Introduction

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) was introduced to ensure time-bound resolution of stressed assets and improve credit discipline in India. However, its effectiveness depends significantly on judicial interpretation and the economic competence of adjudicating authorities.

Importance of Judicial Competence

1. Courts play a critical role in interpreting insolvency laws, which directly influence capital allocation, investor confidence, and credit market stability.
2. Understanding economic principles such as time value of money and asset valuation is essential for ensuring value maximisation during resolution.
3. Judicial clarity and consistency help reduce uncertainty, thereby encouraging investment and improving the ease of doing business.

Challenges

1. Delays in judicial processes lead to erosion of asset value, undermining the objective of timely resolution under the IBC.
2. Frequent and inconsistent interpretations create uncertainty in credit markets, affecting lending decisions.
3. Excessive judicial intervention may override the commercial wisdom of the Committee of Creditors, distorting market-driven outcomes.
4. Limited economic expertise among adjudicating authorities can result in decisions that prioritise procedural correctness over economic efficiency.

Measures to Improve

1. Strengthening the capacity of tribunals such as the NCLT by appointing members with financial and economic expertise.
2. Providing specialised training to judges in areas such as finance, insolvency, and market economics.
3. Clarifying legislative provisions to reduce ambiguity and ensure consistent interpretation.
4. Ensuring a balanced approach where judicial oversight complements, rather than substitutes, the commercial decisions of creditors.

Conclusion

Judicial competence in economic matters is vital for the success of the IBC and the broader financial system. Enhancing expertise, reducing delays, and ensuring clarity in legal frameworks will strengthen insolvency resolution and promote economic growth.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/economic-competence-in-judiciary/article70858583.ece

4. India's many New Years reflect ancient knowledge (HT)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper I – Indian Culture
Topic: Indian culture: diversity and unity
Sub-Topic: Festivals and social practices

Introduction

India's diverse New Year celebrations across regions reflect not merely cultural variation but a deep continuity of ancient knowledge systems, agricultural cycles, and astronomical traditions that bind the civilisation together.

1. Civilisational Continuity through Festivals

1. India's multiple New Year celebrations such as Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Baisakhi, Vishu, Poila Boishakh, and Puthandu reflect a shared civilisational ethos expressed in diverse regional forms.
2. These festivals demonstrate how ancient traditions continue to shape contemporary social life, ensuring cultural continuity across generations.
3. They also reinforce the idea of unity in diversity, where different regions celebrate the same transition of time in culturally distinct ways.

2. Astronomical Foundations

1. Indian calendars are rooted in astronomical observations of planetary movements and solar cycles.
2. Concepts such as *Samvatsara* (year) and planetary alignments reflect a sophisticated understanding of celestial mechanics.
3. Ancient scholars integrated astronomy with daily life, making timekeeping both scientific and cultural.

3. Agricultural Significance

1. Many New Year festivals coincide with harvest cycles, linking them to agrarian life.
2. Celebrations mark seasonal transitions, ensuring alignment between human activity and natural rhythms.
3. This reflects the deep integration of ecology, economy, and culture in Indian traditions.

4. Knowledge Systems and Textual Traditions

1. Ancient Indian texts such as the Puranas and classical literature explain cosmic order, seasons, and time cycles.
2. Contributions of scholars like Varahamihira and Aryabhata highlight India's advanced knowledge in astronomy and mathematics.
3. These traditions represent a blend of scientific inquiry and philosophical understanding.

5. Cultural and Social Dimensions

1. Festivals foster community bonding, social harmony, and collective identity.
2. Rituals and practices encourage values such as gratitude, renewal, and respect for nature.
3. They also serve as vehicles for intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

6. Relevance in Modern Times

1. In an era of rapid modernisation, these traditions provide cultural grounding and identity.
2. They promote sustainable living by emphasising harmony with nature and seasonal awareness.
3. Recognising and preserving such traditions strengthens India's soft power and cultural heritage.

Conclusion

India's many New Year celebrations are not merely festive occasions but expressions of a rich civilisational legacy rooted in science, culture, and ecology. Preserving and understanding these traditions is essential for maintaining cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world.

Source: https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/indias-many-new-years-reflect-ancient-knowledge-101776093540420.html

Question

Q. *"India's diverse New Year celebrations reflect both cultural unity and ancient scientific knowledge systems." Examine.* (250 words)

Introduction

India celebrates multiple New Years across regions, such as Ugadi, Baisakhi, Vishu, and Puthandu, reflecting its cultural diversity. However, these celebrations are deeply rooted in shared civilisational traditions and ancient knowledge systems.

Cultural Unity in Diversity

1. Despite regional variations in names and rituals, these festivals mark the same transition of time, symbolising unity in diversity.
2. They reinforce a shared cultural ethos by promoting values such as renewal, gratitude, and community bonding.
3. The widespread observance across different regions highlights the continuity of Indian civilisation.

Scientific and Knowledge Foundations

1. Indian calendars are based on astronomical calculations, including solar and lunar cycles.
2. Concepts like *Samvatsara* and seasonal transitions reflect a scientific understanding of time.
3. Ancient scholars integrated astronomy with cultural practices, making festivals both scientific and symbolic.

Agrarian and Ecological Linkages

1. Many New Year festivals coincide with harvest seasons, linking them to agricultural cycles.
2. This reflects a sustainable lifestyle aligned with natural rhythms and ecological balance.

Conclusion

India's New Year celebrations represent a unique synthesis of culture, science, and ecology. They embody both unity and diversity while preserving the rich legacy of ancient knowledge systems, making them relevant even in the modern era.

Source: https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/indias-many-new-years-reflect-ancient-knowledge-101776093540420.html

Editorial of the Day – 16.04.2026

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1. Dry days - On rainfall deficit forecast (TH) -01
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1. Dry days - On rainfall deficit forecast (TH)

GS Paper I - Physical Geography; Indian Economy (Agriculture).
Topic - Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System.
Sub-Topic - El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and its impact on Indian Monsoon.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) released a sobering monsoon outlook, signalling the end of a two-year streak of surplus rainfall. With a predicted 8% deficit, India is bracing for "below normal" rainfall during the crucial June–September season. This forecast, driven largely by emerging El Niño conditions, places a significant burden on the agricultural sector and macro-economic stability, as the nation navigates a delicate post-winter recovery amidst global geopolitical tensions.

2. Monsoon Outlook - Likely Deficit Ahead

The Forecast - The IMD predicts rainfall at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA), which falls squarely in the "below normal" category.
Margin of Error - The forecast carries a ±5% model error, meaning the outcome could vary between a marginal deficit and a severe drought.
End of Surplus Era - After two consecutive years of "excess" or "normal" rainfall, the 2026 cycle marks a significant climatic shift, likely impacting the Kharif crop sowing.

3. IMD Forecast Trends and Reliability

The "April Signal" - Historically, when the IMD signals a deficit as early as April, the year has frequently culminated in drought-like conditions.
Conservative Estimates - Past data (e.g., 2015) shows that the IMD's early forecasts are often conservative. In 2015, the IMD predicted 93% LPA, but the actual rainfall plunged to 86%, catching many by surprise.
Terminology Nuance - The IMD avoids the alarmist term "drought," preferring the administrative label "deficient" for rainfall that falls below 90% of the LPA.

4. The Climate Drivers - El Niño and IOD

The 2026 monsoon is a tug-of-war between two major oceanic phenomena -
Niño (The Spoiler) - Characterized by the warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. It disrupts the moisture-laden winds heading toward India.

1. Historical Correlation - Since 1950, 9 out of 16 El Niño years have resulted in deficient monsoons.
2. Timing - The 2026 El Niño is expected to strengthen during the second half of the monsoon (August–September), which could jeopardize the grain-filling stage of crops.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/dry-days-on-rainfall-deficit-forecast/article70866444.ece

Question

"The Indian Monsoon is often characterized as a 'gamble' influenced by complex oceanic teleconnections. Elucidate the roles of El Niño and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) in shaping rainfall

patterns in India and suggest strategic policy interventions to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of a predicted deficit." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Indian Monsoon (June–September) is the primary driver of India's agrarian economy, contributing over 75% of the annual rainfall. However, its predictability is increasingly challenged by global climatic teleconnections. With the IMD forecasting an 8% deficit in 2026, the interplay between the warming Pacific (El Niño) and the sea surface temperatures of the Indian Ocean (IOD) has become a focal point for national food security and macroeconomic stability.

2. Role of El Niño and IOD in Shaping the Monsoon

The monsoon's strength is dictated by the thermal contrast between land and sea, which is often disrupted by -

El Niño (The Suppressor) - Characterized by the unusual warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. It shifts the convective rainfall patterns eastward, weakening the trade winds that bring moisture to the Indian subcontinent.

Historical Impact - Since 1950, nearly 60% of El Niño years have resulted in deficient monsoons, leading to drought-like conditions.

Indian Ocean Dipole (The Regulator) - Known as the "Indian El Niño," it refers to the difference in sea surface temperatures between the western and eastern Indian Ocean.

Positive IOD - Warmer waters in the western Indian Ocean (near Africa) enhance moisture availability and can partially offset the drying effects of El Niño, as observed in the 2019 monsoon.

3. Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities of a Deficit

A rainfall deficit triggers a cascading effect across the economy -

Agricultural Distress - Reduced Kharif output (pulses, oilseeds, rice) leads to rural income contraction and increased demand for MGNREGA work.

Inflationary Pressures - Supply-side shocks in food production increase CPI inflation, complicating the RBI's monetary policy stance.

Energy and Water Crisis - Low rainfall leads to depleted reservoir levels, affecting both irrigation and hydropower generation, while increasing the energy demand for groundwater extraction.

Global Supply Dependencies - In 2026, geopolitical tensions in West Asia already threaten fertilizer and gas supplies; a weak monsoon intensifies this vulnerability.

4. Strategic Policy Interventions

To mitigate these risks, the state must transition from reactive disaster management to proactive resilience -

Precision Agriculture & Guidance - Disseminating real-time, district-level advisories to encourage farmers to shift toward short-duration crops and drought-resistant varieties like millets (Shree Anna).

Water Budgeting - Implementing strict reservoir management and promoting micro-irrigation (Drip/Sprinkler) to maximize the "crop per drop" utility.

Fertilizer and Input Security - Strengthening domestic buffer stocks of fertilizers and ensuring their equitable distribution to prevent price spikes during critical sowing windows.

Expanding the Safety Net - Streamlining the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) to ensure timely claim settlements and providing fodder subsidies to protect the livestock economy.

Conclusion

While India has made significant strides in irrigation, the monsoon remains a critical determinant of national well-being. Achieving "Atmanirbhar Agriculture" in the face of climate change requires a robust integration of meteorological science and responsive governance. By leveraging positive climate signals like the IOD and investing in structural water resilience, India can insulate its growth story from the vagaries of a potentially deficient monsoon.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/dry-days-on-rainfall-deficit-forecast/article70866444.ece

2. For agri growth in volatile world, look beyond farm gate (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and Agriculture.
Topic - Food processing and related industries in India (scope, significance, location, upstream/downstream requirements, supply chain management).
Sub-Topic - Global Supply Chain Resilience.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia have underscored a significant vulnerability in India's agrarian sector - the dependency on volatile global supply chains. With India's agriculture economy currently valued at approximately $600 billion, there is a strategic imperative to transition from a "production-centric" model to a "value chain-centric" model. Achieving the vision of a $1 trillion agri-economy requires integrating farmers into global markets, enhancing "Beyond Farm Gate" infrastructure, and ensuring that agricultural growth is both resilient to external shocks and inclusive of smallholder farmers.

2. Global Supply Chain Volatility and its Impact

External shocks are no longer temporary anomalies but structural risks that affect the "farm-to-fork" journey.

Input Dependency - Conflicts in West Asia disrupt the import of critical fertilizers (like urea and potash) and drive-up crude oil prices, which are essential for irrigation and farm machinery.

The Energy–Agriculture Nexus - High energy prices translate directly into a higher Cost of Cultivation (CoC), squeezing the already thin profit margins of Indian farmers.

Logistics and Freight - Maritime disruptions (e.g., in the Red Sea/Strait of Hormuz) lead to shipping delays and higher freight costs, which are particularly damaging for perishable exports like seafood, fruits, and vegetables.

Resilience Strategy - Global trade trends indicate that India must build long-term domestic buffers to insulate the sector from recurring geopolitical shocks.

3. The "Beyond Farm Gate" Approach

The real economic potential of agriculture lies in the activities that occur after the harvest.

Defining the Concept - "Beyond Farm Gate" encompasses processing, specialized storage, cold chains, logistics, branding, and sophisticated marketing.

Income Multiplication - NITI Aayog estimates that effective value addition can increase farmer incomes by **30–50%** compared to the sale of raw, unprocessed produce.

Post-Harvest Loss (PHL) Mitigation - According to ICAR, India loses roughly ₹92,000 crore annually due to poor post-harvest management. Improving supply chains can convert these losses into economic gains.

Agri-Business Linkages - Creating a seamless flow between farmers and processing firms ensures better price realization and reduces the "middleman" effect.

4. Global Trade Opportunities and Standards

Modern trade agreements are shifting away from traditional tariff discussions toward regulatory and safety compliance.

India–EU FTA Dynamics - The proposed FTA emphasizes non-tariff measures. Success in the European market now depends on meeting Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), sustainability norms, and carbon footprint standards.

Traceability and Compliance - Farm-to-fork traceability—knowing exactly where and how a crop was grown—is becoming a mandatory requirement for premium global markets.

High-Value Exports -

1. Seafood - India remains a global leader with exports valued at ~$8 billion.
2. Spices - India continues to command ~40% of the global spice trade.

Diversifying Markets - Beyond traditional partners, regions like Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East offer significant untapped demand for value-added products. Food Production, Processing and Distribution Chain System Outline Diagram. Labelled Educational Scheme

5. Structural Challenges to Transformation

Fragmented Landholdings - Over 86% of Indian farmers are small and marginal, making it difficult to achieve the economies of scale required for modern value chains.

Weak FPOs - While Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are intended to aggregate produce, many suffer from poor managerial capacity, lack of capital, and weak governance.

Infrastructure Deficit - There is a persistent lack of rural cold storage, testing laboratories, and specialized warehouses, leading to quality degradation of produce.

Policy Flip-flops - Frequent and sudden export bans (e.g., on wheat or rice) to manage domestic inflation erode India's credibility as a reliable global supplier, hurting long-term contracts.

6. Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

Avoiding "Enterprise Bias" - Aggressive value chain integration carries the risk of benefiting only large agribusinesses. Policies must ensure that small farmers are not excluded.

Aggregation Models - Strengthening FPOs and cooperatives is essential to give small farmers the collective bargaining power needed to interact with global firms.

Capacity Building - Farmers need training in digital tools, certification processes, and quality standards to participate in high-value chains.

Digital Integration - Platforms like e-NAM and schemes like PM-FME (Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises) are vital for integrating the informal sector into the formal value chain.

7. Policy Reforms and the Way Forward

Infrastructure Investment - Increased public and private investment in "Blue-Green" infrastructure (cold chains and sustainable storage) is required.

Trade Policy Stability - Implementing a predictable export-import policy to attract long-term foreign and domestic investment in the agri-sector.

Institutional Strengthening - Upgrading laboratories and certification bodies to help Indian produce meet international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards.

Centre-State Synergy - Aligning agricultural reforms across state boundaries to create a truly unified national market.

Conclusion

India's journey toward a $1 trillion agriculture economy hinges on its ability to move beyond simple production. By focusing on value addition, adhering to global quality standards, and building resilient post-harvest infrastructure, India can transform its agricultural sector into a global powerhouse. A balanced strategy that marries technological efficiency with social inclusivity will ensure that the Indian farmer is no longer a victim of global volatility but a beneficiary of global trade.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/for-agri-growth-in-volatile-world-look-beyond-farm-gate-10638872/

Question

"Elucidate the significance of 'Beyond Farm Gate' interventions in achieving India's vision of a $1 trillion agricultural economy. To what extent can these interventions mitigate the vulnerabilities caused by global supply chain shocks?" (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In the current geopolitical landscape of 2026, India's agricultural sector faces a dual challenge - achieving a $1 trillion valuation while navigating volatile global supply chains. A transition from a "production-led" to a "value chain-led" model is essential. "Beyond Farm Gate" interventions—referring to

post-harvest activities such as processing, cold chain logistics, and branding—are the primary drivers of this transformation, moving the focus from mere food security to wealth creation.

2. Significance of 'Beyond Farm Gate' Interventions

The economic potential of Indian agriculture lies in the secondary and tertiary segments of the value chain -

Income Multiplication - Processing raw commodities into high-value products (e.g., turning wheat into specialized flour or fruit into pulp) can increase farmer realizations by 30–50%.

Mitigating Post-Harvest Losses (PHL) - India loses roughly ₹92,000 crore annually due to poor storage. Modern silos and cold chains act as "economic buffers" by preserving quality and allowing farmers to sell when prices are favorable.

Employment Generation - The food processing sector is a labor-intensive industry. Expanding these units provides non-farm employment opportunities in rural areas, reducing the disguised unemployment in agriculture.

Meeting Global Standards - Interventions like farm-to-fork traceability and Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) testing are essential for India to leverage trade agreements like the India-EU FTA.

3. Mitigating Global Supply Chain Shocks

Global tensions, particularly in West Asia in 2026, have highlighted India's dependency on imported inputs and fragile logistics. Value chain interventions offer resilience through -

Reducing Input Sensitivity - By increasing the efficiency of the value chain, the "waste" is reduced, partially offsetting the rising costs of fertilizers and energy caused by global conflicts.

Market Diversification - Strong value chains allow India to shift from exporting bulk commodities (which are prone to export bans) to processed products, which have more stable demand and higher sticky prices in diverse markets like Southeast Asia and Africa.

Logistical Resilience - Investment in indigenous maritime logistics and specialized warehouses reduces the impact of freight spikes and maritime chokepoint disruptions (e.g., in the Strait of Hormuz).

Buffer Stocking - Advanced storage infrastructure allows for the strategic stockpiling of essential commodities, insulating domestic consumers and producers from sudden global price swings.

4. Structural Hurdles to Overcome

Fragmented Landholdings - Over 86% of farmers are smallholders; hence, aggregation via FPOs is the only way to achieve the scale required for "Beyond Farm Gate" success.

Policy Volatility - Frequent export restrictions to manage domestic inflation can damage India's reputation as a reliable partner in the Global Value Chain.

Digital Divide - The adoption of traceability and digital marketing requires a level of technological literacy that is currently uneven across rural clusters.

5. Conclusion

Achieving a $1 trillion agri-economy requires India to view the "Farm Gate" not as an end point, but as the beginning of an industrial process. While "Beyond Farm Gate" interventions provide a potent shield against global volatility, their success depends on stable trade policies and inclusive aggregation models. By harmonizing efficiency with the socio-economic empowerment of the smallholder, India can transform its agricultural sector from a vulnerability into a global strategic asset.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/for-agri-growth-in-volatile-world-look-beyond-farm-gate-10638872/

3. Is TCS harassment case tip of the iceberg? (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance
Topic - Issues relating to women and workplace safety
Sub-Topic - Corporate governance and accountability

Introduction

The recent harassment allegations in a leading IT firm highlight deeper systemic issues in workplace safety. Despite legal safeguards like the POSH Act, 2013, underreporting, weak institutional mechanisms, and workplace culture continue to limit effective redressal of sexual harassment complaints.

1. Legal Framework - POSH Act, 2013

1. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 mandates safe working environments.
2. It requires organisations to establish Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) and ensure time-bound inquiry.
3. The law emphasises prevention, protection, and redressal mechanisms.

2. Trends in Corporate Disclosures

1. POSH disclosures in annual reports show rising complaint numbers, especially in IT firms.
2. However, increased reporting may indicate both greater awareness and persistent prevalence.
3. Many complaints remain unresolved or prolonged, raising concerns about institutional efficiency.

3. Key Challenges

Underreporting of Cases

1. Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and career risks discourage women from reporting harassment.

Ineffective Internal Committees

1. ICCs may lack independence, expertise, or sensitivity, leading to biased or delayed outcomes.

Workplace Culture Issues

1. Male-dominated environments and power hierarchies can perpetuate unsafe conditions.

Lack of Transparency

1. Corporate disclosures often lack detailed insights into nature, resolution, and outcomes of cases.

4. Structural Issues in IT Sector

1. The IT sector employs a large number of urban women professionals, increasing exposure to workplace risks.
2. Long working hours, remote work, and hierarchical structures complicate monitoring and accountability.
3. Informal power dynamics and performance pressures may discourage complaint filing.

5. Implications

Gender Inequality

1. Unsafe workplaces hinder women's participation in the workforce.

Economic Impact

1. Reduced female labour force participation affects productivity and growth.

Corporate Governance Risks

1. Poor handling of complaints damages reputation and investor confidence.

6. Need for Reform

Strengthening ICCs

1. Ensure independence, gender sensitivity, and accountability in internal committees.

Improving Transparency

1. Mandate detailed disclosures on complaints and outcomes.

Awareness and Training

1. Conduct regular sensitisation programs to change workplace culture.

External Oversight

1. Strengthen monitoring by regulatory bodies to ensure compliance.

7. Way Forward

1. Promote a zero-tolerance approach to workplace harassment.
2. Encourage safe reporting mechanisms, including anonymous channels.
3. Integrate workplace safety into broader corporate governance frameworks.
4. Foster inclusive work environments that prioritise dignity and equality.

Conclusion

Ensuring workplace safety for women is essential for both social justice and economic progress. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and transforming workplace culture are critical to making the POSH framework truly effective.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/is-tcs-harassment-case-tip-of-the-iceberg/article70866094.ece

Question

Q. *Despite the enactment of the POSH Act, workplace harassment continues to persist in India. Examine the challenges in its implementation and suggest measures for improvement.* (250 words)

Introduction

The POSH Act, 2013 was enacted to provide a safe working environment for women and ensure effective redressal of sexual harassment complaints. However, persistent incidents of workplace harassment indicate significant gaps in its implementation.

Challenges in Implementation

1. Underreporting remains a major issue due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, and concerns about career progression.
2. Internal Complaints Committees often lack independence and expertise, leading to biased or delayed investigations.
3. Workplace culture in many organisations continues to be male-dominated, with power asymmetries discouraging victims from speaking out.
4. Corporate disclosures on harassment cases are often inadequate, limiting transparency and accountability.
5. Weak enforcement and limited external oversight reduce the effectiveness of the legal framework.

Measures for Improvement

1. Strengthening the independence and capacity of Internal Complaints Committees through proper training and inclusion of external members.
2. Enhancing transparency by mandating detailed reporting of complaints and their outcomes in corporate disclosures.
3. Promoting awareness and sensitisation programs to change workplace attitudes and ensure gender-sensitive environments.
4. Establishing robust grievance redressal mechanisms, including anonymous reporting channels, to encourage reporting.
5. Strengthening regulatory oversight to ensure compliance and accountability across organisations.

Conclusion

While the POSH Act provides a strong legal framework, its effectiveness depends on proper implementation and cultural change. Addressing structural and institutional gaps is essential to ensure safe and inclusive workplaces for women.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/is-tcs-harassment-case-tip-of-the-iceberg/article70866094.ece

4. Rural resilience holds the key TO INDIA'S overall economic tenacity (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Rural development and inclusive growth
Sub-Topic - Infrastructure and economic resilience

Introduction

India's economic resilience is closely tied to the strength of its rural economy. As rural areas absorb shocks such as migration, climate stress, and employment disruptions, strengthening rural systems becomes essential for sustained and inclusive economic growth.

1. Rural Economy as a Shock Absorber

1. Rural India plays a critical role in absorbing economic and social shocks, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Reverse migration highlighted the dependence of millions on rural livelihoods as a fallback option.
3. The rural sector acts as a stabiliser when urban employment and industrial activity decline.

2. Structural Challenges in Rural India

Informal Employment

1. A large share of rural workers is engaged in informal and low-productivity jobs, limiting income stability.

Underemployment and Low Wages

1. Seasonal employment and disguised unemployment reduce economic efficiency.

Infrastructure Deficits

1. Lack of connectivity, irrigation, and market access constrains productivity and growth.

3. Importance of Rural Development Programs

1. Government initiatives aim to enhance livelihood diversification, infrastructure, and income security.
2. Programs such as employment guarantees and rural infrastructure schemes support consumption and demand.
3. Effective implementation can transform rural areas into engines of growth rather than safety nets.

4. Rural Prosperity and Resilience Programme (RPRP)

Integrated Approach

Focuses on combining infrastructure, livelihoods, and social development.

Livelihood Diversification

1. Encourages non-farm employment and skill development.

Institutional Strengthening

1. Promotes decentralised governance and community participation.

Infrastructure Development

1. Emphasises roads, irrigation, and digital connectivity to improve productivity.

5. Economic Significance of Rural Resilience

Boost to Aggregate Demand

1. Higher rural incomes increase consumption, supporting overall economic growth.

Reduction in Migration Pressure

1. Improved rural opportunities reduce distress migration to cities.

Balanced Regional Development

1. Strengthening rural areas reduces regional disparities.

6. Challenges in Implementation

1. Fragmentation of schemes leads to duplication and inefficiencies.
2. Limited coordination between central and state agencies affects outcomes.

3. Financial constraints and governance issues hinder effective delivery.

7. Way Forward

Integrated Policy Design

1. Align multiple schemes under a unified rural development framework.

Focus on Productivity

1. Invest in agriculture modernisation and rural enterprises.

Strengthening Local Institutions

1. Empower Panchayati Raj Institutions for better implementation.

Data-Driven Governance

1. Use technology for monitoring and targeted interventions.

Conclusion

Rural resilience is fundamental to India's economic stability and long-term growth. Strengthening rural livelihoods, infrastructure, and institutions will ensure a more balanced and robust economic trajectory.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/rural-development-india-efforts-prosperity-rural-prosperity-and-resilience-programme-11776172070759.html

Question

Q. *"Rural resilience is central to India's economic stability and inclusive growth." Examine the role of rural development programmes in achieving this objective.* (250 words)

Introduction

Rural India plays a crucial role in sustaining the country's economic stability by acting as a buffer against shocks such as migration, unemployment, and economic disruptions. Strengthening rural resilience is therefore essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth.

Role of Rural Development Programmes

1. Rural development programmes enhance livelihood opportunities by promoting both agricultural and non-farm activities, thereby increasing income security.
2. Infrastructure initiatives such as roads, irrigation, and digital connectivity improve productivity and market access, enabling rural areas to integrate with the broader economy.
3. Employment schemes provide a safety net during economic downturns, supporting consumption and stabilising demand.
4. Programmes focused on skill development and entrepreneurship encourage diversification of rural livelihoods, reducing dependence on agriculture.
5. Institutional strengthening through decentralised governance improves implementation and ensures that benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.

Challenges

Fragmentation of schemes and lack of coordination among agencies reduce efficiency and impact.

1. Persistent issues such as informal employment, low productivity, and infrastructure gaps limit the effectiveness of these programmes.
2. Financial and administrative constraints hinder timely and effective implementation.

Conclusion

Rural resilience is vital for India's economic stability and inclusive growth. Strengthening rural development programmes through better coordination, infrastructure investment, and institutional capacity will enable rural areas to become engines of sustainable development.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/rural-development-india-efforts-prosperity-rural-prosperity-and-resilience-programme-11776172070759.html


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Editorial of the Day – 17.04.2026

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1. Creeping risk: On industrial accidents and neglect of risks (TH)

GS Paper III: Disaster Management; Indian Economy (Infrastructure & Industrial Growth).
Topic: Disaster and disaster management; Issues relating to growth, development, and employment.
Sub-Topic: Industrial Safety and Occupational Hazards.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, a devastating boiler explosion in Sakti, Chhattisgarh, resulting in 20 fatalities, once again brought the concept of "Creeping Risk" to the forefront of India's industrial discourse. Creeping risk refers to the gradual accumulation of minor maintenance lapses, regulatory oversights, and operational stresses that eventually culminate in a catastrophic failure. Unlike sudden natural disasters, these are man-made systemic failures that highlight a critical gap between India's rapid industrial expansion and its lagging safety infrastructure.

2. Engineering Causes: The Anatomy of an Explosion

Boiler explosions are rarely the result of a single, sudden event; they are the final stage of prolonged neglect.

Pressure Imbalances: The core cause often involves overpressure, where safety valves fail to trigger, causing the vessel to exceed its structural limits.

Scaling and Corrosion: Mineral deposits (scaling) inside boiler tubes act as insulators, causing localized overheating and metal fatigue, which weakens the boiler shell over time.

Water Level Management: Low water levels can cause the boiler tubes to overheat rapidly, while high levels can lead to "priming," damaging the steam-driven machinery.

Restart Stress: Most accidents occur during restart phases or when plants operate at partial capacity. The thermal and pressure fluctuations during these periods place immense stress on aging components, making them highly vulnerable.

3. Lessons from Recent Industrial Disasters

The Sakti incident mirrors a historical pattern of industrial negligence in India:

Sakti (2026): Highlighted the risks of transitional operations in recently acquired or commissioned plants that are not yet operating at full, stable capacity.

Visakhapatnam Gas Leak (2020): Demonstrated how safety systems can become poorly calibrated during periods of inactivity (lockdown), leading to chemical instability.

Neyveli Thermal Plant (2020): Triggered during a restart process, proving that the transitional phase from "off" to "on" is the most dangerous operational window.

Systemic Neglect: These incidents confirm that "accidents" are often predictable outcomes of prioritizing operational continuity over preventive maintenance.

4. Regulatory and Inspection Gaps

India's regulatory framework for industrial safety faces several structural hurdles:

Static vs. Dynamic Monitoring: Current boiler certifications are valid for one year. However, the physical condition of a boiler can degrade significantly within weeks due to heavy usage.

The "Compliance" Fallacy: The system often focuses on annual paperwork and fabrication standards rather than real-time monitoring or surprise audits.
Self-Certification Risks: The shift toward self-certification under recent ease-of-doing-business reforms can lead to a dilution of safety standards if not backed by stringent third-party audits.
Penalty for Safety: Ironically, the current regime often penalizes downtime, discouraging managers from performing necessary preventive shutdowns which are seen as "productivity losses."

5. Labour Vulnerability and Legal Accountability

The human cost of "creeping risk" is borne disproportionately by the most vulnerable sections of the workforce.
The "Invisible" Worker: Contract and migrant workers perform high-risk tasks but often lack formal training or safety equipment.
Diffused Accountability: The practice of subcontracting allows principal employers to distance themselves from liability when an accident occurs.
Language Barriers: Safety manuals and hazardous material signage are frequently unavailable in the native languages of migrant workers, rendering them "functionally blind" to risks.
The OSHW Code 2020: Critics argue that the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code reduces the direct liability of principal employers for safety lapses involving contract staff, weakening the deterrent against negligence.

6. Structural Challenges in Industrial Expansion

Aging Infrastructure: As India aims to become a global manufacturing hub, many plants are operating with infrastructure that has surpassed its designed lifespan.
Maximum Capacity Operations: High demand leads to plants operating near 100% capacity for extended periods, leaving no window for the "cooling" and maintenance cycles required to avoid creeping risks.
Normalisation of Deviance: Over time, minor safety violations become "standard practice" as long as they do not lead to an immediate accident, until the "risk creeps" to a tipping point.

Conclusion

The Sakti explosion is a clarion call to move from a reactive to a proactive safety culture. Industrial disasters should not be viewed as the "inevitable cost of business" but as a failure of the state and industry to protect its citizens. Strengthening real-time monitoring, ensuring principal employer liability, and empowering workers with native-language safety education are the only ways to halt the creeping risks that threaten India's industrial future.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/article70870754.ece

Question

"The recurrence of industrial disasters in India is often a result of 'Creeping Risks' rather than isolated technical failures. Analyze the factors responsible for this trend and suggest institutional reforms to strengthen the industrial safety ecosystem." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Industrial disasters, such as the Sakti (Chhattisgarh) boiler explosion in April 2026, are frequently mislabeled as sudden "accidents." In reality, they represent the culmination of "Creeping Risks"—the gradual buildup of minor maintenance lapses, unchecked operational stresses, and regulatory oversights. As India expands its manufacturing footprint, the normalization of these risks creates a systemic "time-bomb" effect that threatens both economic stability and human life.

2. Factors Responsible for the Trend of Creeping Risk

The persistence of these risks is rooted in engineering, regulatory, and socio-economic gaps:
Engineering Strains during Transitional Phases: Boilers and chemical units are most vulnerable during restart phases or partial-capacity operations. Thermal and pressure imbalances ($P \propto T$) during

these unstable periods place immense stress on aging infrastructure that may have been neglected during downtime.

The "Compliance" Fallacy: The current regulatory regime relies heavily on annual certifications and self-compliance. A boiler may be certified "safe" in January but become a hazard by April due to high-intensity usage or poor water treatment leading to internal scaling.

Prioritization of Productivity over Maintenance: Industrial culture often treats preventive shutdowns as "dead time" or productivity losses. This leads to a "Normalization of Deviance," where minor safety warnings (like small leaks or pressure fluctuations) are ignored as long as they don't stop production.

Labour Vulnerability and Diluted Accountability: A large portion of the workforce is contractual and migrant. The lack of safety training in native languages and the diffusion of liability under the OSHW Code 2020 allows principal employers to distance themselves from the "creeping" hazards faced by ground-level workers.

3. Institutional Reforms to Strengthen Safety

To shift from a reactive to a proactive safety ecosystem, the following reforms are essential:

Transition to Real-Time Monitoring: Moving away from static annual inspections to IoT-enabled real-time monitoring of pressure vessels. Centralized digital dashboards should trigger automatic alerts to state regulators when safety parameters are breached.

Dynamic Risk-Based Audits: Instead of scheduled annual checks, the Boiler Inspectorate should conduct surprise audits specifically during high-risk windows, such as plant restarts or changes in management/ownership.

Strengthening Principal Employer Liability: Legal frameworks must ensure that subcontracting does not insulate the parent company from accountability. Financial penalties for safety lapses should exceed the cost of preventive maintenance to change the "cost-of-business" calculus.

Worker Empowerment and Inclusivity: Mandating that safety training and emergency protocols be provided in the vernacular languages of the migrant workforce. Establishing "Safety Whistleblower" channels can allow workers to report creeping risks without fear of job loss.

4. Conclusion

Boilers do not simply "explode"; they fail when the state and industry ignore the cumulative weight of neglect. Strengthening India's industrial safety ecosystem requires a fundamental shift in mindset—viewing safety not as a regulatory burden, but as a non-negotiable component of industrial efficiency. Only by addressing "creeping risks" through real-time technology and strict legal accountability can India ensure that its path to becoming a global manufacturing hub is not paved with avoidable tragedies.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/article70870754.ece

2. Below normal monsoon forecast for India, but no cause for alarm yet: Here's why (IE)

GS Paper I: GEOGRAPHY

Topic: Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country; Irrigation systems; Disaster and disaster management.

Sub-Topic: Monsoon Dynamics and Economic Linkages.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) released a cautious forecast, predicting that the southwest monsoon will be at 92% of its Long Period Average (LPA). This figure represents the lowest forecast in nearly two decades, signaling a "below-normal" season. However, unlike previous years of panic, 2026 finds India in a unique position of "Prepared Resilience." With reservoir levels holding strong and better scientific forecasting, the narrative is shifting from monsoon dependence to climate adaptation.

2. The Indian Monsoon: The Economic Director

The southwest monsoon (June–September) is more than just weather; it is the ultimate director of India's rural and economic drama.

Primary Rainfall Source: It provides 70–75% of India's annual precipitation, serving as the primary source for ecological and hydrological balance.

Agricultural Heartbeat: With 48% of the net sown area being rain-fed, the monsoon determines the fate of Kharif crops (Rice, Pulses, Oilseeds).

Economic Multiplier: A stable monsoon drives rural incomes, which in turn fuels national consumption demand and GDP. While agriculture's share in GDP has moderated to 15–16%, its impact on inflation and food security remains disproportionately high.

Energy and Hydrology: Beyond the farm, it recharges groundwater and reservoirs, which are essential for hydropower and urban drinking water.

3. Scientific Advancements in Forecasting

The IMD has transitioned from broad guesses to high-precision dynamical modeling.

Dynamic Modeling: Using supercomputing and dynamical models, the IMD has reduced the "cone of uncertainty" in its predictions.

Long Period Average (LPA): Forecasts are pegged against an LPA of approximately 87 cm. A 92% forecast is "below normal" but remains significantly above the 90% threshold usually associated with drought conditions.

Granular Intelligence: The move toward region-wise and monthly forecasts allows for "just-in-time" planning for irrigation and sowing strategies.

4. Climate Change and Variability: The El Niño Factor

Climate change is making the "gamble on the monsoon" even more complex.

The El Niño Influence: Warming of the central Pacific Ocean (El Niño) often acts as a spoiler, weakening the monsoon circulation and leading to deficient rains in the subcontinent.

The Duality of Extremes: Climate change has introduced a pattern of "drought-within-deluge." Even in a deficient year, India often sees extreme localized rainfall events followed by prolonged dry spells.

Increased Disaster Frequency: The last decade has seen at least one major flood or extreme rain event annually, complicating prediction and disaster management.

5. India's Emerging "Resilience Shield"

India is no longer a passive victim of rainfall variability.

Reservoir Buffers: Currently, storage in 166 major reservoirs is above the 10-year average (over 100%), acting as a strategic water bank for the dry months of August and September.

The MGNREGA Effect: Rural employment schemes have successfully created thousands of water conservation assets like ponds, check dams, and wells, which have demonstrably improved local groundwater tables.

Economic Decoupling: The diversification of the Indian economy has reduced the overall GDP's sensitivity to monsoon shocks, though rural distress remains a primary concern.

6. Spatial and Temporal Dynamics

A national average of 92% often masks severe regional disparities.

The 2026 Split: Forecasts suggest normal rainfall in June and July, but a significant drying up in August and September. This is particularly dangerous for the grain-filling stage of crops.

Regional Winners and Losers: While the Southern Peninsula and Northeast may see better rainfall, the central heartland may face the brunt of the deficit.

7. Persistent Challenges and Risks

Smallholder Vulnerability: For marginal farmers, a 10% deficit is not a statistic; it is a livelihood crisis due to lack of irrigation access.

Groundwater Paradox: Despite conservation, India remains the world's largest groundwater extractor, leading to long-term sustainability threats.
Institutional Gaps: The "last-mile" coordination between weather alerts and actual on-farm implementation remains a bottleneck.

8. Way Forward: Toward Climate-Smart Governance

Crop Diversification: Promoting drought-resistant varieties (like millets/Shree Anna) to reduce water-heavy rice cultivation in deficit areas.
Micro-Irrigation: Scaling up drip and sprinkler systems to ensure "more crop per drop."
Digital Dissemination: Leveraging mobile platforms to provide farmers with hyper-local weather advisories.
Integrated Basin Management: Regulating groundwater and managing river basins as single units to ensure water equity.

Conclusion

India's 2026 monsoon forecast is less of a crisis and more of a stress test. The nation's ability to navigate a 92% rainfall year will depend on how effectively it uses its "Water Bank" (reservoirs) and how quickly it can adapt its agricultural practices. The shift from "Monsoon Dependence" to "Climate Adaptation" is the only sustainable path forward for a resilient Indian Republic.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/explained-below-normal-monsoon-but-no-cause-for-alarm-10640550/

Question

"India's historic vulnerability to the monsoon is being replaced by a framework of 'Prepared Resilience.' In light of the IMD's 2026 forecast, examine the factors contributing to this resilience and discuss the lingering challenges posed by climate variability." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast the 2026 southwest monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA), the lowest in nearly two decades. Traditionally, such a forecast would signal an economic crisis. However, India's evolving "Prepared Resilience" suggests that the nation is now better equipped to decouple its macroeconomic stability from the vagaries of rainfall.

2. Factors Contributing to India's Resilience

India's ability to withstand a "below-normal" monsoon in 2026 is built on several institutional and technological pillars:
Strategic Water Buffers: Current storage levels in 166 major reservoirs are over 100% of the 10-year average. This provides a vital "water bank" for irrigation and hydropower, mitigating the immediate impact of a rainfall deficit.
Decentralized Water Conservation: Through schemes like MGNREGA, the creation of thousands of farm ponds, check dams, and local wells has significantly improved groundwater recharge and localized water security.
Scientific Forecasting: The transition to dynamical models and supercomputing allows for granular, region-specific, and monthly forecasts. This enables "Climate-Smart" agricultural planning, helping farmers choose drought-resistant crops.
Economic Diversification: The declining share of agriculture in India's GDP (15–16%) has reduced the direct "monsoon-shock" to the national growth rate, although the rural economy remains sensitive.

3. Lingering Challenges of Climate Variability

Despite increased resilience, structural vulnerabilities remain that climate change continues to exploit:
The "Drought-within-Deluge" Paradox: Climate change has increased the frequency of extreme rainfall events occurring alongside prolonged dry spells. A 92% national average can mask severe localized droughts or floods.

Rain-fed Agriculture: Nearly 48% of India's net sown area remains rain-fed. Small and marginal farmers lack the capital for micro-irrigation, making them highly vulnerable to the temporal variability of the monsoon (e.g., a dry August/September).

Groundwater Over-extraction: India remains the largest extractor of groundwater globally. In regions where surface water is scarce, the reliance on deep-bore wells is reaching unsustainable levels, threatening long-term food security.

Inflationary Pressures: Supply-side shocks in pulses, oilseeds, and cereals can still trigger food inflation, impacting the purchasing power of the urban and rural poor alike.

4. Conclusion

The 2026 monsoon forecast serves as a stress test for India's climate adaptation strategies. While "Prepared Resilience" has shielded the economy from the existential threats of the past, the path forward lies in strengthening last-mile forecast dissemination and accelerating micro-irrigation coverage. India must continue its shift from monsoon-dependence to a robust Climate-Resilient Agricultural framework to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/explained-below-normal-monsoon-but-no-cause-for-alarm-10640550/

3. Pathway to maritime insurance sovereignty (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Insurance sector and financial services
Sub-Topic: External sector and services trade

Introduction

Global disruptions such as the Red Sea crisis have exposed India's dependence on foreign maritime insurance markets. Achieving maritime insurance sovereignty is essential to reduce external vulnerabilities, retain economic value, and strengthen India's strategic autonomy in global trade.

1. Maritime Insurance as Strategic Infrastructure

1. Maritime insurance is a critical enabler of global trade, covering cargo, vessels, and liabilities.
2. It functions as a financial backbone of shipping, influencing trade flows and risk management.
3. Dependence on foreign insurers exposes India to external shocks and geopolitical risks.

2. India's Dependence and Associated Risks

High Service Outflows

1. Significant payments for marine insurance flow to global hubs like London, leading to loss of domestic value.

Vulnerability to Global Disruptions

1. Crises such as conflicts or sanctions can disrupt insurance availability, affecting trade continuity.

Limited Domestic Capacity

1. India lacks strong domestic capabilities in Protection and Indemnity (P&I) insurance, which covers third-party maritime risks.

3. Structural Constraints

1. Fragmented domestic insurance market limits scale and competitiveness.
2. Absence of specialised expertise and underwriting capacity in marine risks.
3. Regulatory and institutional gaps hinder the development of a globally competitive ecosystem.

4. Economic and Strategic Implications

External Sector Impact

1. Insurance outflows widen the services deficit in the balance of payments.

Trade Competitiveness

1. Dependence increases costs and uncertainty for Indian exporters and importers.

National Security Concerns

1. Control over maritime insurance is linked to energy security and supply chain resilience.

5. Need for Maritime Insurance Sovereignty

1. Developing domestic capacity ensures risk management independence.
2. It helps retain financial value within the economy and strengthens strategic control over trade infrastructure.
3. Sovereignty in this sector complements broader goals of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

6. Key Components of Strategy

Domestic Capacity Building

1. Strengthen Indian insurers' capabilities in marine and P&I insurance.

Integration with Shipping Ecosystem

1. Align insurance development with shipbuilding, ports, and logistics sectors.

Institutional Strengthening

1. Develop specialised expertise, risk assessment frameworks, and global partnerships.

Regulatory Reforms

1. Create enabling policies to support domestic insurers and attract global business.

7. Way Forward

1. Promote India as a global maritime services hub by integrating finance, insurance, and shipping.
2. Encourage collaboration between public and private players to build scale and expertise.
3. Invest in data analytics, risk modelling, and digital infrastructure for advanced underwriting.
4. Strengthen international engagement while ensuring domestic capability development.

Conclusion

Maritime insurance sovereignty is not merely a financial goal but a strategic necessity. Building domestic capabilities will enhance India's economic resilience, trade competitiveness, and national security.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/pathway-to-maritime-insurance-sovereignty/article70870423.ece

Question

Q. *"Maritime insurance is a critical yet underdeveloped pillar of India's economic security." Examine the challenges and suggest measures to achieve maritime insurance sovereignty.* (250 words)

Introduction

Maritime insurance plays a vital role in facilitating global trade by covering risks associated with shipping and cargo. In India, heavy dependence on foreign insurance markets has exposed vulnerabilities, highlighting the need for maritime insurance sovereignty.

Challenges

1. India faces significant outflows in maritime insurance services, contributing to the services deficit in the balance of payments.
2. Limited domestic capacity in specialised areas such as Protection and Indemnity (P&I) insurance restricts competitiveness.
3. Fragmented insurance markets and lack of expertise hinder the development of a robust domestic ecosystem.
4. Global disruptions, such as geopolitical conflicts and sanctions, can affect insurance availability, impacting trade flows.

Measures

1. Strengthening domestic insurers by enhancing underwriting capacity and expertise in marine risks.
2. Promoting integration between insurance, shipping, and port infrastructure to create a comprehensive maritime ecosystem.

3. Implementing regulatory reforms to support domestic players and attract international business.
4. Investing in technology, data analytics, and risk modelling to improve efficiency and competitiveness.
5. Encouraging public-private partnerships and international collaboration to build capacity while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Conclusion

Achieving maritime insurance sovereignty is essential for India's economic resilience and strategic autonomy. By developing domestic capabilities and strengthening institutional frameworks, India can reduce external vulnerabilities and enhance its position in global trade.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/pathway-to-maritime-insurance-sovereignty/article70870423.ece

4. Super El Niño: A brewing climate shock (TH)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – III – Environment, Disaster Management, Agriculture
Topic: Climate change and its impact
Sub-Topic: Indian monsoon system

Introduction

El Niño is a periodic warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean that disrupts global atmospheric circulation. A potential "Super El Niño" poses heightened risks by intensifying climatic anomalies, threatening monsoons, agriculture, and water security, especially in countries like India.

1. Understanding El Niño and Super El Niño

1. El Niño is part of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, alongside La Niña and neutral phases.
2. It weakens trade winds and shifts warm ocean waters eastward, altering global weather patterns.
3. A Super El Niño represents an extreme phase with unusually high sea surface temperature anomalies, leading to amplified climate disruptions.

2. Global Climatic Impacts

Rainfall Disruptions

1. Causes droughts in regions like India, Australia, and Southeast Asia, while increasing rainfall in parts of the Americas.

Extreme Weather Events

1. Intensifies heatwaves, wildfires, cyclones, and floods across different regions.

Temperature Rise

1. Adds to global warming, making years with El Niño among the hottest on record.

3. Impact on India

Monsoon Variability

1. Weakens southwest monsoon, leading to below-normal rainfall and drought conditions.

Agricultural Stress

1. Reduced rainfall affects crop yields, sowing cycles, and food production, increasing food inflation risks.

Water Crisis

1. Lower reservoir levels and groundwater depletion impact drinking water and irrigation.

Heatwaves and Health Risks

1. Higher temperatures increase heat stress, mortality, and energy demand.

4. Economic and Environmental Consequences

1. Decline in agricultural output can reduce rural incomes and GDP growth.
2. Increased frequency of forest fires and ecological stress on biodiversity.
3. Strain on power systems due to rising cooling demand.

5. Global Economic Linkages

1. Disruptions in Panama Canal operations due to low water levels affect global trade.
2. Impact on fisheries, commodity prices, and supply chains worldwide.
3. Potential slowdown in global economic growth due to climate shocks.

6. Preparedness and Policy Response

Early Warning Systems

1. Strengthening forecasting capabilities through IMD and global climate models.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture

1. Promoting drought-resistant crops and efficient irrigation techniques.

Water Management

1. Enhancing reservoir management, rainwater harvesting, and groundwater recharge.

Disaster Preparedness

1. Building resilience through heat action plans and drought mitigation strategies.

7. Way Forward

1. Integrate climate risk into economic planning and policy frameworks.
2. Strengthen international cooperation on climate monitoring and response.
3. Invest in sustainable agriculture and renewable energy to reduce vulnerability.

Conclusion

A Super El Niño represents a significant climate shock with wide-ranging impacts on environment, economy, and society. Proactive adaptation and resilience-building measures are essential to mitigate its adverse effects.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/super-el-nino-a-brewing-climate-shock#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20high%20probability,worldwide%E2%80%94placing%20economies%20on%20edge.

Question

Q. *What is El Niño? Examine the potential impacts of a "Super El Niño" on India's monsoon, agriculture, and economy. Suggest measures to mitigate its effects.* (250 words)

Introduction

El Niño is a climatic phenomenon characterised by abnormal warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean, which disrupts global weather systems. A "Super El Niño" intensifies these disruptions, posing serious risks to India's monsoon-dependent economy.

Impacts on India

1. El Niño weakens the southwest monsoon by disrupting atmospheric circulation, leading to deficient rainfall and drought conditions.
2. Reduced rainfall adversely affects agricultural productivity, particularly in rain-fed regions, resulting in lower crop yields and increased food prices.
3. Water scarcity intensifies due to declining reservoir levels and groundwater depletion, affecting both irrigation and drinking water supply.
4. Higher temperatures during El Niño years increase the frequency of heatwaves, causing health risks and higher energy demand.
5. Economic growth may be affected due to reduced agricultural output, rural distress, and inflationary pressures.

Measures

1. Strengthening early warning systems and improving climate forecasting to enable timely policy responses.
2. Promoting climate-resilient agriculture, including drought-resistant crop varieties and efficient irrigation methods such as drip irrigation.

3. Enhancing water resource management through rainwater harvesting, watershed development, and better reservoir operations.
4. Implementing heat action plans and disaster preparedness strategies to reduce vulnerability.
5. Encouraging diversification of livelihoods to reduce dependence on monsoon-driven agriculture.

Conclusion

A Super El Niño can significantly disrupt India's climate and economy. Building resilience through proactive planning, sustainable practices, and adaptive governance is essential to minimise its adverse impacts.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/super-el-nino-a-brewing-climate-shock#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20high%20probability,worldwide%E2%80%94placing%20economies%20on%20edge.

Editorial of the Day – 18.04.2026

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1. **Deservedly dead: On the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 (TH)** -01
2. **When animals become instruments of power (IE)** -03
3. **India's AI value paradox (BL)** -06
4. **A confrontation over women (TT)** -08

1. Deservedly dead: On the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 (TH)

GS Paper II: Indian Constitution; Parliament and State Legislatures; Federalism.
Topic: Amendment of the Constitution (Article 368); Representation of People's Act; Delimitation; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.
Sub-Topic: The Census-Delimitation Linkage.

1. Introduction

In a landmark legislative event in April 2026, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill failed to pass the floor of the Parliament. Aimed at restructuring the electoral map of India, the Bill sought to synchronize the implementation of women's reservation with a fresh delimitation exercise. However, its failure to secure the constitutionally mandated two-thirds majority underscores a deep-seated federal anxiety regarding regional representation. Dubbed by critics as "Deservedly Dead," the Bill's collapse has reignited the debate on how India will balance democratic "proportionality" with federal "equity" in the post-2026 era.

2. The Arithmetic of Failure: Article 368 in Action

Constitutional amendments under Article 368 require a "Special Majority" to ensure that fundamental structural changes possess broad-based support.

The Voting Tally: The Bill secured 298 votes in favor and 230 against.

The Threshold Gap: Out of the 528 members present and voting, the government required 352 votes (2/3rd) to pass the amendment. It fell short by 54 votes.

Opposition Unity: The failure was a direct result of a rare, unified front by the Opposition bloc, signaling that structural shifts in India's democracy cannot be achieved through a simple majority "bulldozer" approach.

3. The Delimitation Controversy: The 2011 Census Trigger

The primary "poison pill" in the Bill was its reliance on outdated demographic data.

The 2011 Census Basis: The Bill proposed redrawing boundaries based on the 2011 Census, despite the fact that the 2026–27 Census is currently underway.

The South-North Divide: Using 2011 data would severely disadvantage Southern and Northeastern states that successfully implemented population control measures, effectively "penalizing" them with reduced parliamentary weightage.

Representation Loss: States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh feared a significant dilution of their voice in the Lok Sabha compared to high-growth Northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

4. Government's Response and Verbal Assurances

In an attempt to salvage the Bill, the government offered verbal concessions that failed to find their way into the legal text:

The Proportional Increase: Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured that an expanded Lok Sabha would see a 50% uniform seat increase for all states to prevent any state from losing its current number of seats.

The "Textual" Trust Deficit: The Opposition argued that verbal assurances hold no legal weight in constitutional matters. Since the 50% increase was not codified in the Bill's clauses, the "trust deficit" remained insurmountable.
Withdrawal of Linked Bills: Following the failure, the government withdrew related Bills on Union Territories and local delimitation, acknowledging their inseparable nature.

5. Criticism of the Legislative Approach

The Bill was criticized for its "convoluted" design and lack of transparency:
Unnecessary Linkage: Critics argued that linking Women's Reservation (which has broad support) with Delimitation (which is highly contentious) was an attempt to force a difficult pill down the throat of the Parliament.
Procedural Shortcuts: The attempt to push the Bill without prior consultation with a Parliamentary Standing Committee or a State-level consensus was seen as a breach of "Cooperative Federalism."
Clarity and Intent: The vague wording regarding the timeline of the Census and the subsequent implementation of reservation raised doubts about the government's genuine intent.

6. Political Dynamics: Supporters and Dissenters

The vote revealed a fascinating split in regional political interests:
The Opposition Bloc: The INC, SP, TMC, CPI(M), and DMK voted in a cohesive unit to protect the federal balance.
The Regional Supporters: Interestingly, the TDP and AIADMK supported the Bill despite potential seat losses for their respective states, likely due to broader political alliances or the hope for future negotiated concessions.
The Outcome: The episode reaffirms that the 2/3rd majority safeguard is the "shield of federalism," preventing any single party from altering the regional balance of power unilaterally.

Conclusion

The death of the 131st Amendment Bill is a testament to the resilience of India's constitutional safeguards. It highlights that structural reforms in a diverse republic require more than just parliamentary numbers—they require a national consensus. Moving forward, the path to a fair delimitation must involve completing the 2026 Census, transparent data-sharing, and a formal federal bargain that ensures no state is penalized for its socio-economic successes. For now, the "regional balance of power" remains intact, awaiting a more inclusive and transparent legislative effort.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/deservedly-dead-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-defeat-of-the-constitution-131st-amendment-bill-2026/article70875239.ece#:~:text=Also%2C%20there%20was%20no%20reason,and%20this%20safeguard%20held%20today.

Question

"The failure of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, reflects the deep-seated friction between demographic proportionality and federal equity in India. Elucidate the challenges in redrawing electoral boundaries and discuss why a broad political consensus is vital for such structural reforms." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which failed to secure the mandatory two-thirds majority in April 2026, was an attempt to link women's reservation with a fresh delimitation exercise. While intended to modernize India's electoral map, its collapse underscores a fundamental constitutional safeguard: that major structural changes to the Indian Republic cannot be imposed unilaterally but must respect the delicate balance between high-population regions and those that have achieved socio-economic stability.

2. The Challenge: Demographic Proportionality vs. Federal Equity

The core of the delimitation debate lies in the clash between two democratic principles:

"One Person, One Vote": Proportional representation suggests that states with larger populations (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) should have more seats in Parliament to reflect their democratic weight.
"Federal Equity": States in the South and Northeast argue that they are being "penalized for their success" in population control and social development. A purely population-based delimitation would dilute their political voice, creating a sense of alienation within the Union.
The Data Dilemma: The Bill's reliance on the 2011 Census was a major point of contention. Critics argued that using 15-year-old data while a new Census is underway was logically inconsistent and strategically biased.

3. Reasons for Parliamentary Failure and Opposition

The Bill failed primarily because it lacked the "Special Majority" required under Article 368:
Procedural Trust Deficit: The government's attempt to link the widely supported Women's Reservation with the highly contentious Delimitation was seen as a "tactical linkage" to force through a redistribution of seats.
Lack of Textual Guarantees: While the government offered verbal assurances of a 50% seat increase to protect Southern states, these were not codified in the Bill's text. In constitutional law, verbal promises are not substitutes for legislative clauses.
Constitutional Shield: The requirement of a two-thirds majority acted as a federal veto. It ensured that a coalition of regional parties could block a move that they perceived as a threat to their state's sovereignty and representation.

4. Why Broad Consensus is Vital

Structural reforms like delimitation are not merely administrative exercises; they are "Political Bargains."
Maintaining National Unity: Unilateral changes to seat shares can spark regionalism and sub-nationalism, threatening the cohesive fabric of the country.
Legitimacy of Representation: For a democracy to be functional, the electoral map must be perceived as fair by all constituents. A contested delimitation leads to questions about the legitimacy of the resulting Parliament.
Cooperative Federalism: Such reforms require the involvement of State Assemblies and Inter-State Councils to ensure that the unique developmental trajectories of different regions are respected.

Conclusion

The defeat of the 131st Amendment Bill is a reminder that in the Indian federal system, consensus is a prerequisite for change. Moving forward, the government must decouple gender justice from electoral redrawing, complete the ongoing Census, and initiate a formal Parliamentary Committee dialogue. Only through a transparent, data-driven, and consensus-based approach can India redraw its boundaries without fracturing its federal equilibrium.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/deservedly-dead-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-defeat-of-the-constitution-131st-amendment-bill-2026/article70875239.ece#:~:text=Also%2C%20there%20was%20no%20reason,and%20this%20safeguard%20held%20today.

2. When animals become instruments of power (IE)

GS Paper IV: Ethics
Topic: Ethical concerns in human-animal relationships.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, a series of government proposals—ranging from deploying crocodiles and snakes as biological deterrents at the India-Bangladesh border to expanding canine units for anti-poaching—has sparked an intense debate on Human-Animal Governance. These policies highlight a "paradigm paradox": while India has moved from colonial extermination to constitutional conservation, animals are

still frequently treated as instrumental tools of state power. This shift necessitates a critical look at whether our governance models are truly eco-centric or merely anthropocentric control mechanisms.

2. State Power & Instrumental Use of Animals

Animals as Security Assets: The BSF's exploration of using reptiles in riverine or marshy terrains along borders treats wildlife as "non-human combatants." This raises ethical questions about the coercion of animals into human geopolitical conflicts.

Environmental Law Enforcement: The use of canine units in tiger reserves (e.g., for sniffing out snares or tracking poachers) integrates domestic animals into the state's policing framework within ecological spaces.

Penetration of Authority: Integrating animals into security apparatuses reflects the expansion of state authority into deep wilderness areas where human technology often fails.

Ethical Devaluation: Instrumental use often overlooks the intrinsic value of animals, reducing sentient beings to "biological sensors" or "deterrent hardware."

3. Colonial Legacy in Wildlife Governance

Historical Shift: Colonial-era policies (the "vermin" mindset) focused on the extermination of wild animals to protect agrarian expansion. Post-1947, this shifted toward "Project Tiger" (1973) style protection.

Administrative Continuity: Despite the shift to conservation, the mindset often remains one of "control and command," viewing wildlife as subjects of the state rather than independent ecological stakeholders.

The Fortress Model: Much of India's conservation is built on the "Fortress Model"—creating "inviolate" spaces that exclude humans, often mirroring colonial forest enclosure policies.

Centralization of Control: The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, while vital for survival, centralized power in the hands of the Chief Wildlife Warden, often at the expense of local community agency.

4. Human–Wildlife Conflict & 'Problem Animals'

Spatial Labeling: A binary exists where animals inside parks are "protected," but those crossing invisible administrative boundaries are labeled as "problem animals."

Fragmentation as a Catalyst: Habitat fragmentation due to linear infrastructure (highways, rails) forces species like tigers and leopards into human-dominated landscapes, escalating conflict.

Socio-Economic Burdens: Marginalized farmers bear the "shadow cost" of conservation—crop raids, livestock loss, and physical danger—often leading to retaliatory killings and local resentment.

The Governance Paradox: Managing conflict requires a shift from "managing animals" to "managing human-animal shared spaces."

5. Displacement & Rights of Forest Communities

Conservation-Induced Displacement: To create "core areas," indigenous communities (Adivasis) have often been relocated, sometimes involuntarily, raising human rights concerns.

Legal Friction: The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 was intended to rectify "historical injustices," but it frequently clashes with the enforcement of the Wildlife Protection Act.

The Coexistence Narrative: Groups like the Soliga or Baiga tribes have historically coexisted with predators, challenging the notion that "inviolate zones" are the only way to save species.

Governance Gaps: Failure to implement participatory frameworks leads to social alienation, which can undermine conservation by removing the most effective "on-ground" guardians of the forest.

6. Ecological Concerns & Biodiversity Impact

Trophic Disruptions: Introducing predators like crocodiles to non-native border stretches can lead to invasive behavior, disrupting local fish populations and ecosystem balances.

Sustainability of Translocation: The Cheetah Reintroduction Project highlights that translocation is not just biological but spatial; without large, connected territories, species face "enclosure stress."

Ad-hocism vs. Science: Using animals for border security often lacks rigorous Ecological Impact Assessments (EIA), prioritizing short-term security over long-term biodiversity health.

7. Governance, Ethics & Environmental Justice

Anthropocentric Bias: Most policies are designed *by* humans, *for* human interests (security, tourism, or emotional fulfillment), rather than for the animal's own well-being.

Constitutional Mandates: * **Article 48A:** Directive Principle for the State to protect and improve the environment.

Article 51A(g): Fundamental Duty of citizens to have compassion for living creatures.

Environmental Justice: True justice ensures that the burden of living with wildlife is not solely placed on the poorest forest dwellers while the benefits (carbon sequestration, tourism) go to the urban elite.

8. Way Forward: Toward Eco-centric Governance

Community-Led Conservation: Moving from "Fortress" to "Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)."

Scientific Policy Audits: Ensuring any deployment of animals (canines or reptiles) passes an ethical and ecological audit.

Integrated Technology: Replacing animals as "border deterrents" with AI-based surveillance, drones, and sensors to avoid ethical compromises.

Inter-agency Coordination: Harmonizing the mandates of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Tribal Affairs.

Compensation to Insurance: Shifting from slow state compensation for HWC to a market-linked wildlife insurance model for farmers.

Conclusion

The 2026 proposals to integrate wildlife into state security apparatuses are a wake-up call. While India has made heroic strides in increasing tiger and rhino numbers, the "soul" of our conservation must move from Instrumental Control to Ethical Coexistence. A truly sustainable republic is one where animals are recognized not as tools of power, but as co-citizens of a shared ecological landscape, protected by laws that are as compassionate as they are firm.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/when-animals-become-instruments-of-power-10642414/

Question

"The use of sentient beings as instruments for national security and conservation law enforcement raises a fundamental conflict between utilitarian state interests and the moral duty of compassion. Discuss the ethical dimensions of this 'Instrumentalism' and suggest an ethical framework for human-animal governance." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The proposal to deploy reptiles for border security and expand canine units in tiger reserves (2026) brings to the fore the ethical dilemma of Instrumentalism. This philosophy treats animals as "means to an end" rather than "ends in themselves." In a constitutional democracy like India, this creates a tension between the state's Utilitarian goal of safety and the Deontological duty of compassion toward living creatures.

2. Ethical Dimensions of Instrumentalism

Treating animals as tools of the state involves several ethical conflicts:

Violation of Agency and Sentience: Unlike humans, animals cannot consent to high-risk roles. Forcing sentient beings into "combat-like" or "security-deterrent" roles ignores their capacity for fear and pain, violating the core principle of Ahimsa (non-violence) and biological agency.

Anthropocentric vs. Bio-centric View:

1. Anthropocentrism: Views animals as "biological hardware" available for human utility (Security, Tourism).

2. Bio-centrism: Argues that every living entity has an intrinsic value independent of its usefulness to humans.

The Conflict of Duties: While the state has a duty to protect its borders, the Constitution under Article 51A(g) imposes a Fundamental Duty on every citizen (and by extension, the State) to have compassion for all living creatures. Using crocodiles or snakes as "deterrents" contradicts this constitutional morality.

3. Socio-Ethical Implications of 'Fortress Conservation'

The instrumental approach also extends to human communities:

Social Injustice: The "Fortress Model" of conservation often treats indigenous communities as "encroachers" in their own ancestral lands. Relocating these communities to create "inviolate" animal zones prioritizes an aesthetic of wilderness over the Human Rights of forest dwellers.

Environmental Justice: The burden of living with dangerous wildlife is placed on the poor, while the ethical and environmental benefits (carbon sequestration, heritage) are enjoyed by the urban elite.

4. Suggested Ethical Framework for Governance

To harmonize these interests, India should adopt an "Ethical Stewardship" model:

The principle of 'Least Infringement': If a technological alternative (drones, sensors, AI) exists for a security task, the state is ethically bound to use it instead of a sentient animal.

Recognition of Intrinsic Value: Moving away from the "Vermin" or "Instrumental" labels to recognizing animals as "co-citizens" of a shared ecosystem.

Inclusive Coexistence (Ubuntu of Nature): Shifting from "Fortress" models to community-led conservation, acknowledging that human rights and animal rights are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing.

Precautionary Principle: Before introducing species (like crocodiles) into new terrains for security, an ethical and ecological audit must be performed to ensure no "trophic disruption" occurs.

5. Conclusion

The maturity of a republic is judged by how it treats those who cannot vote or speak. While national security is a paramount interest, achieving it through the instrumentalization of sentient beings erodes the moral fabric of the state. A truly ethical governance model is one that transitions from being a "Master of Nature" to a "Steward of Life," ensuring that the "Nari Shakti" and "Jan Shakti" of India are complemented by a "Prani Shakti" that is respected rather than exploited.

Key Vocabulary for Ethics Answers:

Sentience: The capacity to feel, perceive, or experience subjectively.

Instrumentalism: The view that entities are only valuable insofar as they serve as a tool for human purposes.

Deontology: Ethical theory that the morality of an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules.

Utilitarianism: The doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority.

Inviolate Spaces: Areas where human presence is completely excluded.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/when-animals-become-instruments-of-power-10642414/

3. India's AI value paradox (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III - Science & Technology

Topic: Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies

Sub-Topic: Digital infrastructure and data economy

Introduction

India is rapidly emerging as a global hub for AI infrastructure, particularly data centres and digital connectivity. However, a paradox persists: while infrastructure is expanding, India lags in developing core AI technologies and capturing higher value in the AI ecosystem.

1. The AI Value Paradox

1. India is strong in AI consumption and infrastructure but weak in AI creation and intellectual property (IP).
2. The economy risks remaining a backend service provider rather than a global technology leader.
3. Value capture in AI is concentrated in countries that develop foundational models and platforms.

2. Strength in Infrastructure and Adoption

Digital Backbone Expansion

1. Growth of data centres, cloud infrastructure, and high-speed connectivity.
2. Strong base due to large digital population and policy support.

Enterprise Adoption

1. Increasing integration of AI in business processes such as analytics, automation, and decision-making.
2. Large firms are investing in AI-driven efficiencies.

3. Weakness in Core Innovation

Low R&D Investment

1. India's R&D expenditure remains significantly lower than global leaders.

Limited High-End Research Output

1. Despite a large talent pool, India's share in cutting-edge AI research and patents is modest.

Dependence on Global Models

1. Heavy reliance on foreign-developed AI systems reduces strategic autonomy.

4. Talent and Capability Gaps

1. India produces a large number of STEM graduates, but there is a shortage of advanced AI research talent.
2. Many skilled professionals migrate abroad, contributing to a brain drain in high-value innovation.
3. Limited industry-academia collaboration restricts deep-tech development.

5. Structural Challenges

Startup Divide

1. Many startups focus on applications rather than foundational technologies.

Funding Constraints

1. Deep-tech innovation requires long-term capital, which is relatively scarce.

Ecosystem Fragmentation

1. Lack of coordination between academia, industry, and government.

6. Economic and Strategic Implications

1. India risks being locked into low-value segments of the AI value chain.
2. Dependence on foreign AI technologies raises concerns about data sovereignty and economic security.
3. Missing out on AI-led productivity gains could limit long-term growth.

7. Way Forward

Boost R&D and Innovation

1. Increase public and private investment in AI research and foundational technologies.

Strengthen Talent Pipeline

1. Focus on advanced AI education, research institutions, and retention strategies.

Support Deep-Tech Startups

1. Provide long-term funding, incubation, and policy support for core AI innovation.

Promote Data and Compute Sovereignty

1. Build domestic capabilities in datasets, computing power, and AI models.

Integrated Policy Approach

1. Align industrial, digital, and innovation policies to move up the AI value chain.

Conclusion

India's AI journey must move beyond infrastructure expansion to value creation and technological leadership. Bridging the gap between adoption and innovation is essential for achieving long-term economic competitiveness and strategic autonomy.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-ai-value-paradox/article70874883.ece

Question

Q. *"India's rapid expansion in AI infrastructure has not translated into leadership in AI innovation." Examine the reasons for this paradox and suggest measures to enhance India's position in the global AI value chain.* (250 words)

Introduction

India has made significant progress in building AI infrastructure, including data centres and digital connectivity. However, this growth has not been matched by advancements in core AI innovation, resulting in a gap between infrastructure and value creation.

Reasons for the Paradox

1. India's R&D expenditure in AI remains low compared to global leaders, limiting the development of foundational technologies.
2. The innovation ecosystem is skewed towards application-based solutions rather than core AI research and model development.
3. There is a shortage of advanced research talent, along with brain drain to developed countries.
4. Limited collaboration between academia and industry restricts the translation of research into innovation.
5. Dependence on foreign AI platforms reduces incentives for domestic development.

Measures to Enhance AI Leadership

1. Increasing investment in AI research and encouraging public-private partnerships to build foundational technologies.
2. Strengthening higher education and research institutions to develop advanced AI capabilities and retain talent.
3. Supporting deep-tech startups through long-term funding and incubation frameworks.
4. Developing domestic datasets and computing infrastructure to ensure data sovereignty.
5. Creating an integrated policy framework that aligns industrial, digital, and innovation strategies.

Conclusion

Bridging the gap between AI infrastructure and innovation is crucial for India's technological and economic future. By focusing on research, talent, and ecosystem development, India can transition from a user of AI technologies to a global leader in AI innovation.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-ai-value-paradox/article70874883.ece

4. A confrontation over women (TT)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures
Sub-Topic: Functioning of democracy and political processes

Introduction

The Women's Reservation Bill, aimed at ensuring greater representation of women in legislatures, marks a significant reform in India's democratic framework. However, the absence of political consensus and meaningful deliberation reflects deeper challenges in parliamentary functioning and gender justice.

1. Context of Women's Representation

1. Women remain underrepresented in legislatures despite constitutional equality.

2. India's female labour force participation and socio-economic indicators show persistent gender gaps.
3. Political empowerment is crucial for inclusive governance and policy responsiveness.

2. Evolution of the Women's Reservation Bill

1. The idea dates back to the 1990s with multiple attempts to reserve 33% seats for women.
2. Earlier efforts failed due to lack of consensus and political divisions.
3. The recent Bill links implementation to delimitation and census, delaying actual impact.

3. Key Issues in the Current Approach

Lack of Consensus

1. The Bill was passed without extensive debate or cross-party consultation.
2. Weak deliberative processes undermine democratic legitimacy.

Delayed Implementation

1. Linking reservation to delimitation postpones benefits, raising concerns about intent.

Absence of Sub-Quotas

1. Demand for reservation within reservation (for OBC women) remains unresolved.

4. Parliamentary Functioning Concerns

1. Declining quality of debate and increasing political polarisation.
2. Important legislations are often passed without adequate scrutiny by committees.
3. Weak engagement between Treasury and Opposition reduces policy effectiveness.

5. Socio-Political Implications

Gender Justice

1. Women's representation can improve outcomes in health, education, and welfare policies.

Democratic Deepening

1. Inclusive participation strengthens legitimacy and accountability.

Symbolism vs Substance

1. Without timely implementation, reforms risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Deliberative Democracy

1. Encourage wider consultations, parliamentary debates, and committee scrutiny.

Time-Bound Implementation

1. Decouple reservation from delays linked to delimitation and census.

Inclusive Design

1. Consider sub-quotas to ensure representation of marginalized women.

Capacity Building

1. Promote leadership training and political participation of women at grassroots levels.

Conclusion

Women's political empowerment is essential for a vibrant democracy. However, meaningful reform requires not only legislation but also consensus, timely implementation, and strong institutional processes.

Source: https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/a-confrontation-over-women/

Question

Q. *Critically examine the challenges in implementing women's reservation in legislatures in India. How can democratic processes be strengthened to ensure effective gender representation?* (250 words)

Introduction

Women's reservation in legislatures is a significant step towards achieving gender equality in political representation. However, its effectiveness depends on both institutional design and the quality of democratic processes.

Challenges

1. The lack of political consensus weakens the legitimacy and sustainability of the reform.
2. Linking implementation to delimitation and census delays the actual realization of reservation benefits.
3. Absence of sub-quotas raises concerns about equitable representation of marginalized women.
4. Declining standards of parliamentary debate and limited committee scrutiny reduce the quality of law-making.

Measures to Strengthen Democratic Processes

1. Ensuring wider political consultation and consensus-building before passing major legislations.
2. Strengthening the role of parliamentary committees for detailed examination of bills.
3. Introducing time-bound mechanisms for implementation of reservation provisions.
4. Considering inclusive frameworks such as sub-quotas to address diversity within women.
5. Promoting capacity building and leadership development to enable effective participation of women in politics.

Conclusion

Women's reservation can transform India's democratic landscape, but its success depends on robust institutional processes and inclusive policy design. Strengthening democratic deliberation and ensuring timely implementation are essential for achieving substantive gender equality.

Source: https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/a-confrontation-over-women/

Editorial of the Day – 20.04.2026

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1. PM's address violated Model Code of Conduct - CPI MP alleges in letter to CEC (TH)

GS Paper II – Indian Polity and Governance.
Topic – Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
Sub-Topic – Election Commission of India (ECI).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the announcement of several state elections has brought the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) back into the national spotlight. The MCC serves as the "moral compass" of Indian elections—a set of consensus-based guidelines that govern the behavior of political actors to ensure that the democratic process is not distorted by money, muscle, or administrative power. While the MCC is not a statutory law, its enforcement by the Election Commission of India (ECI) is crucial for maintaining the sanctity of the "level playing field."

2. Meaning and Purpose of the MCC

Regulatory Framework – It is a set of guidelines issued by the ECI to regulate the behavior of political parties and candidates during the election cycle.
Core Objective – To ensure free, fair, and transparent elections by preventing the misuse of power and unfair practices.
Level Playing Field – It ensures that the ruling party does not gain an undue advantage by using state resources, thereby maintaining competitive equity.
Ethical Standard – The MCC promotes ethical campaigning and actively discourages corrupt, divisive, or inflammatory activities.
Public Trust – It is instrumental in sustaining public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

3. Temporal Jurisdiction - When MCC Comes into Force

The Trigger – The MCC comes into effect immediately after the ECI announces the election schedule.
Duration – It remains in force until the entire election process is completed, concluding only after the declaration of results.
Applicability – It applies universally to all political parties, candidates, and government authorities at the Central and State levels involved in the elections.
Monitoring Period – During this phase, the ECI exercises heightened surveillance to ensure total compliance.
Sanctions – Any breach of these guidelines can result in warnings, show-cause notices, or stringent legal action.

4. Rules for Political Parties and Candidates

Prohibition of Divisiveness – Parties must strictly avoid hate speech, personal character assassinations, or the use of religion and caste to solicit votes.

Corrupt Practices - Candidates are forbidden from bribing voters or distributing incentives such as money, gifts, or liquor.
Public Decorum - Campaigning must be peaceful and respectful, ensuring no disruption to public order or communal harmony.
Opposition Respect - Parties are expected to maintain a level of decorum toward opposition leaders and refrain from disseminating false information.
Legal Compliance - All activities must align with the laws of the land and specific instructions issued by the ECI.

5. Restrictions on Government Conduct

The MCC places significant curbs on the ruling government to prevent "incumbency advantage" -
Policy Freeze - The government is prohibited from announcing new schemes, projects, or policy decisions that could influence voter behavior.
Misuse of Machinery - Ministers and officials are barred from using official machinery, government vehicles, or public funds for partisan campaigning.
Resource Neutrality - Public spaces (like parade grounds) and government resources (like rest houses) must be accessible to all parties on a fair and non-biased basis.
Advertising Limits - Government-funded advertisements highlighting the achievements of the ruling party are restricted.
Administrative Neutrality - Any transfers or appointments of officials during this period require the prior expressed approval of the ECI.

6. Campaign Regulations

Logistical Limits - Campaigns must adhere to prescribed time limits and noise regulations (e.g., restrictions on night-time campaigning) to minimize public nuisance.
Permit System - The use of loudspeakers, rallies, and public meetings requires explicit permission from local administrative authorities.
Financial Transparency - Parties must maintain meticulous records of campaign expenditure and stay within the statutory spending limits.
Physical Publicity - Posters, banners, and hoardings must be restricted to permitted locations, avoiding the defacement of public or private property.
Digital Integrity - Campaigning via media and social media must be scrutinized to prevent the spread of fake news and misinformation.

7. Enforcement Mechanisms and Importance

Ground Surveillance - The ECI utilizes flying squads, static surveillance teams, and observers (General, Police, and Expenditure) to monitor the ground situation.
Penal Action - Violations can lead to public censure, the filing of FIRs under the IPC/Representation of People Act, or even disqualification in cases of extreme misconduct.
Legal vs. Moral Authority - While the MCC is not legally binding (statutory), it carries immense **moral authority** and is often backed by various sections of the IPC and the RPA, 1951.
Democratic Integrity - It is the primary tool for maintaining order and credibility during the intense period of state elections.

Conclusion

The Model Code of Conduct is the bedrock of electoral justice in India. By restricting the misuse of power and mandating ethical conduct, it ensures that the will of the people is expressed without coercion or manipulation. For a resilient democracy, the effective and impartial enforcement of the MCC by the Election Commission is non-negotiable to uphold the credibility and integrity of the republic's electoral framework.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/news/national/pms-address-violated-model-code-of-conduct-cpi-mp-alleges-in-letter-to-cec/article70880127.ece#google_vignette

Question

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC), while lacking statutory teeth, remains the 'moral anchor' of Indian elections. Analyze the evolving challenges to the MCC in the era of digital campaigning and evaluate the necessity of granting it statutory backing." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of consensus-based guidelines evolved by political parties to regulate their conduct during elections. Originating in the 1960 Kerala Assembly elections, it is enforced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) under the residual powers of Article 324. In the contemporary landscape of 2026, the MCC faces a paradigm shift as technological disruptions test its traditional moral authority.

2. Evolving Challenges in the Digital Era (2026 Context)

The 2026 Assembly elections in states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have highlighted new-age vulnerabilities -

Artificial Intelligence and Deepfakes - The proliferation of synthetically altered content makes real-time monitoring difficult. Though the ECI mandated AI labeling (covering 10% of the screen) in 2026, deceptive content often spreads faster than the 3-hour take-down window.

Shadow Political Advertising - Micro-targeted ads on social media, often funded by unidentified "third parties," circumvent the MCC's transparency and expenditure clauses.

Encrypted Messaging - Platforms like WhatsApp serve as "dark alleys" for communal propaganda and misinformation, escaping the "48-hour silence period" mandated by Section 126 of the RPA, 1951.

Algorithmic Bias - Social media algorithms can inadvertently amplify polarising content, a challenge the voluntary "Code of Ethics" with big-tech firms has struggled to mitigate.

3. The Debate - Statutory Backing for the MCC?

The demand to make the MCC a statutory law (as suggested by the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice) involves significant trade-offs -

The Argument for Statutory Backing -

Deterrence - Providing the ECI with direct legal powers to disqualify candidates or deregister parties would move the MCC from a "tiger without teeth" to a potent legal instrument.

Consistency - Statutory status would replace subjective interpretations with codified punishments, reducing allegations of bias in enforcement.

The Argument Against (ECI's Stand) -

Judicial Delays - Once a law, every MCC violation would be challenged in court. Given India's judicial backlog, the election cycle would conclude long before a verdict, rendering the sanction moot.

Institutional Flexibility - The current non-statutory nature allows the ECI to take swift, summary action (e.g., banning star campaigners for 48-72 hours), which is more effective during a month-long election process.

4. Way Forward

Technological Fortification - Implementing AI-Watermarking and blockchain for digital campaign materials to ensure traceability.

Updating Section 126 of RPA - Expanding the "silence period" to explicitly include digital platforms and OTT media.

Institutional Reform - Granting the ECI the power to deregister parties for extreme and repeated MCC violations, as recommended by the Law Commission's 255th Report.

5. Conclusion

The MCC's strength lies in the political consensus it represents. While the digital age requires a shift from "moral suasion" to "technological enforcement," granting it full statutory status may prove counterproductive by inviting judicial interference. The goal in 2026 must be to empower the ECI with

"quasi-judicial agility" rather than just legal rigidity, ensuring the republic's electoral integrity remains beyond reproach.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/news/national/pms-address-violated-model-code-of-conduct-cpi-mp-alleges-in-letter-to-cec/article70880127.ece#google_vignette

2. Women participation in economy rising, but presence at top dismal (IE)

GS Paper II - Social Justice;

Topic - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Human Resources; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Sub-Topic - Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India's economic narrative is marked by a significant paradox - while more women are entering the workforce than ever before, they remain largely excluded from the rooms where decisions are made. While the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) reached a decade-high of 40% in 2025, women hold only 13% of leadership and legislative roles. Addressing this "leadership deficit" is not merely a matter of social justice but a macroeconomic necessity for India to achieve its Viksit Bharat @ 2047 goal.

2. Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) Trends

The 40% Milestone - The rise from 33.9% in 2022 to 40% in 2025 shows a positive trajectory in human capital utilization.

Global Benchmarking - Despite the rise, India remains below the global average (49%) and far behind peers like Vietnam (69%) and Brazil (53%).

Macro-Economic Linkage - The World Bank suggests that sustained 8% GDP growth is unattainable without full economic inclusion of women, who constitute nearly 48% of the population.

Quality of Employment - Much of the recent rise is driven by rural self-employment and informal work, raising concerns about job security and fair wages.

3. Sectoral Dynamics and the Labour Market

Labour-Intensive Absorption - High potential for female employment exists in sectors like textiles, food processing, and electronics assembly.

The Wage-Supply Paradox - Increasing the supply of female labor without expanding industrial demand can depress wages, necessitating targeted job creation.

Informal Sector Dominance - A vast majority of working women lack formal contracts, social protection, or maternity benefits.

The Urban-Rural Divide - Urban participation remains lower due to rigid social norms, safety concerns, and the "double burden" of household chores.

4. The "Glass Ceiling" - Leadership and Decision-Making

The 13% Reality - According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, only 13 out of every 100 top managerial or legislative roles are held by women.

Corporate Tokenism - While board representation is mandatory, 77% of companies limit this to 1 or 2 women, often failing to reach the "Critical Mass" of 30% required to influence policy.

Academic Gap - Knowledge leadership remains male-dominated, with only ~14% female faculty in IITs and 20–30% in IIMs.

Decision-Making Power - Without representation in leadership, policies often fail to address gender-specific workplace barriers.

5. Political Representation and Governance

Women's Reservation Act (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) - The implementation delay (linked to delimitation) prevents an immediate surge in female legislative leadership.

The Growth Dividend - Research indicates that constituencies led by women legislators see 1.8% higher economic growth annually due to efficient resource management.
Inclusive Prioritization - Women in power tend to prioritize "soft infrastructure" like health, education, and sanitation, which leads to long-term human development.

6. Structural Barriers to Empowerment

Socio-Cultural Norms - Unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities act as a "time tax," limiting the hours women can dedicate to formal careers.
Safety and Mobility - The lack of safe last-mile connectivity and workplace harassment remains a significant deterrent.
Skill Mismatch - While female education is rising, there is a gap in vocational training for high-growth sectors like STEM.
Wage Inequality - The persistent gender pay gap reduces the opportunity cost of women leaving the workforce for domestic roles.

7. Government Initiatives and Policy Shield

Entrepreneurship - Stand-Up India and MUDRA loans aim to create women employers, though female ownership of enterprises stands at only ~27%.
Skill Development - Focused programs under Skill India are designed to improve employability in non-traditional roles.
Corporate Reform - Mandatory appointments of women directors have improved visibility, though substantive power remains skewed.
Legislative Support - The Code on Social Security and maternity benefit acts are steps toward making the workplace more inclusive.

8. Way Forward - From Participation to Leadership

Investment in the "Care Economy" - Providing affordable childcare and eldercare to reduce the unpaid work burden on women.
Formalization of Work - Ensuring that the rise in LFPR translates into formal jobs with social security.
Targeted Leadership Quotas - Encouraging a minimum 30% representation in corporate and academic boards.
Climate and STEM Focus - Training women for "Green Jobs" and the digital economy to prevent them from being left behind in the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

India is at a pivotal junction where female "participation" is no longer the only goal; "leadership" must be the new priority. For India to transition into a developed economy by 2047, it must dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that keep women at the entry-level of the economy. A truly inclusive republic requires women to be not just the beneficiaries of growth, but its primary architects and leaders.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/business/women-participation-in-economy-rising-but-presence-at-top-dismal-10645640/# -~ -text=with%20male%20lawmakers.-,With%20the%20economy%20posting%20impressive%20growth%20rates%20in%20recent%20years,25 -%2057%20out%20of%20259.

Question

"The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is a milestone in gender justice, yet its delayed implementation underscores the friction between administrative processes and social imperatives. Analyze the impact of legislative quotas on the substantive empowerment of women in India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In 2026, the discourse on gender justice in India is Centered on the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023. While the law mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, its implementation remains tethered to the post-2026 delimitation exercise. This delay

highlights the gap between the symbolic recognition of women's rights and the actual redistribution of political power.

2. Impact of Legislative Quotas on Empowerment

Breaking the "Glass Ceiling" in Politics - Historically, women's representation in the Lok Sabha has stagnated at 14-15%. Legislative quotas provide a mandatory entry point, dismantling the patriarchal gatekeeping inherent in political party ticket distribution.

Substantive vs. Symbolic Presence - Experience from Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) shows that women leaders prioritize "soft infrastructure"—health, water, and education—leading to more inclusive developmental outcomes.

The Intersectional Dimension - The inclusion of a sub-quota for SC/ST women ensures that the benefits of reservation are not monopolized by the urban elite, addressing the layered marginalization of caste and gender.

3. Challenges to Substantive Empowerment

The Census-Delimitation Linkage - The linkage of reservation to the 2026-27 Census and subsequent delimitation acts as a "temporal barrier," delaying the shift in the legislative profile by at least one election cycle.

The 'Sarpanch-Pati' Syndrome - There is a persistent risk of proxy representation, where male relatives wield actual authority behind an elected woman. Without social empowerment, political quotas may remain "functional tokens."

Lack of Economic Parity - Political power alone cannot achieve social justice if the leadership gap in the economy persists (currently women hold only 13% of top managerial roles).

4. Conclusion

Gender justice requires a shift from "numerical representation" to "meaningful participation." While the 106th Amendment is a transformative step, its success depends on internal party reforms and the elimination of the "Care Economy" burden that limits women's full-time engagement in public life.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/business/women-participation-in-economy-rising-but-presence-at-top-dismal-10645640/# -~ -text=with%20male%20lawmakers.-,With%20the%20economy%20posting%20impressive%20growth%20rates%20in%20recent%20years,25 -%2057%20out%20of%20259.

3. Inflation expectations - Whose perceptions are these anyway? (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic - Inflation and monetary policy

Sub-Topic - Role of expectations in economic decision-making

Introduction

Inflation expectations influence how households and firms make consumption, saving, and investment decisions. However, these expectations often diverge from actual inflation data, raising questions about their reliability and role in monetary policy formulation.

1. Concept of Inflation Expectations

1. Inflation expectations refer to future price perceptions held by households, firms, and financial markets.
2. They play a key role in shaping wage demands, consumption behaviour, and pricing strategies.
3. Central banks monitor expectations to anchor inflation and maintain stability.

2. Divergence Between Perception and Reality

Household Perceptions

1. Often based on frequently purchased items like food, fuel, and essentials.
2. Tend to overestimate inflation due to salience and recent price spikes.

Official Inflation Measures

1. Based on Consumer Price Index (CPI), reflecting a broader consumption basket.
2. May not align with individual experiences.

3. Behavioural Biases in Inflation Expectations

Salience Bias - Higher weight given to visible price changes (e.g., vegetables, fuel).
Recency Bias - Recent price movements influence expectations disproportionately.
Limited Information - Households lack complete knowledge of macroeconomic trends.

4. Implications for Monetary Policy

Policy Dilemma

1. Should central banks respond to perceived inflation or measured inflation?

Risk of Overreaction

1. Responding to inflated perceptions may lead to over-tightening of monetary policy.

Credibility of Central Bank

1. Anchoring expectations is essential to maintain trust in policy framework.

5. Role of RBI and Policy Framework

1. RBI uses surveys (households, businesses) alongside CPI data to assess expectations.
2. Inflation targeting framework aims to keep inflation within a tolerance band (4% ± 2%).
3. Communication and forward guidance are key tools to manage expectations.

6. Broader Economic Implications

1. Persistent high expectations can lead to a wage-price spiral.
2. Divergence affects consumption patterns and savings behaviour.
3. Influences investment decisions and overall economic growth.

7. Way Forward

1. Improve inflation communication strategies to bridge perception gaps.
2. Enhance data transparency and financial literacy among citizens.
3. Use a balanced approach combining hard data (CPI) and soft data (surveys).
4. Strengthen credibility through consistent and predictable policy actions.

Conclusion

Inflation expectations are crucial but imperfect indicators. Effective monetary policy must balance data-driven analysis with behavioural insights to ensure stable prices and sustained economic growth.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/inflation-expectations-indian-economy-rbi-monetary-policy-businesses-consumers-price-levels-11776348299173.html

Question

Q. *"Inflation expectations often diverge from actual inflation, yet they play a crucial role in monetary policy." Discuss the reasons for this divergence and its implications for policy-making in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Inflation expectations influence economic behaviour and are central to monetary policy formulation. However, these expectations often differ from actual inflation due to behavioural and informational factors.

Reasons for Divergence

1. Households' base expectations on frequently purchased goods such as food and fuel, which experience higher volatility.
2. Behavioural biases such as salience and recency lead to overestimation of inflation.
3. Limited awareness of broader economic indicators reduces alignment with official CPI data.

4. Differences in consumption patterns across income groups create varied inflation experiences.

Implications for Policy

1. Divergence complicates monetary policy decisions, as central banks must balance perception-driven expectations with actual data.
2. Overreacting to inflated expectations may lead to excessive tightening, affecting growth.
3. Unanchored expectations can trigger wage-price spirals and persistent inflation.
4. Effective communication becomes essential to maintain credibility and guide expectations.

Conclusion

While inflation expectations are imperfect, they remain critical for policy-making. A balanced approach that integrates empirical data with behavioural understanding is necessary to ensure macroeconomic stability.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/inflation-expectations-indian-economy-rbi-monetary-policy-businesses-consumers-price-levels-11776348299173.html

4. Re-energising Bureaucracy for Viksit Bharat (TT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance, Public Administration
Topic - Civil services and bureaucracy
Sub-Topic - E-governance and institutional efficiency

Introduction

India's transition towards Viksit Bharat 2047 depends not only on infrastructure and economic growth but also on a competent, adaptive, and citizen-centric bureaucracy. Initiatives like Mission Karmayogi aim to transform civil services into a future-ready governance system.

1. Changing Role of Bureaucracy

1. Governance is shifting from rule-based administration to outcome-oriented service delivery.
2. Civil servants must handle complex, interdisciplinary challenges such as climate change, AI, and cyber threats.
3. The traditional generalist model is increasingly inadequate in a data-driven governance environment.

2. Mission Karmayogi - Core Features

Capacity Building Framework

1. Focuses on continuous learning and competency development.

Digital Learning Platforms

1. Platforms like iGOT enable anytime, anywhere training.

Role-Based Training

1. Moves from generic training to domain-specific skill development.

Performance Orientation

1. Emphasises outcomes, accountability, and behavioural change.

3. Key Challenges in Bureaucratic Reform

Skill Deficit

1. Limited expertise in emerging areas like AI, data analytics, and climate governance.

Resistance to Change

1. Institutional inertia and adherence to legacy processes slow reforms.

Fragmented Training Systems

1. Lack of coordination across institutions reduces effectiveness.

Weak Incentive Structures

1. Promotions and rewards are not always linked to performance or innovation.

4. Importance of Re-energising Bureaucracy

Effective Policy Implementation

1. Strong administrative capacity ensures better execution of schemes.

Citizen-Centric Governance

1. Improves service delivery and public trust in institutions.

Economic Growth Support

1. Efficient bureaucracy reduces transaction costs and enhances ease of doing business.

5. Role of Technology and Innovation

1. Use of AI, big data, and digital governance tools to improve decision-making.
2. Integration of digital platforms for real-time monitoring and evaluation.
3. Enhancing transparency and reducing corruption through e-governance.

6. Way Forward

Continuous Capacity Building

1. Institutionalise lifelong learning for civil servants.

Specialisation and Expertise

1. Encourage domain-specific roles and lateral entry where necessary.

Performance-Based Incentives

1. Align promotions and rewards with measurable outcomes.

Strengthening Institutional Frameworks

1. Improve coordination among training institutions and governance bodies.

Leadership Development

1. Foster ethical, innovative, and accountable leadership within bureaucracy.

Conclusion

A re-energised bureaucracy is central to achieving Viksit Bharat. By combining capacity building, technology, and institutional reforms, India can create a governance system that is efficient, responsive, and future-ready.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/re-energising-bureaucracy-for-viksit-bharat

Question

Q. *"Civil service reforms are essential for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047." Examine the role of Mission Karmayogi in transforming India's bureaucracy and discuss the challenges in its implementation.* (250 words)

Introduction

Civil services play a critical role in policy formulation and implementation. In the context of Viksit Bharat 2047, reforms such as Mission Karmayogi aim to transform the bureaucracy into a capacity-driven, technology-enabled, and citizen-centric system.

Role of Mission Karmayogi

1. Mission Karmayogi promotes continuous learning and competency-based training, enabling civil servants to adapt to evolving governance challenges.
2. It leverages digital platforms such as iGOT to provide accessible and flexible training opportunities.
3. The initiative emphasises role-based capacity building, ensuring that officials develop domain-specific expertise.
4. It seeks to improve accountability and performance by linking training outcomes with governance objectives.

Challenges

1. Institutional resistance to change and adherence to traditional administrative practices can slow implementation.

2. Limited expertise in emerging domains such as artificial intelligence and data analytics constrains effectiveness.
3. Fragmentation among training institutions reduces coordination and impact.
4. Weak incentive structures may fail to adequately reward innovation and performance.

Conclusion

Mission Karmayogi has the potential to transform India's bureaucracy into a modern, efficient, and responsive institution. However, its success depends on overcoming structural and behavioural challenges while ensuring sustained commitment to capacity building and reform.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/re-energising-bureaucracy-for-viksit-bharat

Editorial of the Day – 21.04.2026

Index

1. The strategic vulnerability in India's LPG supply model (TH) -01
2. India's blue economy and MSP-based procurement system (IE) -03
3. How two wars have upended the global order (BL) -06
4. PRAHAAR: A comprehensive national counter-terror policy (TP) -08

1. The strategic vulnerability in India's LPG supply model (TH)

GS Paper III: Indian Economy; Infrastructure (Energy); Internal Security.
Topic: Infrastructure: Energy; Mobilization of Resources; Security challenges and their management in border areas; Growth and Development.
Sub-Topic: Energy Security and Fossil Fuel Dependence.

1. Introduction

India's Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) crisis is a deep-seated structural mismatch rather than a transient shortage. With a domestic production that meets less than half of the national demand, India's energy security is precariously tied to global supply chains. Unlike industrial fuels, LPG is the primary energy source for Indian kitchens, making its supply non-negotiable for social stability and food security.

2. The Production-Demand Mismatch

Consumption Stats: India consumed approximately 33.15 million tonnes of LPG last year.
Production Gap: Domestic production accounts for only 40% of total demand.
Import Intensity: 60% of LPG is imported. Total demand stands at 250% of indigenous production.
Import Ratio: Annual imports are equivalent to 150% of domestic output, indicating a massive reliance on external molecules.

3. Nature of Consumption: The "Kitchen" Vulnerability

Household Dominance: Over 90% of LPG is used for domestic cooking; commercial/industrial use is less than 10%.
Inelastic Demand: Industrial users can slow down production or switch feedstocks during a crisis; however, household cooking load is "hard to defer" and "hard to replace" quickly.
Strategic Risk: LPG dependence is not a standard product-import issue; it is a direct threat to the daily survival of the Indian household.

4. Geopolitical Bottleneck: The Strait of Hormuz

Single Corridor Dependency: About 90% of India's LPG imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz.
Permanent Risk: Recent tensions have proved that the Strait can no longer be treated as a "routinely dependable" corridor.
Strategic Calculation: The assumption of uninterrupted supply from the Gulf has been permanently altered, requiring a lasting reassessment of energy routes.

5. Comparative Analysis: India vs. East Asian Peers

Feature	India	Japan	China	South Korea
Import Share	High (60%)	Very High	High	High
Primary Use	Domestic Kitchens	Mixed (40% Households)	Petrochemicals	Natural Gas/Electricity
Storage Cover	~1.5 days (Deep storage)	108.3 days	Industrial Buffers	Electricity/Gas Buffers
Vulnerability	Extreme	Low (due to reserves)	Moderate	Low

6. The Storage Deficit

Operational Tankage: Reports suggest about 15 days of operational cover across bottling plants and refineries.

Strategic Deep Storage: Visible underground cavern-based storage is only 140,000 tonnes (60 TMT at Visakhapatnam and 80 TMT at Mangaluru).

The Reality Check: This deep storage accounts for only 1.5 days of national demand—a dangerously thin buffer for a country of India's size.

7. Global Market Constraints

Market Concentration: India is not buying from a neutral market. Just four Asian countries (including India) absorb over half of the world's exportable LPG pool.

Supply Rigidity: Most of the global pool is already tied up in long-term contracts for petrochemicals or heating in other nations, leaving very little room for emergency redirections.

8. Recommendations: A Blueprint for Resilience

A. Prioritizing the Molecule

Pool Separation: Stop treating all LPG as a single pool.

Reservation for Kitchens: Reserve domestic LPG and refinery-origin propane/butane (C3/C4 streams) strictly for household cooking.

Industrial Independence: Force petrochemical users to arrange their own independent feedstock imports rather than drawing from the "protected pool" intended for domestic kitchens.

B. Building a Strategic Buffer

Capacity Expansion: Aim for an initial goal of 14 to 21 days of protected cover for the household pool.

Infrastructure Goal: This requires a jump to 1.3 million tonnes (14 days) or 1.9 million tonnes (21 days) of cavern capacity.

C. The "Electric Cooking" Campaign

Targeting Urban Centres: Launch a sustained campaign to shift urban and semi-urban loads to induction cooking.

Give It Up 2.0: Introduce a new phase of the "Give It Up" plan to encourage households with reliable power and wiring to move away from LPG.

Diversification: Expand Piped Natural Gas (PNG) in high-density areas while using electricity as the broader lever to reduce the "one-fuel" dependence.

Conclusion

India's LPG vulnerability is a design flaw. Resilience cannot be bought simply by increasing cargoes; it must be engineered through the diversification of the cooking fuel mix, the separation of industrial and domestic demand, and a massive investment in strategic deep-storage infrastructure. Until the "one kitchen, one cylinder" model is diluted, India's energy security will remain at the mercy of a single maritime corridor.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-strategic-vulnerability-in-indias-lpg-supply-model/article70885313.ece

Question

"India's LPG vulnerability is an enduring structural mismatch rather than a passing shortage." Analyze this statement in light of India's import dependency, geopolitical risks, and storage deficits. Suggest measures to enhance resilience in the household energy sector. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's energy security is currently tethered to a fragile Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) supply model. With domestic production meeting only 40% of a 33.15 million tonne demand, the nation faces a structural gap where annual imports now equal 150% of domestic output. Unlike industrial energy, India's LPG is primarily a household fuel, making its supply essential for social stability and the daily survival of millions.

2. The Structural Design Flaw

The vulnerability in India's LPG model is characterized by three critical factors:

Inelastic Household Demand: Over 90% of LPG consumption occurs in domestic kitchens. Unlike petrochemical plants that can defer production, household cooking demand is inelastic; it cannot be cut or replaced quickly during a crisis.

Geopolitical Bottleneck: Approximately 90% of imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Recent regional tensions have proved that this corridor is no longer "routinely dependable," yet India's supply chain remains almost entirely reliant on it.

The Storage Deficit: India possesses only 1.5 days of national demand in "reserve-style" deep storage (140,000 tonnes across Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru). This is starkly inadequate compared to peers like Japan, which maintains 108.3 days of LPG stock.

3. Comparative Exposure

While countries like Japan and South Korea also import large shares of LPG, India is more exposed because:

Usage Mix: In China and Korea, LPG is heavily used in petrochemicals; in India, it is a non-deferrable kitchen fuel.

Lack of Alternatives: Other nations have deeper penetration of city gas (PNG) and electricity for residential energy, whereas the Indian kitchen remains asymmetric in its reliance on the LPG cylinder.

4. Measures to Enhance Resilience

To shift from a model of vulnerability to one of resilience, India must adopt a "system-design" change:

Pool Separation: Reserve all domestically produced LPG and refinery-origin propane/butane strictly for household security. Petrochemical industries should be mandated to arrange their own independent feedstock imports.

Expanding Strategic Buffers: Build deeper LPG caverns to achieve a 14-to-21-day protected cover. This requires an infrastructure jump to nearly 1.9 million tonnes of capacity.

The "Electric Cooking" Pivot: Launch a sustained 'Give It Up 2.0' campaign targeting urban and semi-urban India. Transitioning households with reliable power to induction cooking reduces the primary cooking load on LPG.

Diversification of Feedstock: Accelerate the expansion of Piped Natural Gas (PNG) in high-density clusters to reduce the "one-fuel" risk of the LPG cylinder.

5. Conclusion

India's LPG problem is an enduring mismatch between domestic production and household consumption. Buying more cargoes is a temporary fix; true resilience lies in separating industrial demand from domestic pools, building significant strategic reserves, and aggressively promoting electric cooking. Without these design changes, the Indian kitchen will remain strategically vulnerable to global maritime shocks.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-strategic-vulnerability-in-indias-lpg-supply-model/article70885313.ece

2. India's blue economy and MSP-based procurement system (IE)

GS Paper III: Environment (Conservation).

Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Blue Economy; Infrastructure: Ports.

Sub-Topic: Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Coastal Management.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, Odisha etched its name in India's maritime history by becoming the first state to implement Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). Backed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), this initiative is a significant step toward reconciling

industrial growth with environmental sanctity. As India navigates the "Blue Economy" frontier, Odisha's MSP framework provides a scientific blueprint for managing its 550 km coastline—a region as economically vital as it is ecologically fragile.

2. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP): Concept & Global Framework

Definition & Objective: Defined by the IOC-UNESCO, MSP is a public process of analyzing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives.

Integrated Governance: Unlike traditional sectoral management, MSP integrates disparate sectors—such as fisheries, shipping, tourism, and renewable energy—into a single cohesive plan, effectively reducing stakeholder conflicts.

Global Benchmarks: * **Norway:** A leader in integrated ocean management, providing the foundational model for India's current initiatives.

1. Australia: Successfully uses MSP to balance the preservation of the Great Barrier Reef with commercial shipping and tourism.

SDG Alignment: Directly advances SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and supports SDG 13 (Climate Action) by preserving carbon-sequestering marine habitats.

3. MSP in India: Policy Evolution & the Blue Economy

India–Norway Initiative (2019): Launched to strengthen scientific ocean planning, the first phase focused on pilot sites in Puducherry and Lakshadweep.

Economic Integration: MSP is the operational arm of India's Blue Economy Policy, complementing the Sagarmala Programme (port-led development) and the Deep Ocean Mission.

Institutional Framework: The NCCR provides the "data backbone," utilizing oceanography, biodiversity mapping, and climate modeling to ensure evidence-based zonation.

The Strategic Necessity: With a 7,500 km coastline, India faces immense pressure from urbanization and climate-induced disasters, making integrated planning a non-negotiable priority.

4. Odisha's Strategic Importance

Ecological Capital: Home to the Bhitarkanika Mangroves (a vital cyclone buffer), Chilika Lake (Asia's largest brackish water lagoon), and diverse estuaries.

Economic Engine: The coastline supports high-volume fisheries, tourism, and strategic ports. Chilika Lake alone is a primary livelihood source for thousands of fishing communities.

The "Cyclone Capital": Odisha's extreme vulnerability to sea-level rise and intense storms (e.g., Cyclone Fani) necessitates a shift from reactive disaster management to proactive spatial planning.

5. Key Features of Implementation in Odisha

Benthic & Seabed Mapping: Scientific mapping of underwater vegetation and the seabed to identify "No-Go" zones for conservation and "Go" zones for commercial activities.

Oceanic Parameter Assessment: Constant monitoring of salinity, temperature, and water quality to track the health of marine ecosystems.

Zonation Strategy: Clear demarcation of areas for:

1. Fisheries & Aquaculture
2. Tourism & Recreation
3. Shipping & Port Infrastructure
4. Renewable Energy (Offshore Wind/Solar)

Data-Driven Policy: Ensuring that state-level development policies are rooted in real-time ecological data.

6. MSP and Climate Resilience

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR): By identifying vulnerable zones, MSP prevents the construction of critical infrastructure in high-risk areas, minimizing future economic losses.

Ecosystem-Based Adaptation (EbA): It prioritizes the protection of mangroves and seagrasses, which are far more efficient at carbon sequestration than terrestrial forests and serve as natural storm surges protectors.
Food Security: By preventing overexploitation and pollution in nursery grounds, MSP ensures the long-term sustainability of fish stocks.
Paris Agreement Alignment: Supports India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by enhancing the carbon sink capacity of the coastal zone.

7. Challenges in Implementation

Data & Technical Gaps: High-resolution marine data is scarce, and the technological expertise required for real-time monitoring is currently localized in a few central agencies.
Governance Complexity: Overlapping jurisdictions between Central (Shipping/Environment), State (Fisheries/Tourism), and Local bodies can lead to bureaucratic friction.
Livelihood Friction: Zonation may restrict access for traditional fishing communities, potentially leading to social resistance if not managed inclusively.
Legal Vacuum: India currently lacks a dedicated MSP Act. Integration with existing Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms remains a complex legal task.

8. Way Forward

National Policy Framework: Transition from state-specific pilots to a comprehensive National MSP Policy with legislative backing.
Inclusive Governance: Adopt a bottom-up approach where local fishing unions and coastal dwellers are primary stakeholders in the zonation process.
Technological Integration: Utilize AI, GIS, and Satellite Remote Sensing for the "Digital Twin" modeling of the coastline.
Policy Convergence: Align MSP with the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) to ensure a unified response to rising sea levels.

Conclusion

Odisha's pioneering move into Marine Spatial Planning marks a departure from the "exploitation-first" mindset of the past. For a nation with India's maritime ambitions, MSP is not just an environmental tool; it is a strategic necessity. By balancing the "Blue" of economic growth with the "Green" of ecological integrity, MSP ensures that the ocean remains a source of prosperity rather than a theater of conflict and climate catastrophe.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/upsc-essentials-mains-answer-practice-gs-3-questions-week-151-10648369/

Question

"Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is a transformative approach to ocean governance that reconciles economic ambitions with ecological integrity. Elucidate this statement in the context of India's Blue Economy and Odisha's recent pioneering initiative." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, Odisha became the first Indian state to implement Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in Phase-II of the India–Norway collaboration. MSP is a scientific, data-driven framework that allocates marine space for ecological, economic, and social objectives. It represents a paradigm shift from sectoral management to an integrated, ecosystem-based approach, ensuring that India's maritime growth does not compromise its environmental health.

2. Reconciling Economy with Ecology: The Significance of MSP

MSP acts as a bridge between the "Blue" of economic growth and the "Green" of conservation:
Conflict Resolution: By demarcating specific zones for shipping, fisheries, and tourism, MSP reduces competition and spatial conflicts among maritime stakeholders.

Optimization of the Blue Economy: It identifies sites for emerging sectors like offshore wind energy and marine biotechnology while protecting traditional fishing grounds.
Climate Resilience: MSP prioritizes the conservation of mangroves (Bhitarkanika) and estuaries, which serve as natural carbon sinks and buffers against cyclones—a critical need for Odisha's 550 km coastline.
SDG Alignment: The framework directly advances SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and supports SDG 13 (Climate Action) by facilitating ecosystem-based adaptation.

3. Odisha as a National Model (2026 context)

Odisha's partnership with the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) serves as a pilot for the rest of India's 7,500 km coastline:
Scientific Mapping: The initiative uses Benthic (seabed) mapping and salinity studies to understand underwater health before allocating zones for industrial ports or aquaculture.
Blue Economy Synergy: It integrates the state's vision for 2036 and 2047 with sustainable resource use, particularly in sensitive regions like Chilika Lake.
Inclusive Governance: Unlike top-down models, the 2026 MSP framework aims to engage local fishing communities and rightsholders in the zonation process to build social trust.

4. Lingering Challenges in Implementation

Technical & Data Gaps: High-resolution marine data and real-time seafloor monitoring capabilities are still in nascent stages.
Jurisdictional Complexity: Overlapping roles of Central (Shipping/Environment) and State (Fisheries/Tourism) departments create governance bottlenecks.
Livelihood Displacement: Zonation may inadvertently restrict access for traditional, small-scale fishers if not designed with extreme inclusivity.
Statutory Vacuum: India currently lacks a dedicated MSP Act, requiring integration with existing Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) and Environment Protection laws.

5. Conclusion

Marine Spatial Planning is not merely an environmental tool; it is a strategic necessity for a sustainable republic. Odisha's initiative marks a milestone in India's ocean governance, proving that economic development and ecological protection can coexist. For India to achieve its $1 trillion Blue Economy goal, the MSP framework must be scaled nationally, backed by robust technology and "Cooperative Federalism" to safeguard the ocean for future generations.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/upsc-essentials-mains-answer-practice-gs-3-questions-week-151-10648369/

3. How two wars have upended the global order (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic: Globalisation and its challenges
Sub-Topic: Energy security and supply chains

Introduction

Recent conflicts such as the Russia–Ukraine war and the West Asia crisis have disrupted global trade, energy flows, and supply chains. These events signal a shift from a rules-based global order to a fragmented and uncertain system, with significant implications for India.

1. Breakdown of the Rules-Based Order

1. The post-World War II system emphasised free trade, multilateralism, and stable supply chains.
2. Rising geopolitical conflicts have weakened these norms, leading to unilateral actions and protectionism.
3. Trade is increasingly shaped by strategic interests rather than economic efficiency.

2. Supply Chain Disruptions

Critical Chokepoints

1. Disruptions in key routes like the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea affect global trade flows.

Fragmentation of Trade Networks

1. Countries are rethinking dependencies, leading to regionalisation and friend-shoring.

Higher Costs

1. Increased transport, insurance, and risk premiums are raising global trade costs.

3. Energy Security Challenges

1. India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil and gas.
2. Conflicts disrupt supply chains, leading to price volatility and inflationary pressures.
3. Fertiliser supply disruptions affect agriculture and food security.

4. Economic Implications for India

Inflationary Pressures

1. Rising energy and commodity prices increase cost of living.

Growth Slowdown Risks

1. Supply shocks can reduce industrial output and economic growth.

External Sector Stress

1. Higher import bills widen the current account deficit (CAD).

5. Strategic Response Options

Diversification of Imports

1. Reduce dependence on a few suppliers by sourcing from multiple countries.

Strategic Reserves

1. Build reserves of oil, gas, and fertilisers to cushion shocks.

Renewable Energy Transition

1. Accelerate shift towards solar, wind, and green hydrogen.

Nuclear Energy Expansion

1. Provide stable and long-term energy security.

6. Changing Nature of Globalisation

1. Movement from efficiency-driven globalisation to resilience-driven systems.
2. Emergence of geo-economic blocs and strategic alliances.
3. Increased role of state intervention in trade and industry.

7. Way Forward for India

1. Adopt a balanced approach combining self-reliance and global integration.
2. Strengthen domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependence.
3. Enhance diplomatic engagement to secure stable trade partnerships.
4. Invest in resilient infrastructure and supply chain systems.

Conclusion

The twin shocks of global conflicts have exposed vulnerabilities in the global order. For India, building resilience, diversification, and strategic autonomy is essential to navigate an increasingly uncertain world.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/how-two-wars-have-upended-the-global-order/article70885428.ece#:~:text=It%20has%20always%20been%20so,up%20after%20World%20War%20II

Question

Q. *"Recent global conflicts have accelerated the shift from efficiency-driven globalisation to resilience-driven economic systems." Discuss the implications of this shift for India and suggest appropriate policy responses.* (250 words)

Introduction

Recent geopolitical conflicts, particularly the Russia–Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia, have disrupted global trade and energy systems. These developments mark a transition from efficiency-driven globalisation to a more fragmented, resilience-focused economic order.

Implications for India

1. Supply chain disruptions have increased costs of imports, especially energy and fertilisers, leading to inflationary pressures.
2. Dependence on critical trade routes and limited diversification of imports expose India to external shocks.
3. Rising import bills widen the current account deficit and strain macroeconomic stability.
4. Global trade fragmentation may reduce export opportunities and slow economic growth.

Policy Responses

1. India should diversify its sources of energy and critical imports to reduce vulnerability.
2. Building strategic reserves of oil and fertilisers can help manage short-term disruptions.
3. Accelerating renewable energy and nuclear power development can enhance long-term energy security.
4. Strengthening domestic manufacturing under initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat can reduce import dependence.
5. Enhancing diplomatic and trade partnerships can ensure stable access to global markets.

Conclusion

The evolving global economic order requires India to prioritise resilience alongside growth. A combination of diversification, self-reliance, and strategic engagement will be crucial to navigate emerging challenges.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/how-two-wars-have-upended-the-global-order/article70885428.ece#:~:text=It%20has%20always%20been%20so,up%20after%20World%20War%20II

4. PRAHAAR: A comprehensive national counter-terror policy (TP)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Internal Security
Topic: Terrorism and internal security challenges
Sub-Topic: Role of intelligence and security agencies

Introduction

India's evolving security landscape demands a shift from reactive counter-terror responses to proactive, intelligence-driven strategies. The PRAHAAR doctrine represents such a transition, focusing on pre-emption, coordination, and capability enhancement to tackle emerging terror threats.

1. Shift in Counter-Terror Strategy

1. Traditional approaches were largely reactive, responding after attacks occurred.
2. PRAHAAR emphasises anticipatory action, identifying threats before they materialise.
3. It reflects a move towards strategic deterrence and disruption of terror networks.

2. Core Pillars of PRAHAAR Doctrine

Prevention through Intelligence

1. Strengthening intelligence gathering and real-time analysis.
2. Leveraging data analytics and surveillance technologies.

Pre-emptive Action

1. Neutralising threats at early stages rather than post-incident response.

Inter-Agency Coordination

1. Ensuring seamless cooperation among intelligence, military, and law enforcement agencies.

Capacity Building

1. Enhancing training, modernisation, and technological capabilities of security forces.

3. Role of Technology and Modern Warfare

1. Use of AI, big data, and cyber intelligence for threat detection.
2. Monitoring digital platforms to track radicalisation and recruitment.
3. Adoption of advanced surveillance systems for border and internal security.

4. Addressing Emerging Threats

Radicalisation and Lone-Wolf Attacks

1. Focus on early detection of extremist ideologies.

Cross-Border Terrorism

1. Strengthening border management and intelligence-sharing mechanisms.

Hybrid Threats

1. Tackling cyber-terrorism and misinformation campaigns alongside physical threats.

5. Challenges in Implementation

1. Coordination gaps between multiple agencies can hinder effectiveness.
2. Balancing security measures with civil liberties and democratic values.
3. Resource and capacity constraints in adopting advanced technologies.
4. Need for continuous training and skill upgradation.

6. Strategic Significance

1. Enhances India's ability to prevent large-scale attacks and minimise casualties.
2. Strengthens national security architecture through integration and modernisation.
3. Positions India to respond effectively to evolving global terror dynamics.

7. Way Forward

1. Institutionalise intelligence-sharing frameworks across agencies.
2. Invest in advanced technologies and cybersecurity infrastructure.
3. Strengthen community engagement to counter radicalisation.
4. Ensure accountability and safeguards to protect civil rights.

Conclusion

The PRAHAAR doctrine marks a significant evolution in India's counter-terrorism approach. By focusing on prevention, coordination, and technological integration, it enhances India's capacity to address complex security challenges while maintaining democratic principles.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/prahaar-a-comprehensive-national-counter-terror-policy

Question

Q. *"Modern counter-terrorism requires a shift from reactive responses to proactive and intelligence-driven strategies." Discuss in the context of India's PRAHAAR doctrine.* (250 words)

Introduction

India faces diverse and evolving terrorism threats, ranging from cross-border terrorism to cyber radicalisation. In this context, the PRAHAAR doctrine represents a shift towards proactive and intelligence-driven counter-terrorism.

Key Features of the Doctrine

1. The doctrine emphasises prevention by strengthening intelligence gathering and real-time threat analysis.
2. It focuses on pre-emptive action to neutralise threats before they materialise.
3. It promotes coordination among multiple agencies, including intelligence, military, and law enforcement.
4. It integrates modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics into security operations.

Significance

1. A proactive approach reduces the likelihood of large-scale terror incidents.
2. Improved coordination enhances operational efficiency and response time.
3. Technological integration strengthens the ability to detect and counter emerging threats such as cyber-terrorism.

Challenges

1. Coordination among agencies remains complex and requires institutional strengthening.
2. Ensuring that security measures do not infringe upon civil liberties is a critical concern.
3. Resource constraints and the need for specialised training may limit effective implementation.

Conclusion

The PRAHAAR doctrine reflects a necessary evolution in India's counter-terrorism strategy. Its success will depend on effective implementation, technological advancement, and balancing security with democratic values.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/prahaar-a-comprehensive-national-counter-terror-policy

Editorial of the Day – 22.04.2026

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1. Lunar governance should be multilateral (TH)

GS Paper II: International Relations; Important International Institutions, Agencies and Fora.
Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
Sub-Topic: Space Governance (Artemis Accords vs. 1979 Moon Agreement).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, as the Artemis II mission captures a new "Earthset" from the lunar limb, a stark geopolitical irony emerges. While NASA invokes the "universalism" of humanity's return to the moon, the United States simultaneously faces severe criticism for its disregard of international law, human rights, and multilateral trade norms. This duality suggests a "contempt for human rights" that contradicts the very global cooperation required for sustainable space governance.

2. The Irony of Universalism: Past and Present

The text draws a parallel between two eras of lunar exploration and military violence:
The Apollo 8 Parallel (1968): The iconic "Earthrise" image was captured in the same year U.S. forces committed the My Lai massacre in Vietnam.
The Artemis II Parallel (2026): The current lunar mission coincides with coordinated U.S.-Israeli strikes against Iran, resulting in child casualties at a girls' primary school—described as the largest child casualty event in a single U.S. attack since My Lai.
The Gaza Conflict: The U.S. continues to enable an Israeli military campaign under scrutiny by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for potential genocide since January 2024.

3. Erosion of International Law and Due Process

The U.S. administration is accused of dismantling the very legal protections it helped build:
International Humanitarian Law (IHL): Both U.S. and Israeli forces have allegedly struck sites protected under IHL, while the Pentagon shelved frameworks designed to avoid civilian harm.
International Criminal Court (ICC): Despite ICC arrest warrants for Israeli leaders for war crimes, the U.S. responded with sanctions against ICC officials.
Trade Law and the WTO: The U.S. has used the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose sweeping tariffs found to be in violation of GATT. However, by blocking appointments to the WTO Appellate Body since 2019, the U.S. has effectively hollowed out the dispute resolution mechanism.
Domestic Due Process: Massive deportation programs (approximately 6 lakh people) involving Venezuelan migrants have been criticized for violating due process rights, often ignoring the lack of gang affiliations or individual legal standing.

4. Space Governance: The Artemis Accords vs. The World

The Artemis Accords are viewed by experts like Christopher Newman as a mechanism for U.S. hegemony in space:
Resource Interpretation: A 2015 U.S. law allows citizens to own lunar resources. The Accords are seen as a tool to force other nations to accept this interpretation of resource rights.

Finite Resources: The lunar south pole contains finite water ice (crucial for rocket fuel). The Accords introduce "Safety Zones" which, while intended to prevent interference, could effectively become "exclusion zones" allowing early movers to consolidate control.
Outer Space Treaty (OST) Loophole: These zones allow for the consolidation of control over resource-rich areas without technically violating the OST's ban on national appropriation.

5. The Challenge of Unilateralism

Bypassing the UN: The Artemis Accords sidestep the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), opting for bilateral agreements that set industry rules before global consensus is reached.
Strategic Confrontation: By excluding major powers like China, the U.S. architecture for the moon risks setting up a permanent geopolitical confrontation in space.
Alternative Leadership: The text argues that while U.S. governance is more transparent than China's, Chinese leadership is not the *only* alternative; multilateralism remains the superior path.

6. Way Forward: Toward a Multilateral Lunar Regime

Engagement with the Moon Agreement: The U.S. should engage with the 1979 Moon Agreement, which calls for an international regime to govern resource exploitation.
Treaty-Level Rules: There is a need for treaty-level rules that give all nations a stake in lunar resources rather than a "first-come, first-served" model.
Desisting from Hegemony: If the U.S. seeks to be a credible leader, it must move away from unilateral rule-setting and return to the multilateral process of the UN.

Conclusion

The "Artemis era" is threatened by a fundamental disconnect between U.S. space aspirations and its terrestrial conduct. A nation whose policy is defined by "unmitigated self-interest" and a disregard for international legal warrants cannot credibly lead a mission for "all humankind." Sustainable lunar exploration requires a return to cooperative, treaty-based frameworks that prioritize the collective interests of the global community over the strategic consolidation of power.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/lunar-governance-should-be-multilateral/article70890057.ece

Question

"The Artemis Accords seek to establish a new normative framework for lunar exploration, yet they are criticized for bypassing multilateral processes and reflecting a policy of unmitigated self-interest. Critically analyze the implications of the U.S.-led space governance model in the context of evolving standards of international law." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 Artemis II mission symbolizes humanity's return to the moon, yet it is framed by a profound geopolitical paradox. While NASA invokes "universalism," the U.S. simultaneously faces scrutiny for hollowing out international institutions (WTO, ICC) and violating humanitarian norms. This duality raises a fundamental question: can a nation whose terrestrial conduct inspires "least confidence" credibly lead the governance of the Global Commons in outer space?

2. The Shift from Multilateralism to Unilateralism

The U.S. space governance model, centered on the Artemis Accords, signals a shift away from traditional UN-led processes:
Bypassing the UN: The Accords utilize bilateral agreements to set "industry rules" among a subset of states, effectively sidestepping the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS).
Resource Consolidation: Under a 2015 U.S. law incorporated into the Accords, citizens can possess and sell lunar resources. This interprets "resource rights" in a manner that favors early-movers, potentially contradicting the 1979 Moon Agreement which advocates for an international regime for exploitation.

"Safety Zones" as Exclusion Zones: While intended to prevent "harmful interference," these zones could function as de facto exclusion zones around finite resources like water ice at the lunar South Pole, allowing control without technically violating the Outer Space Treaty's ban on national appropriation.

3. Terrestrial Credibility and the Crisis of Law

The text highlights a "contempt for international law" that undermines the Accords' moral standing:

Institutional Erosion: By blocking WTO Appellate Body appointments and sanctioning ICC officials who issued warrants for war crimes, the U.S. has weakened the global "rule of law" architecture.

Humanitarian Contradictions: Coordinated strikes in 2026 involving child casualties and the scrutinized military campaign in Gaza create a trust deficit. A leadership that disregards International Humanitarian Law (IHL) on Earth is seen as an unreliable architect for "peaceful use" in space.

4. Geopolitical Implications: The Risk of Confrontation

The current architecture risks institutionalizing a "Space Cold War":

Exclusion of Peers: By effectively excluding China and favoring a western-aligned subset, the Accords risk a permanent lunar confrontation rather than a stake-based global regime.

Erosion of Due Process: The administration's domestic policies—such as the deportation of 6 lakh migrants while questioning due process—further alienate nations seeking a fair and equitable space regime.

5. Way Forward: Toward a Multilateral Regime

Reviving the Moon Agreement: There is a need for treaty-level rules that give all nations a stake in lunar resources, rather than a "first-come, first-served" model.

Multilateral Consensus: The U.S. must return to the UN COPUOS framework to ensure that industry standards are reached through global consensus rather than unilateral imposition.

Conclusion

While the Artemis Accords offer transparency and principles for emergency assistance, their legitimacy is compromised by the U.S.'s recent disregard for terrestrial multilateralism and human rights. For space to remain the "province of all mankind," its governance must be rooted in a genuine multilateral regime that prioritizes collective interest over unmitigated self-interest. Leadership in the cosmos cannot be sustained without a corresponding commitment to the rule of law on Earth.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/lunar-governance-should-be-multilateral/article70890057.ece

2. 'Hard reset': A year since Pahalgam, J&K's security landscape looks vastly different (IE)

GS Paper III: Internal Security.

Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Security challenges and their management in border areas.

Sub-Topic: Evolution of Counter-Insurgency (COIN) strategies in J&K.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the first anniversary of the Pahalgam terror attack (2025) serves as a grim reminder of a major inflection point in India's internal security strategy. The attack, which targeted the "soft underbelly" of J&K's tourism sector, resulted in 26 civilian casualties and exposed critical gaps in the post-pandemic security grid. Consequently, India has transitioned from an urban-centric defensive posture to a terrain-dominant, intelligence-led offensive strategy, aimed at neutralizing the evolving threat of "hybrid" militancy and cross-border infiltration.

2. The Evolving Nature of Terrorism in J&K

The landscape of militancy has shifted from traditional battlegrounds to asymmetric targets:

Targeting "Normalcy": The focus has shifted from security installations to soft targets (tourists and civilians) to disrupt economic revival and damage India's international image.
Hybrid Militancy: The emergence of "faceless" militants—locals without prior criminal records—has made traditional surveillance less effective.
Psychological Warfare: By attacking high-profile tourist hubs, terror outfits aim to project a sense of instability and undermine governance.
Cross-Border Linkages: Continued infiltration across the Line of Control (LoC) remains a structural reality, supported by external non-state actors.

3. Security Lapses and the "Soft Frontier" Concept

The 2025 attack highlighted a dangerous mismatch between development and security:
Expansion without Grid Support: Post-pandemic, 70–75 new tourist destinations were opened. However, the security grid was not proportionally expanded to cover these remote areas.
Faulty Assumptions: Security agencies predominantly focused on urban centers, underestimating the strategic sensitivity of the Pir Panjal range, which sits near traditional infiltration routes.
The "Soft Frontier" Reality: These remote destinations became accessible to the public but remained insufficiently secured, creating a vacuum that militants exploited.

4. The "Road to Ridge" Doctrine: A Strategic Shift

To counter high-altitude threats, the Indian Army and security forces adopted a new operational philosophy:
Terrain Dominance: Shifting focus from road-based patrolling to high-altitude ridge control, denying militants the advantage of "high ground" hideouts.
Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs): The establishment of over 40 TOBs at altitudes reaching 9,000 feet allows for sustained surveillance and rapid-strike capabilities.
Area Domination Exercises (ADEs): Frequent patrols in dense forests and mountains disrupt the cycle of "infiltration-concealment-attack."
Integrated Deployment: Closer coordination between the Rashtriya Rifles (RR), Jammu & Kashmir Police (JKP), and the CRPF ensures a unified response.

5. Intelligence-Led & Technology-Driven Counter-Terrorism

Modern security in J&K is now defined by "Precision over Presence":
Intel-First Approach: Shifting from reactive engagement to operations based on real-time, actionable data.
Operation Mahadev (2025): A benchmark operation that utilized human intelligence and drones to neutralize attackers in difficult terrain.
Network-Based Targeting: Focus has shifted from killing individual militants to dismantling the entire ecosystem, including recruiters and financiers.

Advanced Technological Integration:

1. Drones: Deployment of surveillance and combat drones in inaccessible forest areas.
2. Digital Identification: Utilizing Aadhaar-linked QR identification for over 50,000 tourism-related workers to verify identities and filter out overground workers (OGWs).
3. Smart Surveillance: Use of satellite inputs, sensors, and AI-based analytics for real-time situational awareness.

6. The "Human Firewall" and Community Integration

Sustainable security is impossible without the local population:
Local Participation: Integrating guides, pony handlers, and vendors as eyes and ears on the ground to provide grassroots intelligence.
The "Human Firewall": Creating a verified network of locals who act as a protective layer for tourists, effectively bridging the trust gap.

Economic Stability as Security: The revival of tourism ensures livelihoods, creating a vested interest within the local community to maintain peace.

7. Persistent Challenges and Internal Security Implications

Despite the "Road to Ridge" shift, several hurdles remain:

Porous Terrain: Infiltration persists through difficult gaps in the LoC, especially during extreme weather.

Intelligence Gaps in Dense Forests: The thick foliage of the Pir Panjal limits the effectiveness of both aerial drones and human reconnaissance.

External Support: The structural challenge of cross-border support and safe havens for terrorists remains unaddressed at the diplomatic level.

Development-Security Nexus: The paradox remains—opening more areas for development increases the surface area for potential attacks.

Conclusion

The security transformation in Jammu & Kashmir post-2025 represents a move toward a more dynamic, multi-layered, and proactive counter-terrorism framework. By combining high-altitude terrain dominance with cutting-edge technology and community integration, India is effectively shrinking the "soft frontiers." However, the long-term success of this "Road to Ridge" doctrine depends on maintaining the balance between robust security measures and the protection of civil liberties to prevent further alienation.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/hard-reset-a-year-since-pahalgam-jks-security-landscape-looks-vastly-different-10647134/

Question

"Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir acts simultaneously as a symbol of normalcy and a strategic vulnerability in the current security landscape." Comment on this statement in the light of the 'Road to Ridge' doctrine and the emergence of 'soft frontiers'. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, which resulted in the loss of 26 civilian lives, marked a significant shift in the theater of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. While the expansion of tourism to over 70 new destinations post-pandemic was projected as a hallmark of "normalcy," it inadvertently created "soft frontiers"—remote, high-altitude regions that were accessible to the public but insufficiently covered by the existing security grid.

2. The Paradox: Normalcy vs. Vulnerability

Tourism serves as a double-edged sword in internal security:

Economic & Psychological Normalcy: A thriving tourism sector disrupts the "conflict economy," ensures local livelihoods, and projects a stable image of India to the global community.

Strategic Vulnerability: The opening of remote areas in the Pir Panjal range provided militants with asymmetric targets. These "soft targets" require lower logistical effort for terrorists compared to hardened security installations but yield higher psychological impact.

Infiltration Overlap: Many newly opened tourist hubs lie in close proximity to traditional infiltration routes, making the presence of high civilian density a challenge for kinetic military operations.

3. The 'Road to Ridge' Shift: Reclaiming the High Ground

To address these vulnerabilities, security forces moved away from urban-centric, road-based deployments toward a terrain-dominant doctrine:

Ridge Dominance: By controlling the high-altitude ridges, the army denies militants the traditional advantage of concealment in the upper reaches.

Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs): The establishment of over 40 TOBs at altitudes up to 9,000 feet allows for a "constant eyes-on" approach, disrupting the infiltration–hide–attack cycle.

Precision Intelligence: Operations like Operation Mahadev (2025) demonstrate the transition to intelligence-led precision strikes, utilizing drones to minimize collateral damage in fragile ecological zones.

4. Strengthening the 'Human Firewall'

The current strategy recognizes that technology must be augmented by human stakes:

Community Integration: By integrating local guides and vendors into a verified network via QR-based identification, the state has created a "human firewall" that serves as the first line of intelligence.

Technological Multipliers: The use of AI-based analytics and Aadhaar-linked verification for 50,000+ tourism workers has made it increasingly difficult for "hybrid militants" to operate undetected within the civilian space.

5. Lingering Challenges

Despite these tactical successes, the "security-development nexus" remains fragile:

Terrain Constraints: Dense forest cover continues to limit the efficacy of drones during adverse weather.

External Factors: Continued cross-border support and the porous nature of the LoC in high-altitude zones remain structural threats that tactical shifts alone cannot fully resolve.

Conclusion

In 2026, the security architecture in Jammu and Kashmir has evolved to protect the "symbol of normalcy" (tourism) by hardening the "soft frontiers." The success of the Road to Ridge doctrine suggests that for sustainable peace, security grids must expand in tandem with developmental initiatives. Ultimately, the transition from a state of conflict to a state of stability requires a balance where technology, terrain dominance, and community trust converge to neutralize the evolving threat of hybrid terrorism.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/hard-reset-a-year-since-pahalgam-jks-security-landscape-looks-vastly-different-10647134/

3. How US-Iran tensions threaten the global food – energy – water balance (TP)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic: Energy security and food security

Sub-Topic: Impact of global conflicts on economy

Introduction

Rising tensions between the United States and Iran, especially around critical chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, threaten not just energy supplies but also the interconnected food–energy–water (FEW) nexus. Disruptions in one sector can cascade across others, creating systemic global risks.

1. The Food–Energy–Water (FEW) Nexus

1. The FEW nexuses highlight the interdependence of food production, energy supply, and water availability.
2. Agriculture depends on water for irrigation and energy for inputs like fertilisers and transport.
3. Energy production itself requires water, while water systems depend on energy for extraction and distribution.

2. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

1. A major share of global oil and gas passes through this chokepoint.
2. Any disruption can lead to sharp increases in energy prices.
3. This has cascading effects on global supply chains and economic stability.

3. Transmission Channels of Crisis

Energy Shock

1. Rising oil and gas prices increase input costs for agriculture and industry.

Food Security Impact

1. Higher fertiliser and transport costs reduce agricultural productivity and increase food prices.

Water Stress

1. Energy shortages affect water extraction, desalination, and irrigation systems.

Supply Chain Disruptions

1. Trade interruptions lead to shortages and price volatility across commodities.

4. Global and Indian Implications

For the World

1. Increased risk of food inflation, hunger, and resource conflicts.
2. Vulnerability of import-dependent countries.

For India

1. High dependence on imported crude exposes the economy to inflationary pressures.
2. Rising fertiliser costs affect agriculture and food security.
3. Water stress may intensify due to energy-linked constraints in irrigation and supply systems.

5. Structural Vulnerabilities

1. Overdependence on a few energy sources and trade routes.
2. Weak integration of policies across food, water, and energy sectors.
3. Climate change exacerbates resource scarcity and volatility.

6. Policy Responses

Diversification of Energy Sources

1. Reduce reliance on specific regions by expanding supply partnerships.

Strengthening Food Systems

1. Promote sustainable agriculture and reduce input dependency.

Efficient Water Management

1. Improve irrigation efficiency and adopt water-saving technologies.

Strategic Reserves

1. Build reserves of oil, fertilisers, and essential food commodities.

7. Way Forward

1. Adopt an integrated FEW nexus approach in policy planning.
2. Enhance resilience through diversification, sustainability, and innovation.
3. Strengthen international cooperation to manage global resource risks.

Conclusion

Geopolitical tensions can trigger cascading crises across food, energy, and water systems. Building resilience through integrated planning and strategic diversification is essential to safeguard economic stability and human security.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/how-us-iran-tensions-threaten-the-global-food-energy-water-balance

Question

Q. *"Geopolitical tensions can disrupt the food–energy–water nexus, leading to systemic global risks." Examine this statement with reference to recent West Asia developments. Suggest measures for India to mitigate such risks.* (250 words)

Introduction

The food–energy–water (FEW) nexus reflects the interdependence of critical resources essential for human survival and economic stability. Geopolitical tensions, particularly in West Asia, can disrupt this nexus and trigger cascading global crises.

Impact of Geopolitical Tensions

1. Disruptions in energy supply through chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz lead to rising oil prices.

2. Higher energy costs increase fertiliser and transportation expenses, adversely affecting agricultural productivity.
3. Water systems dependent on energy for irrigation and distribution face constraints, intensifying water scarcity.
4. Supply chain disruptions lead to food shortages and inflation, especially in import-dependent countries.

Implications for India

1. Increased crude oil prices raise inflation and widen the current account deficit.
2. Higher fertiliser costs impact agricultural output and food security.
3. Water stress may worsen due to energy-linked constraints in irrigation systems.

Measures

1. Diversifying energy imports and accelerating renewable energy adoption.
2. Promoting sustainable agriculture and efficient fertiliser use.
3. Enhancing water management through modern irrigation techniques.
4. Building strategic reserves of energy and essential commodities.
5. Strengthening international cooperation and trade partnerships.

Conclusion

Geopolitical disruptions highlight the vulnerability of interconnected resource systems. India must adopt an integrated and resilient approach to safeguard its food, energy, and water security in an uncertain global environment.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/how-us-iran-tensions-threaten-the-global-food-energy-water-balance

4. Lesson from Hungary (TS)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic: Democracy and its challenges
Sub-Topic: Populism and political ideology

Introduction

Recent political developments in Hungary under Viktor Orbán highlight the rise of populism and "illiberal democracy", where electoral legitimacy coexists with weakening institutional safeguards. This raises critical concerns about the erosion of democratic values globally.

1. Rise of Illiberal Democracy

1. Illiberal democracy refers to systems where elections exist but civil liberties and institutional checks weaken.
2. Leadership often relies on majoritarian nationalism and populist narratives.
3. Political legitimacy is derived from electoral victories rather than adherence to liberal democratic norms.

2. Features of the Hungarian Experience

Centralisation of Power

1. Increasing control over executive, judiciary, and independent institutions.

Erosion of Checks and Balances

1. Weakening of institutions that ensure accountability and oversight.

Media Influence

1. Expansion of state influence over media reduces dissent and pluralism.

Populist Mobilisation

1. Use of nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric to consolidate support.

3. Drivers of Populism

1. Economic anxieties and perceived inequality.

2. Cultural concerns such as immigration and identity politics.
3. Disillusionment with traditional political elites and institutions.

4. Democratic Backsliding: Key Concerns

Institutional Weakening

1. Independent bodies lose autonomy, affecting governance quality.

Reduced Political Pluralism

1. Opposition voices face constraints, limiting democratic competition.

Normalization of Majoritarianism

1. Minority rights and dissenting opinions may be sidelined.

5. Global Implications

1. Rise of similar trends in other countries indicates a broader democratic regression.
2. Challenges the universality of liberal democratic values.
3. Impacts international cooperation and global governance frameworks.

6. Lessons for India

Strengthening Institutions

1. Ensure independence of judiciary, media, and regulatory bodies.

Promoting Inclusive Democracy

1. Balance majority rule with protection of minority rights.

Encouraging Political Dialogue

1. Foster consensus-building and deliberative democracy.

Safeguarding Civil Liberties

1. Protect freedom of speech, expression, and association.

7. Way Forward

1. Reinforce constitutional values and rule of law.
2. Strengthen accountability mechanisms and transparency.
3. Promote civic awareness and democratic participation.

Conclusion

The Hungarian experience demonstrates that democracy can weaken from within when institutions erode and populism dominates. Sustaining democracy requires strong institutions, inclusive governance, and vigilant citizenry.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/lesson-from-hungary-1503584580.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *"The rise of illiberal democracies poses a challenge to the core principles of liberal democracy." Examine with reference to recent global trends. What lessons can India draw from such experiences?* (250 words)

Introduction

Illiberal democracy refers to a system where elections are held but constitutionalism, civil liberties, and institutional checks are weakened. Recent global trends, including developments in Hungary, highlight the growing challenge posed by such systems.

Nature of Illiberal Democracies

1. These systems maintain electoral processes but concentrate power in the executive.
2. Independent institutions such as the judiciary and media are weakened, reducing accountability.
3. Populist narratives based on nationalism and identity are used to mobilise support.

Challenges to Liberal Democracy

1. Erosion of checks and balances undermines the rule of law.
2. Reduction in political pluralism limits democratic competition.
3. Majoritarian tendencies may marginalise minority rights.

4. Weak institutions reduce transparency and governance effectiveness.

Lessons for India

1. Strengthening institutional independence is essential to preserve democratic balance.
2. Ensuring protection of civil liberties and minority rights is crucial for inclusive democracy.
3. Promoting political dialogue and consensus-building can reduce polarisation.
4. Encouraging active civic participation enhances democratic accountability.

Conclusion

The rise of illiberal democracies underscores the need to safeguard democratic institutions and values. India must reinforce its constitutional framework and democratic ethos to ensure long-term stability and inclusiveness.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/lesson-from-hungary-1503584580.html

Editorial of the Day – 23.04.2026

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1. The importance of cultural continuity (TH) -01
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1. The importance of cultural continuity (TH)

GS Paper I: Indian Heritage and Culture; Indian Society; Social Justice.
Topic: Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Salient features of Indian Society.
Sub-Topic: Stewardship vs. Privilege: The role of former royalty.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the discourse surrounding India's former royal families has moved beyond mere nostalgia to a critical examination of cultural continuity within a modern republic. This resurfaced debate explores the ideological friction between democratically mandated equality and the historical stewardship of heritage. At its heart lies the challenge of the 21st-century Indian state: how to pursue radical social reform and dismantle hierarchical legacies without erasing the living systems of meaning that define the nation's cultural identity.

2. Core Debate: Royalty in Modern India

Intersectionality: The role of former royals is situated at the complex crossroads of culture, history, and partisan politics.
Non-Neutrality: Perspectives on this issue are rarely neutral; they are shaped by ethical stances on inherited privilege versus the practical need for heritage preservation.
Democratic Balancing Act: The central question is whether a modern democracy can integrate past traditions within current systems without compromising egalitarian values.

3. The Egalitarian Critique: Symbol of Inequality

Critics argue that the continued prominence of former royal houses presents several risks to social justice:
Reinforcing Hierarchies: The persistent visibility of "royals" in social and political spheres may inadvertently validate historical class and caste hierarchies.
Romanticizing Privilege: High-profile displays of wealth (palaces, vintage cars, luxury fashion) can romanticize inherited privilege, creating an aesthetic that feels detached from India's socio-economic realities.
Aestheticizing Power: There is a concern that cultural displays prioritize the "beauty" of the past while obscuring the historical injustices and exploitative structures that often funded them.

4. Cultural Representation and the Power Narrative

The debate highlights a struggle over the "Ownership of Culture":
Control of the Narrative: Questions persist regarding who defines "Indian Heritage." Is it the elite (royals/designers) or the actual practitioners (artisans/local communities)?
The Sidelining of Artisans: Global platforms often focus on the "Patron" (royal) while the "Creator" (the weaver, the stone carver, the folk musician) remains a secondary figure in the story.
Imbalance of Visibility: There is a perceived imbalance in cultural authority, where heritage is viewed through the lens of a few high-profile families rather than the diverse regional communities that sustain it.

5. The Alternative View: Custodians of Heritage

Supporters argue that former royals fulfil a unique role that the state often cannot:

Transition of Power: Having lost political authority, many families have pivoted to becoming social and cultural influencers, focusing on the "soft power" of heritage.

Stewardship of Tangible Heritage: Palaces, armoires, and private libraries require immense resources to maintain. Without royal stewardship, many sites risk decay or being repurposed in ways that strip their historical context.

Intangible Heritage Guardians: Royals are often central to "living traditions"—rituals, temple festivals, and traditional courtly etiquette—that constitute India's intangible heritage.

Craft Patronage: Historical patronage systems continue through royal foundations, sustaining niche artisan networks (like *Zardozi* or *Minakari*) that might otherwise succumb to mass-market commercialization.

6. Continuity vs. Reform: The "Lived Heritage" System

Living Systems of Meaning: Cultural practices are not museum pieces; they depend on living participation. Abruptly dismantling traditional structures can lead to "Cultural Incoherence," where the meaning behind the ritual is lost.

The Risk of Transition: While reform is necessary to ensure equality, policymakers must consider the "hidden costs" of transition—specifically the loss of specialized knowledge and social cohesion provided by traditional frameworks.

Tangible vs. Lived Heritage: Modernity often preserves the *building* (tangible) but kills the *ritual* (lived). Continuity seeks to preserve both.

7. Conclusion

The struggle between Equality and Cultural Continuity is an enduring theme of the Indian Republic. While the dismantling of hierarchical privilege is a non-negotiable goal for a just society, the erosion of traditional stewardship frameworks poses a threat to the nation's "identity richness." A balanced approach—one that democratizes the narrative by empowering artisans while supporting traditional custodians—is essential. Progress must not be a zero-sum game; it must ensure that the India of 2047 remains as culturally deep as it is socially equal.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-importance-of-cultural-continuity/article70894325.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The role of former royal families in India transcends the debate on privilege, touching upon the deeper necessity of 'Lived Heritage.' Elucidate how cultural continuity can be maintained in a modern republic without compromising egalitarian social reforms." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In the socio-political landscape of 2026, the relevance of India's former royal families remains a subject of intense ideological debate. While the 26th Amendment (1971) abolished titles and privy purses, the cultural footprint of these families persists. The challenge for modern India lies in distinguishing between inherited political privilege, which is antithetical to a republic, and cultural stewardship, which is vital for the survival of the nation's "lived heritage."

2. The Concept of 'Lived Heritage'

Lived heritage refers to cultural traditions that are not merely preserved in museums but are actively practiced in daily life.

Intangible Systems: Former royals often serve as the focal point for complex systems of rituals, temple festivals, and traditional etiquette. For example, the *Dasara* in Mysore or the *Puri Rath Yatra* involve traditional roles that provide a sense of historical coherence to the community.

Craft Patronage: Many niche Indian crafts (such as *Zardozi*, *Thewa* jewelry, or *Pashmina*) survived through centuries of royal patronage. Today, royal-led foundations continue to provide these artisans with a global platform, preventing the "deskilling" that often follows industrialization.

3. The Friction: Continuity vs. Egalitarianism

Maintaining this continuity in a democracy presents significant ideological hurdles:

Aestheticizing Inequality: Critics argue that the visibility of royals romanticizes historical hierarchies, potentially "masking" the social injustices of the past.

Narrative Power: There is an inherent tension regarding who "owns" the narrative. When culture is seen solely through the lens of the elite, the voices of the actual creators—the artisans and regional communities—risk being sidelined.

4. Reconciling Reform with Continuity

To achieve progress without "cultural rootlessness," a balanced framework is required:

Democratization of the Narrative: Transitioning from a "Patron-Centric" to an "Artisan-Centric" model. The former royals can act as facilitators, but the artisan must be recognized as the primary stakeholder of the craft.

Stewardship as Public Service: Former royal houses should be viewed as trustees of history rather than holders of status. By opening private libraries, armories, and archives to scholars, they convert "private privilege" into "public knowledge."

Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCP): Heritage conservation should involve the state (for funding/regulation), former royals (for contextual knowledge), and local communities (for living participation).

5. Conclusion

The goal of a modern republic is not the erasure of the past but its equitable integration. Cultural continuity ensures that as India moves toward a developed future (2047), it retains its unique identity richness. By fostering a model of "Democratic Stewardship," India can ensure that its heritage remains a living, breathing system that respects the egalitarian spirit of the Constitution while safeguarding the historical traditions that define its soul.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-importance-of-cultural-continuity/article70894325.ece#google_vignette

2. Sabarimala hearing: Supreme Court says blanket rule not possible on state intervention in religious affairs (IE)

GS Paper II: Indian Constitution & Polity.
Topic: Separation of Powers; Fundamental Rights; Judiciary; Secularism.
Sub-Topic: Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, during the high-stakes Sabarimala review hearing, a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court made a profound admission: it is exceedingly difficult for a secular court to determine what constitutes an "Essential Religious Practice" (ERP). This observation signals a potential watershed moment in Indian jurisprudence, where the judiciary—long criticized for playing "theologian"—may be seeking to recalibrate the delicate balance between the State's power to reform and a community's right to its religious identity.

2. The Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine

The ERP doctrine is the yardstick by which Indian courts decide which religious activities deserve constitutional protection and which can be regulated by the State.

Origin (Shirur Mutt Case, 1954): The Court initially held that only practices "essential" to a religion are protected under Article 25.

The Theological Trap: Over decades, the Court has taken on the role of defining "essentiality" by interpreting scriptures. Critics argue this exceeds institutional competence, effectively turning judges into religious arbiters.

The 2026 Shift: The Court's recent acknowledgement that identifying ERP is "difficult if not impossible" suggests a move away from theological hair-splitting toward a more Rights-based approach (focused on Constitutional values).

Judicial Subjectivity: Inconsistent interpretations by different benches have historically created a "legal lottery," leading to uncertainty for religious denominations.

3. Constitutional Framework: Articles 25 & 26

The core conflict lies in the friction between individual rights and group autonomy.

Article 25 (Individual Rights): Guarantees freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion. Crucially, it is subject to public order, morality, and health.

Article 26 (Group Rights): Protects the autonomy of "religious denominations" to manage their own affairs.

Article 25(2)(b) (The Social Reform Clause): This is the State's "sword." It allows the legislature to pass laws for social welfare and the "throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes."

The Sabarimala Friction: Does the individual woman's right to worship (Art 25) override the temple denomination's right to preserve its unique custom (Art 26)?

4. The Sabarimala Context: Equality vs. Custom

The 2018 judgment sparked a nationwide debate on the limits of judicial intervention in faith.

2018 Verdict: Relying on Articles 14 (Equality) and 21 (Dignity), the Court struck down the ban on women of menstruating age, calling it a form of "biological discrimination."

Constitutional Morality: The Court held that social prejudices cannot masquerade as religious customs if they violate basic human dignity.

The Denominational Defense: Opponents argued the Ayyappa devotees constitute a distinct group with a right to preserve their unique celibate (Naishtika Brahmachari) character of the deity.

The 9-Judge Review: The current bench is not just looking at Sabarimala but at the broader relationship between Article 25 and 26 across all faiths.

5. Judicial vs. Legislative Role in Reform

State as Reformer: The Court noted that the State reflects the "will of the people" and has a duty to eliminate social evils (e.g., Sati, Untouchability).

Case-by-Case Prudence: The 2026 hearing emphasized that there can be no "universal formula." Reform must be balanced so as not to "hollow out" the core identity of a religion.

Limits of Intervention: While the State can reform, it cannot destroy the very essence of a religious group.

6. Related Issue: The Dawoodi Bohra Case

The Sabarimala review is inextricably linked to the excommunication practices of the Dawoodi Bohra community.

The Individual vs. The Head: The case tests whether the community head's power to excommunicate (as an essential practice) violates an individual's right to live with dignity.

Judicial Consistency: The Court must harmonize its Sabarimala stance with previous rulings (like *Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin*) to ensure a cohesive legal framework.

7. Key Principles for the Future

Constitutional Morality: The idea that "morality" in the Constitution refers to values like liberty and equality, not popular social morality.

Principled Equidistance: The Indian model of secularism, where the State remains neutral but intervenes for social justice.

Judicial Restraint: A growing consensus that courts should avoid "rewriting scriptures" and stick to assessing whether a practice violates fundamental rights.

Conclusion

The April 2026 Supreme Court observations indicate a move toward a more balanced and humbler judiciary—one that recognizes the limits of its own theological expertise while remaining steadfast in protecting individual dignity. The final verdict of the 9-judge bench will likely redefine the "Indian Way" of secularism for the 21st century, ensuring that while the temple gates stay open to reform, the core of the sanctuary remains respected.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/sabarimala-hearing-supreme-court-says-blanket-rule-not-possible-on-state-intervention-in-religious-affairs-10650940/

Question

"The Essential Religious Practices (ERP) doctrine has increasingly positioned the Indian Judiciary as a 'theological arbiter,' potentially blurring the lines of the Separation of Powers. Critically analyze this doctrine in light of the Supreme Court's recent observations in the Sabarimala review proceedings." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Essential Religious Practices (ERP) doctrine, established in the Shirur Mutt case (1954), serves as the judicial gateway to determine which religious activities merit protection under Articles 25 and 26. However, the 2026 observations by a nine-judge bench—admitting the "impossibility" of defining such practices—highlight a growing institutional realization that the court's foray into theology may be an overreach that undermines religious autonomy and judicial competence.

2. The Evolution and Utility of the ERP Doctrine

Defining Protection: The doctrine was intended to prevent every secular activity (financial or political) associated with religion from claiming immunity from state regulation.

Shield for Social Reform: It provided the constitutional basis for the state to intervene in practices like Untouchability, Sati, or Temple Entry, by declaring them "non-essential" to the core of the faith.

Balancing Articles 25 & 26: It helped the court navigate the friction between an individual's right to worship and a denomination's right to manage its internal affairs.

3. The "Theological Thicket": Critical Challenges

The application of the ERP doctrine has faced significant criticism:

Institutional Incompetence: Judges, trained in law and not theology, are often forced to interpret complex scriptures, effectively playing the role of "religious heads."

Subjectivity and Inconsistency: Different benches have interpreted "essentiality" variedly (e.g., the contrasting views on the Hijab or the celibate nature of Lord Ayyappa), leading to a "legal lottery" for religious groups.

Separation of Powers: By deciding what is "true" religion, the judiciary inadvertently encroaches upon the autonomy of religious denominations, which is protected under Article 26.

4. Recalibrating through Constitutional Morality (2026 Perspective)

The recent 2026 hearings suggest a shift toward Constitutional Morality as a more robust yardstick:

Rights-Based Approach: Rather than asking if a practice is "essential" to a religion, the court is increasingly asking if it violates Fundamental Rights (Equality under Art. 14, Dignity under Art. 21).

Social Reform via Art. 25(2)(b): The court acknowledges the state's power to reform "social evils" without needing to declare the practice "non-essential."

Judicial Restraint: The 2026 admission of the "difficulty" in identifying ERP signals a move toward a more restrained role, focusing on whether a practice harms Public Order, Morality, or Health, rather than its scriptural validity.

5. Conclusion

The ERP doctrine was a product of a nascent republic's need to balance tradition with modernity. However, in a mature democracy, the judiciary must avoid becoming a "theological arbiter." The way forward lies in upholding Constitutional Morality—ensuring that while the sanctuary of faith is respected, it does not become a fortress that harbors practices violating human dignity and gender justice. The 2026 recalibration ensures that the "reformist" spirit of the Constitution remains intact without hollowing out the core of India's religious diversity.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/sabarimala-hearing-supreme-court-says-blanket-rule-not-possible-on-state-intervention-in-religious-affairs-10650940/

3. Transferring Equity to Coastal Communities (BI)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Environment
Topic: Biodiversity conservation and governance
Sub-Topic: Inclusive growth and livelihoods

Introduction

India's vast coastline and marine biodiversity offer significant economic potential under the Blue Economy. However, traditional coastal communities often receive limited benefits from commercial exploitation of marine resources. Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) provide a framework to ensure equitable distribution of gains.

1. Concept of Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)

1. ABS is a mechanism under the Biological Diversity framework that ensures fair sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological resources.
2. It mandates that commercial users compensate local communities who conserve and sustain these resources.
3. It aligns with global commitments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

2. Current Challenges in Marine Resource Governance

Inequitable Benefit Distribution

1. Commercial industries capture most profits, while coastal communities receive minimal returns.

Regulatory Gaps

1. Limited focus on marine ecosystems compared to terrestrial biodiversity.

Biopiracy Risks

1. Exploitation of marine genetic resources without adequate compensation to local custodians.

3. Significance for Coastal Communities

1. Provides livelihood security by ensuring financial returns from marine resources.
2. Strengthens community participation in resource conservation and management.
3. Enhances socio-economic development in vulnerable coastal regions.

4. Economic Potential of Blue Economy

1. Marine resources such as fisheries, seaweed, and bio-resources have high commercial value.
2. Value addition through processing and exports can boost income and employment.
3. Integration with global markets requires adherence to sustainability and equity norms.

5. Institutional Mechanisms

Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)

1. Local bodies responsible for managing and conserving biological resources.

State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)

1. Oversee implementation and ensure compliance with ABS norms.

National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)

1. Provides regulatory oversight and policy direction.

6. Strategic Importance

Economic Sovereignty

1. Ensures that benefits from marine resources remain within the country.

Sustainable Development

1. Encourages conservation-linked utilisation of resources.

Global Competitiveness

1. Aligns India with international standards, enhancing export potential.

7. Way Forward

1. Strengthen implementation of ABS in marine sectors through clear guidelines and monitoring.
2. Enhance capacity of local institutions like BMCs for effective governance.
3. Promote value addition and local processing industries in coastal regions.
4. Integrate ABS with broader Blue Economy policies for inclusive growth.

Conclusion

Access and Benefit Sharing is crucial for ensuring that the Blue Economy is inclusive, sustainable, and equitable. Empowering coastal communities through fair benefit distribution will strengthen both conservation and economic development.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/transferring-equity-to-coastal-communities/article70898457.ece

Question

Q. *"Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) is essential for ensuring equity in India's Blue Economy." Discuss its significance and challenges in the context of marine resource governance.* (250 words)

Introduction

Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) is a key principle under biodiversity governance that ensures fair distribution of benefits derived from biological resources. In the context of India's Blue Economy, it plays a vital role in promoting equity and sustainability.

Significance

1. ABS ensures that coastal communities, who are traditional custodians of marine resources, receive a fair share of economic benefits.
2. It promotes sustainable use of marine biodiversity by linking conservation with livelihood incentives.
3. It strengthens India's economic sovereignty by preventing exploitation of marine genetic resources without compensation.
4. It enhances compliance with global biodiversity frameworks, improving export competitiveness.

Challenges

1. Weak implementation and limited awareness among stakeholders hinder effective functioning of ABS mechanisms.
2. Institutional capacity constraints at local levels, especially in Biodiversity Management Committees, reduce efficiency.
3. Conflicts may arise between commercial interests and community rights.
4. Regulatory gaps in marine biodiversity governance increase the risk of biopiracy.

Conclusion

ABS is critical for balancing economic growth with social equity in the Blue Economy. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and ensuring effective implementation will be key to achieving sustainable and inclusive marine resource governance.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/transferring-equity-to-coastal-communities/article70898457.ece

4. Rethinking Global Tourism Rankings (TP)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Environment
Topic: Tourism sector and its potential
Sub-Topic: Role of indices and global rankings

Introduction

Global tourism rankings such as the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) significantly influence policy, investment, and perception. However, these rankings often fail to capture structural diversity and contextual realities, leading to skewed assessments of countries like India.

1. Nature and Influence of Global Tourism Rankings

1. Rankings act as benchmarking tools shaping investor sentiment and policy priorities.
2. They influence global perception, often becoming proxies for competitiveness.
3. Governments tend to align strategies with ranking metrics, sometimes at the cost of local priorities.

2. Methodological Limitations

Uniform Metrics Bias

1. Rankings apply standardized indicators across diverse economies, ignoring developmental asymmetries.

Overemphasis on Infrastructure

1. High weightage to transport, urban infrastructure, and services favours developed nations.

Neglect of Cultural and Experiential Value

1. Rich heritage, diversity, and cultural depth are undervalued due to difficulty in quantification.

3. Structural Disadvantages for Developing Countries

1. Countries like India, despite strong tourism potential, rank lower due to income disparities and infrastructure gaps.
2. Large population and scale distort per capita indicators.
3. Informal sector contributions remain underrepresented.

4. Perception vs Performance Gap

1. Rankings often reflect perception rather than actual tourism experience.
2. Visitor diversity, cultural richness, and affordability may not translate into higher scores.
3. This creates a mismatch between ground realities and global image.

5. Implications for Policy

Distorted Priorities

1. Governments may prioritise rank improvement over holistic development.

Resource Misallocation

1. Investments may focus on visible metrics rather than long-term sustainability.

Neglect of Local Context

1. Unique strengths such as heritage tourism and community-based tourism may be sidelined.

6. Need for Context-Sensitive Evaluation

1. Rankings should incorporate qualitative indicators like cultural value and sustainability.
2. Greater weightage to inclusive growth and local participation.
3. Regional benchmarking among similar economies may provide fairer comparisons.

7. Way Forward

1. Develop India-specific tourism indices reflecting domestic priorities.
2. Balance global benchmarking with contextual policy design.
3. Promote sustainable, experience-based tourism alongside infrastructure development.

Conclusion

While global tourism rankings provide useful benchmarks, they must be interpreted cautiously. A balanced approach that integrates global standards with local realities is essential for unlocking India's tourism potential.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/rethinking-global-tourism-rankings#:~:text=Global%20rankings%20carry%20quiet%20but,Tourism%20Development%20Index%20(TTDI).

Question

Q. *"Global tourism rankings often fail to reflect the true potential of developing economies." Critically examine with reference to India. Suggest measures to improve the effectiveness of such indices.* (250 words)

Introduction

Global tourism rankings like the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) are widely used to assess competitiveness. However, their standardized methodology often fails to capture the diverse realities of developing economies such as India.

Limitations of Global Rankings

1. Rankings rely on uniform indicators that do not account for differences in economic development and structural conditions.
2. Excessive emphasis on infrastructure and per capita metrics disadvantages populous and developing countries.
3. Cultural richness, diversity, and experiential tourism are undervalued due to measurement challenges.
4. Informal sector contributions and community-based tourism remain largely unaccounted for.

Implications for India

1. India's strong tourism potential is not fully reflected in rankings despite its heritage and diversity.
2. Policy focus may shift towards improving rankings rather than addressing core sectoral needs.
3. Misalignment between perception and actual tourism experience affects global competitiveness.

Measures for Improvement

1. Incorporate qualitative indicators such as cultural value, sustainability, and visitor experience.
2. Adopt region-specific benchmarking to ensure fair comparisons.
3. Increase recognition of informal and community-based tourism sectors.
4. Balance global metrics with domestic priorities in policy formulation.

Conclusion

Global tourism rankings must evolve to reflect structural diversity and ground realities. A more inclusive and context-sensitive approach will better capture the true potential of countries like India while guiding effective policy-making.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/rethinking-global-tourism-rankings#:~:text=Global%20rankings%20carry%20quiet%20but,Tourism%20Development%20Index%20(TTDI).

Editorial of the Day – 24.04.2026

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1. Scaling climate adaptation from policy to grassroots (TH)

GS Paper III: Environment & Ecology
Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Disaster and disaster management; Investment models.
Sub-Topic: Climate Adaptation vs. Mitigation Finance.

1. Introduction

India stands as the ninth most climate-vulnerable nation globally. Between 1995 and 2024, the country grappled with 430 extreme weather events, resulting in an economic drain of $170 billion and affecting 1.3 billion lives. In response, India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2031–35 have shifted focus toward "mainstreaming" climate resilience. The transition from reactive disaster management to proactive adaptation is now a core pillar of India's development strategy, aiming to safeguard both the economy and vulnerable livelihoods.

2. Strengthening the Adaptation Framework (NDCs 2031–35)

The updated NDCs emphasize a multi-sectoral approach to resilience:
Key Pillars: Focus on coastal resilience, resilient infrastructure, disaster preparedness, heat mitigation, and biodiversity conservation.
Global Alignment: India's goals align with the COP30 adoption of the Belém Adaptation Indicators and the global pledge to triple adaptation finance by 2035.
Implementation Needs: Success hinges on institutionalizing adaptation from national policies down to the "last mile" at the grassroots level.

3. Models of Excellence: NICRA and Tamil Nadu's CRV

India is leveraging pilot programs to create scalable blueprints for resilience:
NICRA (National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture): An ICAR initiative spanning 448 villages across 151 hotspots. It maps risks in 651 districts, focusing on climate-smart farming and capacity building.
Tamil Nadu's CRV Programme: Recognized by the Economic Survey 2025-26, the Climate Resilient Villages model (supported by WRI India) operates across 11 vulnerable districts.
Holistic Interventions: The TN model integrates water management, renewable energy, waste management, and alternate livelihoods through local community consultation.

4. The Financing Challenge: Adaptation vs. Mitigation

Despite the high stakes, financing remains a significant bottleneck:
The Global Gap: UNEP's 2025 Adaptation Gap Report estimates that developing countries face a financing deficit of $284–$339 billion annually through 2035.
Domestic Spending Disparity: While India's adaptation spending was approximately 5.6% of GDP in FY22, the Union Budget 2026–27 remains heavily skewed toward mitigation (emission reduction).
Taxonomy Issues: The 2025 Draft Framework of Climate Finance Taxonomy is criticized for focusing on "emission avoidance" rather than specific adaptation typologies.
The Economic Case: A WRI study suggests a ten-fold return (10x) on adaptation investments, as they prevent "avoidable losses" and generate significant socio-economic co-benefits.

5. Institutionalizing Adaptation: Governance Reforms

To sharpen the focus, the following structural changes are proposed:

Climate Budgeting: State Finance Departments should mandate "Climate Budgeting" through annual budget circulars to track and streamline spending.

SAPCC Revisions: Most states have not yet updated their State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) to reflect the 2030 and 2035 NDC targets.

Localized Vulnerability Assessments: Moving beyond state-level data to regular assessments at the district and block levels, integrating socio-economic and livelihood factors.

Dedicated Workforce: Strengthening or establishing Climate Change Cells at the district level with a dedicated, skilled workforce to manage rehabilitation and skill development.

6. Facilitating Locally Led Adaptation (LLA)

Adaptation is most effective when it is place-based and context-specific:

Decentralized Action: Institutional mechanisms must extend to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

Community Ownership: COP30 highlighted LLA as central to people-centric action. Resilience planning should be "co-developed" with communities—from management to leadership.

Behavioural Change: A "whole-of-systems" approach is required, where national commitments are met through grassroots awareness and ownership of climate interventions.

Conclusion

India's path to becoming a developed economy by 2047 is inextricably linked to its climate resilience. While pilot models like Tamil Nadu's CRV provide hope, the "scattered" nature of current efforts must be replaced by a standardized, well-funded, and decentralized adaptation architecture. By prioritizing the "Care Economy" of the environment and empowering local communities, India can turn its climate vulnerability into a blueprint for sustainable global leadership.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/scaling-climate-adaptation-from-policy-to-grassroots/article70898407.ece

Question

"While India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2031–35 emphasize climate resilience, adaptation remains the 'poor cousin' of mitigation in terms of financial and institutional focus. Critically analyze the structural bottlenecks in India's adaptation strategy and suggest a roadmap for mainstreaming resilience at the grassroots level." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India is the ninth most climate-vulnerable country globally, having faced $170 billion in losses due to extreme weather events between 1995 and 2024. Despite the NDCs (2031–35) prioritizing adaptation, India's climate strategy remains lopsided. While mitigation (reducing emissions) attracts global and private capital, adaptation (building resilience) struggles with scattered efforts and a massive funding deficit.

2. Structural and Financial Bottlenecks

The "adaptation gap" in India is driven by several systemic issues:

Mitigation-Skewed Finance: The Union Budget 2026–27 continues to prioritize mitigation. While adaptation spending was 5.6% of GDP in FY22, the lack of a clear Climate Finance Taxonomy means most funds are directed toward "emission avoidance" rather than building resilient communities.

Quantification Challenges: Unlike mitigation, where success is measured in CO_2 tonnes, the benefits of adaptation (avoidable losses, socio-economic stability) are harder to quantify. This makes adaptation projects less "bankable" for private investors.

Institutional Fragmentation: Adaptation efforts are currently scattered across various missions. Many states have yet to update their State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) to align with the post-2030 targets.

Top-Down Planning: Vulnerability assessments are often performed at the national or state level, missing the micro-realities of the district and block levels.

3. The roadmap: Mainstreaming Resilience at the Grassroots

To turn NDCs into reality, India must adopt a "Whole-of-Systems" approach:

Institutionalizing Locally Led Adaptation (LLA): Resilience planning must be "co-developed" with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). As seen in Tamil Nadu's Climate Resilient Villages (CRV) model, local ownership ensures that interventions in water and waste management are context-specific.

Climate Budgeting: The Ministry of Finance should mandate a Climate Budgeting framework through State Finance Departments. This would ensure that every department tracks its resilience-building activities through annual budget circulars.

Developing a 'Resilience Workforce': Establishing dedicated Climate Change Cells at the district level to manage rehabilitation, skill development, and alternate livelihoods for affected populations.

Standardizing Taxonomy: Creating a clear typology for adaptation finance. Recognizing the 10-fold return on investment (WRI estimate) can help leverage international and private funds into sectors like climate-smart agriculture (NICRA).

4. Conclusion

For India to become a developed economy by 2047, climate resilience can no longer be a "by-product" of development; it must be its foundation. Transitioning from a mitigation-heavy focus to a grassroots-led adaptation model is essential to protect the 1.3 billion people most at risk. Only by empowering local bodies and institutionalizing climate finance can India bridge the gap between global commitments and local survival.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/scaling-climate-adaptation-from-policy-to-grassroots/article70898407.ece

2. India's Goldilocks moment is over, macro situation will worsen (IE)

GS Paper III: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Sub-Topic: Macroeconomic Stability and External Sector Vulnerabilities.

1. Introduction

In the first half of 2026, India's economy is transitioning out of its celebrated "Goldilocks phase"—a rare period characterized by high growth, low inflation, and stable fiscal fundamentals. The intensifying crisis in West Asia, coupled with surging global crude prices and volatile capital flows, has exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the Indian economy. As GDP growth projections recalibrate from 7.6 % to 6.7%, the focus of Indian policymakers has shifted from "growth acceleration" to "macro-resilience" in the face of global economic fragmentation.

2. The "Goldilocks" Concept and the Current Erosion

Definition: A "Goldilocks Economy" describes a state of optimal performance: moderate growth and low inflation that prevents both overheating (inflation) and recession.

India's Pre-Crisis Fundamentals: Real GDP growth sustained at ~7.6%.

1. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation anchored near 2%.
2. Current Account Deficit (CAD) kept manageable at 1% of GDP.

The Transition: The current geopolitical shock in West Asia has disrupted this "perfect" balance, leading to a period of "Triple Challenges": Higher Inflation, Lower Growth, and Widening Deficits.

3. Impact of West Asia Crisis on Energy Security

High Import Vulnerability: India remains one of the world's largest energy consumers, importing approximately 88% of its crude oil requirements.

Sourcing Concentration: Nearly 50% of these imports originate from West Asia. Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz or regional instability directly translates to supply-side shocks for Indian refineries.
Supply Chain Disruptions: Beyond crude, the crisis has increased the "landed cost" of fertilizers, LNG, and critical industrial inputs, impacting the primary and secondary sectors alike.

4. Inflationary Pressures and Monetary Challenges

Price Surge: Crude oil prices have stabilized at a high band of 85–90 per barrel, representing a ~40% increase from previous lows.
Cost-Push Inflation: This serves as a classic "cost-push" trigger, where rising input costs for transportation and fuel increase the prices of essential goods.
CPI Outlook: Headline inflation is projected to rise to 4.6%, approaching the upper threshold of the RBI's 4% pm 2% tolerance band.
Monetary Tightening Risk: To prevent "second-round effects" (where fuel price hikes lead to generalized wage/price increases), the RBI may be forced to maintain a hawkish stance, potentially dampening private investment.

5. Balance of Payments (BoP) and External Sector Stress

The external sector is currently the primary area of concern for macroeconomic stability.

Indicator	Pre-Crisis (Baseline)	2026-27 Projection
GDP Growth	7.6%	~6.7%
CAD (% of GDP)	~1 %	~2.1%
Crude Price	$70/bbl.	85-90/bbl.
FPI Flows	Net Positive	17$ billion Outflow

Widening CAD: Driven by a bloated oil import bill and slowing global demand for Indian exports.
Currency Pressure: The mismatch in BoP puts the Indian Rupee (INR) under depreciation pressure, which further increases the cost of "imported inflation."
Forex Buffer: While India's 700$ billion forex reserves offer $~8$ months of import cover, the adjusted reserves are declining as the RBI intervenes to prevent excessive volatility.

6. Capital Flows and Investment Climate

FPI Flight to Safety: Global risk aversion has led Foreign Portfolio Investors to withdraw 17$ billion in the 2025-26 cycle, seeking safer havens in US Treasuries.
Weak FDI Performance: Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plummeted to 1.7$ billion, primarily due to:

1. Increased profit repatriation by multinational corporations.
2. Heightened outward investment by Indian firms expanding globally.

Impact on Growth: Declining capital inflows limit the availability of low-cost capital for "Make in India" initiatives and infrastructure projects.

7. Fiscal Challenges and Government Finances

The crisis is stretching the Union and State budgets:
Revenue Loss: To cushion the common man, the government reduced excise duties on petrol/diesel, leading to significant revenue foregone.
Subsidy Spike: Higher global prices for LNG and feedstock have ballooned the Fertilizer and Food subsidy burden.
Fiscal Deficit Impact: The estimated fiscal cost of the crisis is approximately 0.5% of GDP, making it harder to adhere to the fiscal consolidation path (4.5 % by FY26).
Crowding Out: Higher government borrowing to cover these costs could "crowd out" private sector credit, further slowing the growth engine.

8. Structural Reforms: The Way Forward

To regain the "Goldilocks" stability, India must transition from a "reactive" to a "proactive" policy framework:

Energy Diversification: Aggressive expansion of Green Hydrogen, Solar, and nuclear energy to reduce the "Oil-linked" BoP vulnerability.
Strategic Reserves: Building underground crude storage (Strategic Petroleum Reserves) to provide at least 90 days of cover.
Resilient Supply Chains: Promoting "Friend-shoring" and diversifying trade partners beyond the West Asian corridor.
Investment Policy: Rationalizing FDI norms and improving the "Ease of Doing Business" to ensure that capital stays in India despite global volatility.

Conclusion

The end of the "Goldilocks phase" in 2026 is a structural warning for the Indian economy. While India remains a "bright spot" relative to global peers, its heavy reliance on imported energy and volatile capital flows creates a "ceiling on growth." Sustainable macroeconomic stability will depend on India's ability to decouple its domestic growth story from West Asian geopolitical shocks through energy self-reliance and fiscal prudence.
Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-goldilocks-moment-is-over-macro-situation-will-worsen-10652660/'

Question

"The erosion of India's 'Goldilocks' macroeconomic phase highlights that external sector stability remains the 'Achilles' heel' of the Indian growth story. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In economic parlance, a "Goldilocks phase" refers to an ideal state where growth is robust and inflation remains low—a "neither too hot, nor too cold" scenario. By early 2026, India's exit from this phase, triggered by the West Asia crisis and escalating crude prices ($\$85-90$/barrel), underscores a persistent reality: while India's domestic "engine" is powerful, its "fuel supply" and "financial lubricants" (capital flows) are vulnerable to global friction.

2. The External Sector as the "Achilles' Heel"

The recent transition highlights three primary vulnerabilities in India's external sector:
The Energy Chokepoint: India imports 88% of its crude oil, with 50% sourced from West Asia. A 40% surge in oil prices acts as an "unintended tax" on the economy, widening the Current Account Deficit (CAD) from 1% to a projected 2.1%.
The Capital Flow Paradox: Despite being the world's fastest-growing major economy, India remains reliant on volatile "hot money." The withdrawal of 17 billion by FPIs in the 2025-26 cycle demonstrates how external shocks can trigger capital flight even when domestic fundamentals are stable.
Imported Inflation: Higher energy costs lead to "cost-push" inflation. This limits the RBI's ability to cut interest rates to support growth, effectively allowing global geopolitical events to dictate domestic monetary policy.

3. Domestic Resilience: The Counter-Narrative

However, labelling the external sector as a terminal weakness overlooks India's internal "shock absorbers":
Forex Reserves as a Shield: India's 700 billion forex buffer provides $~8$ months of import cover, preventing the kind of currency "free-fall" seen during the 2013 Taper Tantrum.
Domestic Demand Base: Unlike export-led economies (like East Asian "Tigers"), India's 6.7% growth is largely driven by domestic consumption and government Capex, providing a cushion against global trade slowdowns.
Fiscal Consolidation: The rationalization of GST and improved tax compliance have created a fiscal floor that allows the government to absorb some fuel shocks through excise duty cuts without a total collapse of budgetary discipline.

4. Way Forward: Moving Beyond the Vulnerability

To ensure the "Goldilocks" phase isn't just a fleeting memory, India must address the "Achilles' heel" through structural shifts:

Energy Sovereignty: Reducing the "oil-weight" of the GDP by accelerating the Green Hydrogen Mission and expanding Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to 90 days.

Deepening FDI: Transitioning from volatile FPI to stable, long-term FDI by addressing the weak net FDI inflow (1.7 billion) through better profit-repatriation norms and ease of doing business.

Trade Diversification: Reducing the 38% remittance and 15% export dependency on West Asia by exploring newer markets in the Global South.

Conclusion

In 2026, India's macroeconomic story is one of "Internal Strength vs. External Stress." While the Goldilocks phase has weakened, the economy is not in a crisis. However, the current episode proves that India cannot be truly "Atmanirbhar" (self-reliant) until it decouples its macro-stability from the volatile corridors of West Asia. Long-term resilience lies in converting the external "Achilles' heel" into a "Strategic Shield" through energy diversification and fiscal prudence.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-goldilocks-moment-is-over-macro-situation-will-worsen-10652660/'

3. Gender Gap In Parliament (Dh)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Governance
Topic: Representation of women in legislatures
Sub-Topic: Issues relating to equality and social justice

Introduction

Women's representation in Parliament remains limited despite constitutional guarantees of equality. The persistence of the gender gap reflects not structural inevitability but a political choice shaped by party strategies, electoral incentives, and institutional design.

1. Nature of Gender Gap in Parliament

1. Women constitute a significantly lower proportion of legislators compared to their population share.
2. Representation is uneven across states and political parties.
3. The gap persists despite increasing female participation in education and workforce.

2. Structural and Political Causes

Party-Level Constraints

1. Political parties often hesitate to nominate women due to perceived electoral risks.

Patriarchal Norms

1. Societal biases influence candidate selection and voter preferences.

Electoral Dynamics

1. First-past-the-post system discourages experimentation with new candidates.

Resource Inequality

1. Women face constraints in campaign finance, networks, and political exposure.

3. Limitations of Voluntary Measures

1. Incremental increases in representation have been slow and inconsistent.
2. Reliance on party goodwill has not ensured adequate inclusion.
3. Without institutional mandates, progress remains uneven and reversible.

4. Role of Reservation and Institutional Reform

Women's Reservation

1. Legislative quotas can ensure a critical mass of women representatives.

Delimitation Linkages

1. Implementation delays tied to delimitation processes may postpone impact.

Global Experience

1. Countries with quotas show significantly higher female representation.

5. Implications for Governance

1. Greater representation enhances policy inclusivity and responsiveness.
2. Women legislators often prioritise social sector issues such as health and education.
3. Improves democratic legitimacy and participatory governance.

6. Challenges in Implementation

1. Risk of proxy representation or tokenism.
2. Need for capacity building and political empowerment.
3. Balancing reservation with merit-based selection debates.

7. Way Forward

1. Expedite implementation of women's reservation in legislatures.
2. Encourage political parties to adopt internal quotas.
3. Strengthen leadership training and financial support mechanisms.
4. Promote societal change to address gender biases in politics.

Conclusion

Bridging the gender gap in Parliament requires deliberate political commitment and institutional reform. Ensuring meaningful representation of women is essential for achieving substantive democracy and inclusive governance.

Source: https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/gender-gap-in-parliament-is-a-political-choice-3977387

Question

Q. *"The gender gap in legislative representation is more a political choice than a structural constraint." Critically examine in the Indian context. Suggest measures to improve women's participation in Parliament.* (250 words)

Introduction

Women's representation in India's Parliament remains disproportionately low despite constitutional guarantees of equality. This gap reflects political decisions in candidate selection and institutional design rather than purely structural limitations.

Nature of the Problem

1. Women are underrepresented in legislatures relative to their population share.
2. Representation varies across regions and political parties.
3. Progress has been gradual and insufficient.

Reasons for Gender Gap

1. Political parties often avoid fielding women due to perceived electoral risks.
2. Patriarchal norms influence both candidate selection and voter behaviour.
3. The first-past-the-post system discourages experimentation with new candidates.
4. Women face constraints in access to finance, networks, and political exposure.

Why It Is a Political Choice

1. Parties control nominations and can increase representation if they choose.
2. Evidence shows women candidates have comparable success rates when fielded.
3. Countries with mandated quotas demonstrate rapid improvements in representation.

Measures to Improve Participation

1. Implement women's reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies.
2. Introduce internal party quotas for candidate selection.
3. Provide financial and institutional support for women candidates.
4. Promote leadership training and capacity building.

Conclusion

Addressing the gender gap requires proactive political will and institutional reforms. Enhancing women's representation will strengthen democratic inclusiveness and improve governance outcomes.
Source: https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/gender-gap-in-parliament-is-a-political-choice-3977387

4. Why Nuanced Oversight of Social Media Platforms Matter (TP)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Governance
Topic: Role of media and social media in democracy
Sub-Topic: Government policies and regulation of digital platforms

Introduction

Social media platforms have transformed communication but also created new governance challenges, including misinformation, algorithmic bias, and weak accountability. This necessitates a nuanced regulatory framework that balances freedom of expression with democratic stability.

1. Expanding Role of Social Media in Governance

1. Social media acts as a primary source of information dissemination and public discourse.
2. It influences political opinions, electoral behaviour, and policy debates.
3. Platforms increasingly function as gatekeepers of information, replacing traditional media roles.

2. Key Challenges Posed by Social Media

Misinformation and Fake News

1. Rapid spread of unverified content undermines informed decision-making.

Algorithmic Amplification

1. Engagement-driven algorithms promote sensational or polarising content.

Opacity in Content Moderation

1. Lack of transparency in takedown decisions and moderation policies.

Jurisdictional Issues

1. Global platforms operate beyond national regulatory boundaries.

3. Limitations of Existing Regulatory Framework

1. Laws struggle to keep pace with technological advancements.
2. Enforcement mechanisms remain weak due to data asymmetry and platform power.
3. Risk of overregulation leading to censorship and restriction of free speech.

4. Need for Nuanced Oversight

Balancing Freedom and Accountability

1. Regulation must protect free speech while curbing harmful content.

Transparency Requirements

1. Platforms should disclose algorithmic functioning and moderation practices.

Platform Responsibility

1. Greater accountability for content dissemination and user safety.

Multi-Stakeholder Approach

1. Collaboration between government, industry, and civil society.

5. Role of Judiciary and Institutions

1. Courts have increasingly emphasised accountability and proportional regulation.
2. Institutional mechanisms must ensure checks without excessive control.
3. Independent regulators may help maintain balance.

6. Implications for Democracy

1. Unchecked misinformation can erode public trust and polarise society.
2. Effective oversight strengthens democratic resilience and informed citizenship.
3. Poor regulation may either lead to digital anarchy or authoritarian control.

7. Way Forward

1. Develop clear, transparent, and adaptive regulatory frameworks.
2. Strengthen digital literacy to combat misinformation.
3. Promote algorithmic accountability and ethical AI practices.
4. Ensure safeguards against misuse of regulatory powers.

Conclusion

Nuanced oversight of social media is essential to protect democratic values while preserving digital freedoms. The challenge lies in achieving a balanced approach that ensures accountability without undermining openness.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/why-nuanced-oversight-of-social-media-platforms-matter

Question

Q. *"Social media platforms pose both opportunities and challenges for democratic governance." Discuss the need for nuanced regulation of these platforms in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Social media platforms have become central to democratic discourse by enabling rapid information exchange and citizen engagement. However, their unregulated expansion has raised concerns regarding misinformation, accountability, and governance.

Opportunities

1. Social media enhances citizen participation and democratic engagement.
2. It facilitates rapid dissemination of information and awareness.
3. It provides a platform for diverse voices and public debate.

Challenges

1. Spread of misinformation and fake news undermines informed decision-making.
2. Algorithm-driven amplification promotes polarisation and sensationalism.
3. Lack of transparency in content moderation reduces accountability.
4. Jurisdictional complexities limit effective regulation of global platforms.

Need for Nuanced Regulation

1. Regulation must balance freedom of expression with the need to curb harmful content.
2. Transparency in algorithms and moderation practices is essential.
3. Platforms must be held accountable for content dissemination without stifling innovation.
4. A multi-stakeholder approach involving government, industry, and civil society is necessary.

Conclusion

A calibrated regulatory framework is essential to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its risks. Ensuring accountability, transparency, and protection of democratic values will be key to effective governance in the digital age.

Source: https://dailypioneer.com/news/why-nuanced-oversight-of-social-media-platforms-matter

Editorial of the Day – 25.04.2026

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1. Fire and sound - On Kerala's Mundathikode tragedy (TH)

GS Paper III - Disaster Management; Governance & Public Policy.
Topic - Disaster and disaster management; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
Sub-Topic - Industrial and Chemical Disasters.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, a catastrophic explosion at a makeshift fireworks unit in Mundathikode, Thrissur, served as a grim reminder of the persistent safety deficit in India's high-risk festivities. Occurring during preparations for the iconic Thrissur Pooram, the blast resulted in 15 fatalities and extensive property damage. This tragedy underscores a systemic failure where the "spectacle of sound" is consistently prioritized over stringent regulatory compliance, highlighting the urgent need for a "safety-first" paradigm in cultural celebrations.

2. The Mundathikode Incident - Impact & Context

The Event - A powerful blast occurred at a makeshift unit handling fireworks for the "sample vedikkettu" (pre-event display) of the Thrissur Pooram.

Human & Physical Toll -

1. Fatalities - Approximately 15 lives lost.
2. Injuries - Over 24 individuals sustained serious injuries.
3. Property Damage - Nearly 50 houses in the vicinity suffered structural damage, indicating the high intensity of the explosion.

Administrative Response - The state declared the incident a "State-specific disaster" to accelerate relief and compensation, though the festival was allowed to continue in a scaled-down form to appease public sentiment.

3. Systemic Regulatory & Enforcement Failures

The tragedy highlights that lessons from the 2016 Puttingal Temple Disaster remain unlearned -

1. Post-Puttingal Negligence - Safety norms mandated after the 2016 tragedy (which killed 100+) were largely ignored or poorly enforced by local administrations.
2. Inadequate Monitoring - Weak surveillance by the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) and local police during the peak festival season creates a vacuum of accountability.
3. Licensing Gaps - Licenses are often issued for small quantities, but units frequently store explosives far beyond the legal threshold without site inspections.

4. Critical Safety Lapses - The "Anatomy of a Disaster"

The Mundathikode unit exhibited classic "disaster-prone" conditions -

Hazardous Proximity - Lack of mandatory "safe distances" between storage sheds meant that a small spark caused a lethal chain reaction.

Excessive Stockpiling - Illegal storage of large quantities of flash powder and explosive chemicals far beyond the approved capacity.

Banned Substances - Suspected use of high-intensity, prohibited chemicals to achieve louder decibel levels.

Human Capital Deficit - Deployment of untrained seasonal workers who lack basic knowledge of chemical stability and emergency protocols.
Infrastructure Deficit - Absolute lack of on-site firefighting systems or protective safety gear.

5. Socio-Political & Cultural Challenges

The "Fire and Sound" issue is deeply rooted in India's socio-political fabric -

1. Vote-Bank Pressures - Strict enforcement is often weakened by political interference, as political parties fear a backlash from religious organizations if safety curbs are seen as "anti-tradition."
2. The "Loudness" Culture - A cultural obsession with loud, high-decibel explosives persists, leading to public resistance against "Green Crackers" or low-noise alternatives.
3. Spectacle over Science - The competitive nature of temple displays (e.g., between *Thiru Ambady* and *Paramecium*) drives authorities to push safety boundaries to provide a more "grand" show.

6. Way Forward - Toward Safer Celebrations

To prevent the recurrence of such "preventable disasters," a multi-pronged approach is required -
Technological Shift - Adoption of Cold Spark Technology and modern pyrotechnics that provide visual grandeur without the risk of high-intensity explosions.
Strict Accountability - Implementing a "Zero Tolerance" policy where local officials (District Collectors/Police) are held personally accountable for safety breaches in their jurisdiction.
Professionalization - Ensuring that only certified, trained pyrotechnicians handle explosives, moving away from the makeshift, unregulated "shed" model.
Public Awareness - Engaging religious heads and community leaders to advocate for a "Safe Pooram" that prioritizes life over loudness.

Conclusion

The Mundathikode tragedy is a testament to the fact that cultural richness cannot justify administrative lethargy. India's fireworks industry requires a systemic overhaul—transitioning from a tradition-led approach to a science-led safety framework. Until political will aligns with regulatory rigor, the sky-high spectacles of our festivals will continue to cast a dark shadow of avoidable mortality over the nation's democratic spirit.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/fire-and-sound-the-hindu-editorial-on-keralas-mundathikode-tragedy/article70902512.ece

Question

"The transition from 'traditional festivities' to 'high-decibel spectacles' has outpaced the existing regulatory framework for fireworks in India. Evaluate the efficacy of the current legal and institutional mechanisms in preventing fire-related disasters during mass public gatherings." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Mundathikode tragedy in April 2026, which occurred during the preparations for the Thrissur Pooram, reflects a recurring failure in India's safety governance. While India possesses a robust legal framework in the form of the Explosives Act (1884) and Explosives Rules (2008), the persistent occurrence of mass-casualty events suggests that the efficacy of these mechanisms is severely undermined by a "implementation gap" furled by political and cultural pressures.

2. Evaluation of Existing Mechanisms

A. Legal Framework (The Explosives Rules, 2008)

Strengths - The rules provide exhaustive guidelines on the chemical composition of firecrackers, safe storage distances (Article 21 distance norms), and the requirement for licensed pyrotechnicians.
Weaknesses - The laws are largely designed for static factories rather than the "makeshift" storage units that crop up during festival seasons. There is a lack of specific "Event-Based Safety Protocols" for religious festivities, leading to the use of temporary, non-compliant sheds.

B. Institutional Oversight (PESO and Local Administration)

Strengths - The Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) is the nodal technical body for licensing and quality control.

Weaknesses - PESO suffers from acute manpower shortages, making it impossible to monitor thousands of local festivals simultaneously. Consequently, the responsibility shifts to the local police and district administration, who often lack the technical expertise to identify hazardous chemical mixes like banned flash powders.

C. Post-Disaster Judicial Directives

Strengths - Inquiries into past disasters (like the 2016 Puttingal Tragedy) have produced detailed safety mandates, including bans on high-decibel "competitive" displays.

Weaknesses - These directives often suffer from "normative amnesia." As public memory fades, local administrations, under vote-bank pressures, frequently grant "special exemptions" or turn a blind eye to violations of decibel and chemical limits.

3. The Conflict - Spectacle vs. Safety

A critical evaluation reveals that the current framework fails because it does not account for the socio-cultural "competitive" element -

Loudness as Prestige - The cultural emphasis on "sound" over "visuals" drives manufacturers to use unauthorized, highly unstable chemical compositions to win local display competitions.

Politicization of High-Risk Festivities - When safety norms are viewed as "anti-tradition," the political cost of enforcement increases, leading to the hollowing out of regulatory authority.

4. Way Forward - Strengthening the Efficacy

From Policing to Professionalization - Mandating that only certified pyrotechnic firms—rather than temple-contracted seasonal workers—can handle explosives.

Technological Substitution - Providing subsidies for the adoption of Cold Spark Technology and electronic crackers that provide the "vibe" of tradition without the "risk" of combustion.

Statutory Liability - Introducing strict liability for temple boards and organizers, ensuring they are financially and legally responsible for any safety breach.

5. Conclusion

The current regulatory framework in India is "strong on paper but weak on the ground." The efficacy of the Explosives Rules is compromised not by a lack of law, but by a lack of political and social will to enforce them. Moving forward, the state must transition from a "reactive" disaster responder to a "proactive" safety regulator, ensuring that the Right to Life (Article 21) is the non-negotiable foundation of every cultural celebration.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/fire-and-sound-the-hindu-editorial-on-keralas-mundathikode-tragedy/article70902512.ece

2. There are three pathways for India to develop greater energy resilience (IE)

GS Paper III - Economy (Infrastructure/Energy) & Environment (Conservation).

Topic - Infrastructure - Energy; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Sub-Topic - Energy Security and Strategic Autonomy.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, intensifying geopolitical friction—particularly the potential disruption of the Strait of Hormuz—has underscored the fragile nature of India's energy security. As a nation importing nearly 85% of its crude oil, India is perpetually exposed to external supply shocks. To achieve Strategic Autonomy and ensure economic stability, India is aggressively pursuing three convergent pathways -

Electrification, Bioenergy, and Natural Gas expansion. This shift is not merely an environmental mandate but a fundamental necessity for macroeconomic resilience.

2. Energy Security & The Vulnerability of Import Dependence

Deep Dependency - India imports 85% of its crude oil and approximately 50% of its Natural Gas (LNG). This creates a direct link between global volatility and domestic inflation/fiscal health.

Strategic Chokepoints - The Strait of Hormuz handles 20% of global oil trade; any blockade there represents an existential threat to India's energy supply chain.

Economic Impact - High energy import bills are the primary drivers of the Current Account Deficit (CAD), making the Indian Rupee vulnerable to global market sentiment.

The Policy Objective - Energy security is now defined by the 3 As - Availability, Accessibility, and Affordability.

3. Pathway I - Electrification & Renewable Expansion

Panchamrit Commitments - India is on track to meet its 500 GW non-fossil capacity target by 2030, shifting the power mix toward solar and wind.

Sectoral Deepening - * **Transport -** Aggressive push for Electric Vehicles (EVs) to reduce the "tailpipe" demand for petroleum.

Residential - Promoting Electric Cooking to replace LPG, thereby reducing the domestic import burden.

Technological Integration - Utilization of AI, IoT, and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to manage the intermittency of renewable sources.

Atmanirbhar Minerals - Focus on domestic mining and processing of Rare Earth Elements (REEs) and Lithium, essential for battery manufacturing and electronic resilience.

4. Pathway II - Bioenergy & Waste-to-Energy Potential

Agricultural Residue - India generates 950 million tonnes of ag-residue annually. Converting the available 400 million tonnes into energy can solve both energy and pollution problems.

The Biogas Revolution - With 300 million cattle, India has the potential to produce 100 billion cubic metres (bcm) of biogas annually, which could significantly offset LNG imports.

GOBAR-Dhan Scheme - Institutionalizing the conversion of cattle dung and solid waste into Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) and organic manure.

Climate-Pollution Link - Bioenergy reduces stubble burning (a major cause of winter smog in North India) and aids in carbon sequestration.

5. Pathway III - Natural Gas & LNG Diversification

The "Bridge Fuel" - Natural gas emits roughly 50% less CO_2 than coal, serving as a critical transition fuel while renewable infrastructure matures.

Supply Security - Unlike the oil market (dominated by OPEC), the global gas market is less cartelized, allowing India to source from diverse geographies (e.g., USA, Australia, Qatar).

Infrastructure Scaling - India's gas pipeline network has reached 25,000 km, though further expansion is required to integrate the "National Gas Grid."

Small-Scale LNG (SSLNG) - A game-changer for distribution, SSLNG allows gas to reach MSMEs and transport hubs without relying solely on large-scale pipeline connectivity.

6. Challenges in Energy Diversification

Logistics of Biomass - Agricultural waste is bulky and geographically scattered; creating a cost-effective supply chain for collection and storage remains a hurdle.

Capital Intensity - Transitioning to green hydrogen, EVs, and smart grids requires massive upfront capital investment and long gestation periods.

Technological Gaps - India still lacks indigenous high-end technology for Carbon Capture (CCS) and efficient long-duration energy storage.

Federal Coordination - Energy policy requires seamless alignment between Central mandates and State-level execution (e.g., land acquisition for solar parks).

7. Climate Commitments & Sustainable Development

Net Zero 2070 - Diversification is the primary vehicle for achieving India's long-term climate neutrality.
SDG Integration - Directly addresses SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
Just Transition - Ensuring that the shift away from fossil fuels provides alternative livelihoods for workers in the traditional coal and oil sectors.

8. Conclusion

India's energy future lies in a synchronized multi-modal strategy. By overlapping Electrification, Bioenergy, and Natural Gas, India can move from a state of "import vulnerability" to "strategic resilience." The success of this transition depends on fostering private innovation, creating bankable infrastructure projects, and maintaining a steadfast commitment to the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision in the energy sector.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/there-are-three-pathways-for-india-to-develop-greater-energy-resilience-10654540/

Question

"India's transition from a fossil-fuel-dependent economy to a diversified energy basket is no longer just a climate mandate but a strategic necessity for macroeconomic stability. Critically analyze the efficacy of the three proposed pathways—electrification, bioenergy, and natural gas—in ensuring India's energy security." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In 2026, India's energy security is increasingly threatened by geopolitical volatility, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint through which much of its 85% crude oil imports flow. To achieve strategic autonomy, India is pursuing a multi-pronged diversification strategy. While these pathways offer a blueprint for Net Zero 2070, their success depends on overcoming significant technological, logistical, and financial barriers.

2. The Efficacy of the Three Pathways

A. Electrification & Renewable Energy

Pros - Shifting transport (EVs) and residential cooking to electricity reduces the direct demand for petroleum and LPG. Utilizing AI and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) helps manage the intermittency of solar and wind power.
Critical Gap - India is heavily dependent on imports for Rare Earth Elements (REEs) and Lithium needed for batteries. These risks shifting dependency from "Oil cartels" to "Mineral cartels."

B. Bioenergy & Waste-to-Energy

Pros - India produces 950 million tonnes of agricultural residue. Programs like GOBAR-Dhan convert waste into Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG), potentially replacing expensive LNG imports while reducing stubble burning and pollution.
Critical Gap - The biomass supply chain is highly fragmented. Collecting, transporting, and storing bulky agricultural waste remains economically unviable in many regions without heavy subsidies.

C. Natural Gas Expansion

Pros - As a "Bridge Fuel," it emits 50% less CO_2 than coal. The expansion of the National Gas Grid (25,000 km) and Small-Scale LNG (SSLNG) provides a cleaner alternative for MSMEs and long-haul transport.
Critical Gap - India still imports 50% of its natural gas. While less cartelized than oil, it remains an imported fossil fuel that subjects the Current Account Deficit (CAD) to global price shocks.

3. Structural Bottlenecks

Capital Intensity - The transition requires massive upfront investment in smart grids, green hydrogen, and charging infrastructure, often stretching fiscal targets.
Federal Challenges - Energy is a concurrent subject; lack of coordination between Central mandates and State-level land acquisition or DISCOM reforms often delays projects.

Technological Sovereignty - India still relies on foreign technology for high-efficiency solar cells and long-duration energy storage.

4. Way Forward

Incentivizing Innovation - Leveraging carbon credits and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to localize the manufacturing of electrolyzers and solid-state batteries.

Decentralized Energy - Promoting "Micro-grids" and local bio-digesters to reduce the logistical costs associated with centralized energy distribution.

Strategic Mineral Diplomacy - Securing long-term leases for lithium and cobalt mines abroad while fast-tracking domestic exploration under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

5. Conclusion

The three-pathway strategy is a vital shield against the "Imported Inflation" that plagues the Indian economy. However, energy security is not achieved by merely switching fuels; it is achieved through Technological Sovereignty and Resource Resilience. For India to become a developed economy by 2047, it must ensure that its energy transition is as much about "Making in India" as it is about "Cleaning in India." Moving from a reactive posture to a proactive, diversified framework is the only way to safeguard India's growth story from global geopolitical shocks.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/there-are-three-pathways-for-india-to-develop-greater-energy-resilience-10654540/

3. Are freebies really a curse? (DH)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance

Topic - Fiscal policy and public expenditure

Sub-Topic - Inclusive growth and poverty alleviation

Introduction

The debate on “freebies” versus productive expenditure has intensified in India. While critics argue that freebies strain fiscal resources, proponents highlight their role in stimulating demand, reducing inequality, and empowering vulnerable groups. The issue requires a nuanced economic assessment rather than a binary view.

1. Understanding Freebies and Cash Transfers

1. Freebies refer to direct benefits such as cash transfers, subsidies, or free services provided by governments.
2. They are often targeted at low-income and vulnerable populations.
3. Unlike capital expenditure (capex), they primarily influence consumption rather than asset creation.

2. Economic Rationale of Freebies

Demand Stimulation

1. Direct cash transfers increase disposable income, boosting demand for goods and services.

Multiplier Effects

1. Increased consumption can stimulate production and employment, especially in local economies.

Counter-Cyclical Role

1. During economic slowdowns, freebies can act as automatic stabilisers.

3. Social and Developmental Benefits

Poverty Reduction

1. Transfers provide immediate relief to economically weaker sections.

Women Empowerment

1. Direct transfers to women improve household decision-making and welfare outcomes.

Human Development

1. Subsidies in food, health, and education improve long-term social indicators.

4. Criticism and Concerns

Fiscal Stress

1. Excessive reliance on freebies can increase fiscal deficits and debt burden.

Opportunity Cost

1. Resources diverted to consumption may reduce investment in infrastructure and long-term growth.

Dependency Risks

1. Continuous handouts may reduce incentives for work and productivity.

Political Populism

1. Freebies may be driven by electoral considerations rather than economic rationale.

5. Capex vs Freebies Debate

1. Capex generates long-term growth through asset creation and productivity gains.
2. Freebies generate short-term demand and welfare benefits.
3. The two are not mutually exclusive; a balanced fiscal mix is essential.

6. Towards a Balanced Approach

1. Target subsidies to genuinely vulnerable groups using data-driven identification.
2. Combine freebies with productive investments in health, education, and skills.
3. Ensure fiscal discipline through transparent budgeting and accountability.
4. Shift from universal freebies to conditional and outcome-based transfers where feasible.

Conclusion

Freebies are not inherently detrimental; their impact depends on design, targeting, and fiscal sustainability. A balanced approach integrating welfare support with long-term investments is essential for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/are-freebies-really-a-curse/article70902677.ece

Question

Q. *"Freebies are often criticised for undermining fiscal discipline, yet they play a crucial role in inclusive growth." Critically examine this statement in the Indian context.* (250 words)

Introduction

Freebies, in the form of cash transfers and subsidies, are widely debated in India for their fiscal implications. While they are often criticised as populist measures, they also serve important economic and social objectives.

Role in Inclusive Growth

1. Freebies increase disposable income of low-income households, thereby boosting consumption demand.
2. They act as economic stabilisers during downturns by sustaining aggregate demand.
3. Direct transfers to women enhance financial inclusion and household welfare.
4. Subsidies in food, health, and education contribute to improved human development outcomes.

Concerns and Limitations

1. Excessive expenditure on freebies can strain fiscal resources and increase public debt.
2. It may crowd out capital expenditure needed for long-term growth.
3. Poorly targeted schemes can lead to inefficiencies and leakages.
4. Persistent reliance may create dependency and reduce work incentives.

Way Forward

1. Rationalise subsidies to ensure better targeting and efficiency.
2. Maintain a balance between welfare spending and capital investment.
3. Strengthen fiscal responsibility frameworks to ensure sustainability.
4. Link transfers with outcomes such as education, health, or skill development where appropriate.

Conclusion

Freebies, when well-designed and targeted, can support inclusive growth without undermining fiscal stability. The focus should be on achieving a balanced and sustainable fiscal strategy rather than dismissing welfare measures altogether.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/are-freebies-really-a-curse/article70902677.ece

4. Dealing with Risk (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Science & Technology
Topic - Emerging technologies and associated risks
Sub-Topic - Infrastructure development and resilience

Introduction

India's rapid expansion into advanced sectors such as green hydrogen, nuclear energy, biofuels, and sustainable aviation fuels introduces complex technological risks. Managing these risks through robust safety frameworks, institutional capacity, and skilled manpower is essential for sustainable growth.

1. Changing Nature of Risk in Emerging Technologies

1. Modern industrial risks are increasingly complex, interconnected, and high-impact.
2. Technologies such as hydrogen energy and nuclear systems involve high uncertainty and catastrophic potential.
3. Traditional safety approaches are inadequate for managing dynamic and evolving risk landscapes.

2. Limitations of Current Risk Management Systems

Inadequate Skill Ecosystem

1. Shortage of highly trained professionals in safety science, modelling, and risk assessment.

Weak Institutional Mechanisms

1. Absence of a unified national framework for advanced risk governance.

High Cost of Safety Infrastructure

1. Testing facilities, simulations, and validation mechanisms require significant investment.

Fragmented Learning Systems

1. Lack of standardised documentation and institutional learning from past incidents.

3. Importance of Advanced Risk Assessment Tools

1. Tools such as Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) and simulation models help predict accident scenarios.
2. Use of AI, data analytics, and digital twins improves precision in risk forecasting.
3. Virtual Reality (VR)-based training enhances preparedness for real-world emergencies.

4. Strategic Need for Institutional Capacity Building

Centres of Excellence

1. Establish specialised institutions for research, training, and certification in risk management.

Standardisation and Knowledge Sharing

1. Develop national repositories and frameworks for safety protocols and best practices.

Integration with Industry

1. Collaboration between government, academia, and private sector for innovation and implementation.

5. Role of Policy and Regulation

1. Mandatory risk assessments and safety audits for all major projects.
2. Strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure compliance and accountability.
3. Aligning safety standards with global best practices.

6. Economic and Strategic Implications

1. Poor risk management can lead to industrial disasters, financial losses, and reputational damage.
2. Strong safety systems enhance investor confidence and global competitiveness.
3. Critical for achieving India's goals of energy transition and industrial expansion.

7. Way Forward

1. Develop a national risk management architecture for emerging technologies.
2. Invest in skill development and specialised training ecosystems.
3. Promote adoption of advanced technologies for risk prediction and mitigation.
4. Encourage continuous learning and institutional memory.

Conclusion

Effective risk management is foundational to India's technological and industrial ambitions. Building robust institutions, skilled manpower, and advanced safety systems will ensure sustainable and secure growth.

Source - https -//www.msn.com/en-in/news/opinion/dealing-with-risk/ar-AA21FYXG?apiversion=v2&domshim=1&noservercache=1&noservertelemetry=1&batchservertelemetry=1&renderwebcomponents=1&wcseo=1&bundles=feat-es2020-t

Question

Q. "Rapid technological advancement has increased the complexity of industrial risks." Discuss the challenges in risk management in emerging sectors in India and suggest measures to address them. (250 words)

Introduction

India's expansion into advanced sectors such as green hydrogen, nuclear energy, and biofuels has increased the complexity of industrial risks. These technologies require sophisticated risk management systems to ensure safety and sustainability.

Challenges in Risk Management

1. Emerging technologies involve high uncertainty and potential for catastrophic accidents.
2. There is a shortage of skilled professionals trained in advanced risk assessment and safety science.
3. Institutional frameworks remain fragmented, lacking coordination and standardisation.
4. High costs of safety infrastructure and testing facilities limit widespread adoption.
5. Limited institutional learning and documentation reduce preparedness for future risks.

Measures to Address Challenges

1. Establish specialised centres of excellence for risk assessment, training, and research.
2. Strengthen regulatory frameworks with mandatory safety audits and compliance mechanisms.
3. Promote use of advanced tools such as AI, simulation models, and digital twins for risk prediction.
4. Develop a national knowledge-sharing platform for best practices and incident learning.
5. Encourage collaboration between government, academia, and industry for capacity building.

Conclusion

Managing risks in emerging technologies is critical for India's sustainable development. A comprehensive approach combining institutional strengthening, technological innovation, and skill development will ensure safe and resilient industrial growth.

Source - https -//www.msn.com/en-in/news/opinion/dealing-with-risk/ar-AA21FYXG?apiversion=v2&domshim=1&noservercache=1&noservertelemetry=1&batchservertelemetry=1&renderwebcomponents=1&wcseo=1&bundles=feat-es2020-t

Editorial of the Day – 27.04.2026

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1. Turning point: On the U.S. and India's independent foreign policy (TH)

GS Paper II: International Relations.
Topic: India and its neighbourhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
Sub-Topic: Indo-Iran Strategic Partnership.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, India's regional connectivity ambitions hit a significant roadblock as the U.S. sanctions waiver on the Chabahar port expired. This development has thrust New Delhi into a complex geopolitical dilemma: how to safeguard its massive strategic investment in Iran while navigating the risk of American secondary sanctions. As a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia that bypasses Pakistan, Chabahar is not just a port; it is the cornerstone of India's "Connect Central Asia" policy.

2. Historical Context: The Long Road to Chabahar

The Genesis (2003): Initiated via an MoU during the Vajpayee era to provide India with land-access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
The Revival (2015): The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the Iran Nuclear Deal provided a window for India to finalize the Trilateral Agreement with Iran and Afghanistan.
Economic Commitment: India committed approximately $620 million for the development of the Shahid Beheshti terminal and related infrastructure.
Integration: The project is strategically linked to the Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan, creating a dedicated Indian trade corridor.

3. The 2026 Crisis: Expiry of the U.S. Waiver

The lapsing of the humanitarian and trade carve-out has fundamentally altered the operational landscape:
Zero Protection: Without the waiver, any Indian firm or entity operating in Chabahar is now exposed to U.S. secondary sanctions.
Financial Sunk Costs: India has already invested roughly $120 million in port equipment and initial phases.
Operational Halt: The threat of sanctions complicates banking channels, insurance for shipping, and the procurement of spare parts for port machinery.
Diplomatic Pressure: Washington's refusal to renew the waiver signals a harder stance on Iran, regardless of India's strategic needs.

4. India's Strategic Dilemma

India is caught between two competing pillars of its foreign policy:
Strategic Autonomy: The desire to pursue national interests (connectivity to Central Asia) independent of Great Power pressures.
Global Alignment (U.S. Partnership): The need to maintain a robust "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" with the U.S., which is vital for defense, technology, and countering regional threats.
Geopolitical Leverage: Abandoning Chabahar would mean ceding influence to China, which is already expanding its presence in Iran through a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement.

5. Policy Options for New Delhi

Stake Transfer: Transferring India's operational stake to an Iranian entity or a third-party non-sanctioned intermediary.
Temporary Disengagement: Winding down operations while maintaining a "skeleton presence" to allow for a future return if geopolitical tensions ease.
Negotiated Re-entry: Seeking a specific, narrow carve-out limited strictly to non-dual-use goods or humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.
Alternative Corridors: Accelerating focus on the INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) via the Port of Bandar Abbas, though this remains equally susceptible to sanctions.
Strategic Defiance: Continuing operations despite sanctions—a high-risk move that could alienate the U.S. and impact Indian firms with significant American exposure.

6. Implications for India's Foreign Policy

Credibility Gap: Repeated delays and potential withdrawal might project India as an "unreliable partner" in the eyes of Tehran and Central Asian capitals.
Connectivity Constraints: Without Chabahar, India remains permanently "land-locked" by Pakistan for its westward trade.
Multi-alignment Testing: The crisis tests India's ability to "walk the tightrope" between Washington and Tehran.
Regional Security: Weakened access to Afghanistan hampers India's ability to provide humanitarian aid and engage with Afghan stakeholders effectively.

Conclusion

The Chabahar dilemma is a litmus test for the resilience of India's strategic autonomy in an increasingly polarized world. While economic pragmatism might suggest a temporary retreat to avoid American wrath, the long-term cost of losing a strategic foothold in the Eurasian heartland could be far greater. A calibrated approach—perhaps involving low-key operational continuity paired with high-level diplomatic lobbying in Washington—is essential to preserve India's regional credibility and sustain its independent voice in global affairs.
Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/turning-point-on-the-us-and-indias-independent-foreign-policy/article70909254.ece

Question

"The recent expiry of the U.S. sanctions waiver on the Chabahar port has placed India's 'Strategic Autonomy' at a critical crossroads. Evaluate the strategic significance of Chabahar for India and analyze the challenges in sustaining this project amidst shifting global alignments." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the expiration of the U.S. sanctions waiver for the Chabahar port has reignited a fundamental debate in Indian foreign policy. As New Delhi faces the threat of secondary sanctions, the project—once hailed as a gateway to Central Asia—now tests India's ability to balance its "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" with the U.S. against its long-term regional connectivity ambitions.

2. Strategic Significance of Chabahar

Chabahar is more than a commercial port; it is a geopolitical necessity for India:
Bypassing the 'Pakistan Blockade': It provides the only viable sea-land route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, circumventing Pakistan's denial of transit rights.
Economic Gateway: It serves as the southern hub for the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), potentially reducing freight costs to Russia and Europe by 30%.
Regional Influence: The port, linked with the Zaranj-Delaram highway, allows India to sustain its developmental and humanitarian footprint in Afghanistan.

Counter-Hegemony: Strategic presence in the Gulf of Oman prevents the total dominance of the region by the China-backed Gwadar port, located just 170 km away.

3. Challenges in Sustaining the Project

The transition into a "post-waiver" era introduces several structural hurdles:

The Sanctions Trap: Without a U.S. carve-out, Indian state-owned and private firms involved in the port face de-platforming from the global dollar-based financial system.

Investment Paralysis: While India has invested $120 million, further scaling of the terminal and the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line requires global tenders, which are now unlikely to attract international bidders.

The 'China' Factor: Iran's 25-year strategic pact with China creates a risk that any Indian withdrawal or hesitation will result in Beijing filling the vacuum, effectively "encircling" India's maritime interests.

Multi-Alignment Stress: Sustaining ties with a "pariah" state (Iran) while deepening defense ties with Washington (via iCET and GE engine deals) creates an increasingly narrow path for Strategic Autonomy.

4. Evaluation of Policy Options

India's response must prioritize pragmatism over sentiment:

Stake Transfer: Exploring the transfer of operational control to an Iranian entity while maintaining "technical consultancy" could mitigate direct sanction risks.

Humanitarian Narrowing: Negotiating with the U.S. for a "non-commercial, humanitarian-only" waiver focused strictly on food and medicine for the Afghan people.

Diversification: Reducing the risk by accelerating the Middle Corridor or the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), though these do not replace the unique access Chabahar provides to Eurasia.

5. Conclusion

The Chabahar dilemma is the ultimate litmus test for India's 21st-century diplomacy. Abandoning the project would signal a retreat from the Eurasian heartland and a dilution of India's independent foreign policy. However, reckless defiance could jeopardize critical high-tech cooperation with the West. The way forward lies in "Quiet Continuity"—maintaining a minimal operational footprint while leveraging diplomatic capital in Washington to prove that a stable, Indian-led presence in Chabahar is a better alternative for regional stability than a Chinese monopoly.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/turning-point-on-the-us-and-indias-independent-foreign-policy/article70909254.ece

2. Extreme Weather Events: Trends, triggers and consequences (IE)

GS Paper I: Physical Geography

Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena; Geographical features and their location-changes.

Sub-Topic: Monsoon Variability and the "New Normal."

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a forecast that appears paradoxical: a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA), yet a significantly elevated risk of catastrophic flooding. This highlights a critical evolution in India's climate reality—overall rainfall deficiency no longer guarantees a reprieve from floods. As climate change alters the traditional monsoon rhythm, the focus is shifting from "how much" it rains to "how fast" it rains, necessitating a complete overhaul of India's disaster preparedness framework.

2. The Indian Monsoon System: Dynamics and Variability

Differential Heating: Driven by the thermal contrast between the Indian landmass and the surrounding oceans, leading to seasonal wind reversal and moisture transport.

The Trap of Averages: All-India averages (like the 92% LPA) often mask Spatial and Temporal Variability. A national deficit can co-exist with regional surpluses that trigger local disasters.

Intra-seasonal Variations: The monsoon moves in "Active" and "Break" cycles. Concentrated rainfall during active spells, even in a deficit year, creates high runoff and flood conditions.
Forecast Constraints: While seasonal trends are predictable, localized Extreme Rainfall Events (EREs) remain beyond the precision of current long-range models

3. Extreme Rainfall Events (EREs): The Rising Trend

IMD Definition: Rainfall exceeding 21 cm within 24 hours is classified as "extremely heavy."
Frequency Shift: Such events have surged from an average of 60–70 annually to over 150 in recent years, marking a structural departure from historical norms.
Intensity vs. Infiltration: Rain is now falling in shorter, more violent bursts. This reduces the time for soil infiltration and increases immediate surface runoff, overwhelming natural and man-made drainage.
Threshold Revision: While some increases are due to updated classification standards, the actual physical trend remains sharply upward.

4. Climate Change and Hydrological Impacts

Thermodynamic Link: A warmer atmosphere has a higher moisture-holding capacity (approx. 7% more per 1°C rise), fuelling more intense precipitation.
Erratic Distribution: Climate change creates "hydrological extremes," where the same region may experience prolonged drought followed by flash flooding.
Scientific Consensus: Modern EREs are increasingly attributed to anthropogenic climate change, making adaptation a core pillar of national security rather than just environmental policy.

5. Historical Context: Major Flood Disasters (2013–2026)

Year	Disaster	Primary Trigger	Impact/Lesson
2013	Kedarnath	Cloudbursts & Glacial activity	Exposed Himalayan vulnerability & unplanned tourism.
2015	Chennai	Intense rainfall & Poor drainage	Highlighted urban planning failures & wetland loss.
2018	Kerala	Unprecedented rain & Dam mgmt.	Emphasized the need for integrated reservoir operation.
Annual	Recurring Pattern	Increasing EREs	India has faced a major rainfall disaster every year since 2013.

6. Urban Flooding and Governance Lapses

Encroachment: The conversion of wetlands and natural floodplains into real estate reduces the "sponginess" of cities.
Infrastructure Deficit: Outdated drainage systems designed for 20th-century rainfall intensities are incapable of handling 21st-century EREs.
Solid Waste Management: Plastic and silt block existing channels, turning moderate rain into severe waterlogging.
Economic Toll: Beyond casualties, urban flooding paralyzes transport and business, causing multi-billion-dollar losses annually.

7. Challenges in Weather Prediction

Butterfly Effect: Weather is a chaotic system; minor initial fluctuations can lead to drastically different outcomes, making local intensity predictions difficult.
The Localization Gap: Predicting *that* it will rain is easy; predicting *exactly where and how much* at a city-block level remains a technological frontier.
Technological Imperative: While models are improving, they cannot eliminate the inherent uncertainty of small-scale weather phenomena.

8. Disaster Management: Shifting Policy Focus

Institutional Framework: The NDMA and IMD provide the backbone for response, but regional effectiveness remains uneven.

Fiscal Burden: Floods now account for over 50% of state disaster expenditure, straining public finances and diverting funds from development.

The "Drought-to-Flood" Pivot: Historical policy focused on agrarian drought. Modern policy must prioritize flood resilience, heat mitigation, and urban adaptation.

9. Way Forward

Climate-Resilient Infrastructure: Designing "Sponge Cities" with permeable pavements and expanded water retention bodies.

Advanced Early Warning Systems (EWS): Investing in Doppler radars and hyper-local modeling to provide "Impact-Based Forecasts."

Governance Reform: Strict enforcement of land-use regulations and protection of eco-sensitive zones in both hills and coasts.

Nature-Based Solutions: Reforestation and restoration of mangroves and riparian buffers to act as natural shock absorbers.

Conclusion

The 2026 monsoon forecast serves as a reminder that "average rainfall" is a deceptive metric. In an era of climate variability, the threat is no longer defined by the total volume of water but by the violence of its delivery. India must move beyond reactive relief toward a proactive, "climate-smart" governance model that respects the limits of its hydrological systems.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/knowledge-nugget-extreme-weather-events-trends-climate-change-impact-upsc-10656515/

Question

"The spatial and temporal distribution of the Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM) is undergoing a structural shift driven by global warming. Elucidate the geophysical factors contributing to the rising frequency of Extreme Rainfall Events (EREs) and their impact on the Indian hydrological regime." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM) is a complex geophysical system driven by the differential heating of the Indian landmass and the surrounding oceans. However, in 2026, the traditional seasonal rhythm is being replaced by a "New Normal" of hydrological extremes. As observed by the IMD, even in years with below-normal Long Period Average (LPA), the frequency of Extreme Rainfall Events (EREs)—defined as $>21\text{cm}$ in 24 hours—continues to rise, signalling a profound shift in atmospheric thermodynamics.

2. Geophysical Factors Driving Extreme Rainfall

The surge in EREs (from ~70 to over 150 annually) is anchored in several geophysical shifts:

Atmospheric Moisture Capacity: According to the Clausius-Clapeyron relationship, the atmosphere's moisture-holding capacity increases by approximately 7% for every 1°C rise in temperature. This leads to more moisture being available for sudden, high-intensity discharge.

Rapid Indian Ocean Warming: The Indian Ocean is warming faster than other tropical oceans. Higher Sea Surface Temperatures (SSTs) increase the rate of evaporation and provide a constant "moisture feed" to the monsoon trough, fuelling intense convective systems.

Instability in Monsoon Trough: Global warming has made the position and strength of the monsoon trough more erratic. This results in "concentrated" rainfall zones where a single low-pressure system remains stationary over a region, causing catastrophic flooding.

Mesoscale Convective Systems: There is an increase in localized cloudbursts, especially in the Himalayan and Western Ghats regions. These are triggered by the forced ascent of moisture-laden air (orographic lifting) combined with a highly unstable, warmer atmosphere.

3. Impact on the Hydrological Regime

This shift from steady rain to "violent bursts" significantly alters India's water cycle:

Runoff vs. Infiltration: Intense rainfall exceeds the soil's infiltration capacity. Instead of recharging groundwater, most of the water becomes immediate surface runoff, leading to flash floods and reduced baseflow in rivers during dry spells.

Sediment Load and River Morphology: High-intensity rain increases soil erosion. The resulting high sediment load causes riverbeds to rise (aggradation), reducing the carrying capacity of rivers like the Ganga and Brahmaputra, thus making them more prone to "over-bank" flooding.

The Drought-Flood Paradox: The temporal shift causes "Active-Break" cycles to become extreme. A region may face a 20-day dry spell (agricultural drought) followed by 48 hours of EREs (hydrological flood), complicating water resource management.

4. Conclusion

The 2026 monsoon reality confirms that the ISM is no longer just a seasonal wind reversal but a high-energy thermodynamic system in flux. Elucidating these shifts reveals that spatial-temporal variability is now a greater threat than total rainfall deficiency. For a geography as diverse as India, ensuring water security requires moving beyond "average" metrics and adopting a landscape-based hydrological approach that can absorb the shocks of an increasingly volatile atmosphere.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/knowledge-nugget-extreme-weather-events-trends-climate-change-impact-upsc-10656515/

3. Misadventures of superpowers (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic: Global economic trends and their impact on India
Sub-Topic: Unemployment and economic shocks

Introduction

Geopolitical conflicts such as tensions involving major powers can trigger systemic global economic disruptions. Unlike earlier bipolar conflicts, today's highly interconnected global economy amplifies risks, leading to inflation, unemployment, and structural instability across nations.

1. Changing Nature of Global Conflicts

1. Earlier conflicts (e.g., Cold War) were contained within blocks, limiting global spillovers.
2. Contemporary conflicts involve deep economic interdependence, making disruptions widespread.
3. Integration of trade, finance, and supply chains has increased systemic vulnerability.

2. Economic Channels of Disruption

Energy and Commodity Shocks

1. Conflicts disrupt supply of oil, gas, and critical minerals, increasing global prices.

Trade Disruptions

1. Sanctions, tariffs, and geopolitical tensions affect global trade flows.

Financial Market Instability

1. Uncertainty leads to capital flight, currency volatility, and reduced investments.

3. Inflationary Pressures

1. Supply-side disruptions increase production costs, leading to cost-push inflation.
2. Higher energy prices cascade across sectors such as transport, manufacturing, and agriculture.
3. Inflation reduces purchasing power and slows economic growth.

4. Spectre of Unemployment

1. Rising costs force firms to adopt cost-cutting and labour-substituting technologies.

2. Economic slowdown reduces demand, leading to job losses.
3. Structural unemployment may increase due to automation and reduced investment.

5. Limits of Policy Responses

1. Governments face constraints in using fiscal and monetary tools simultaneously.
2. Expansionary policies may worsen inflation while contractionary policies may deepen recession.
3. Policy trade-offs become sharper during global shocks.

6. Strategic Implications for India

1. India remains vulnerable due to dependence on energy imports and global trade.
2. External shocks can affect growth, inflation, and employment simultaneously.
3. Strengthening domestic resilience becomes critical.

7. Way Forward

1. Diversify energy sources and strengthen strategic reserves.
2. Promote domestic manufacturing and reduce external dependence.
3. Build resilient supply chains and enhance regional trade cooperation.
4. Maintain prudent macroeconomic policies to manage shocks.

Conclusion

Modern geopolitical conflicts have far-reaching economic consequences due to global interdependence. Building economic resilience and strategic autonomy is essential for mitigating the impact of such shocks.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/misadventures-of-superpowers/article70909173.ece

Question

Q. "In an interconnected global economy, geopolitical conflicts have far-reaching economic consequences." Discuss the impact of such conflicts on inflation and employment. Suggest measures for India to mitigate these effects. (250 words)

Introduction

Geopolitical conflicts in today's interconnected world have significant economic repercussions. Unlike earlier periods, global integration amplifies the impact of such conflicts on inflation, employment, and economic stability.

Impact on Inflation

1. Disruptions in energy and commodity supply lead to cost-push inflation.
2. Increased transport and production costs raise prices across sectors.
3. Currency volatility and capital outflows further intensify inflationary pressures.

Impact on Employment

1. Firms facing higher costs reduce workforce or adopt automation.
2. Economic slowdown lowers demand, leading to job losses.
3. Structural unemployment may rise due to technological substitution.

Measures for India

1. Diversify energy imports and strengthen strategic reserves to reduce vulnerability.
2. Promote domestic manufacturing and supply chain resilience.
3. Maintain macroeconomic stability through prudent fiscal and monetary policies.
4. Enhance skill development to address structural unemployment.

Conclusion

Geopolitical conflicts pose serious challenges to economic stability in an interconnected world. Strengthening domestic resilience and adopting strategic policy measures are essential for mitigating their impact on inflation and employment.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/misadventures-of-superpowers/article70909173.ece

4. India's presidency of Brics could transform it into a global force (MT)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic: Multilateral groupings and global governance
Sub-Topic: India's foreign policy and global leadership

Introduction

India's presidency of BRICS comes at a time of global geopolitical flux and institutional fragmentation. With its emphasis on inclusive growth and Global South leadership, India has the opportunity to transform BRICS into a more effective and influential global platform.

1. Evolution and Significance of BRICS

1. BRICS represents major emerging economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
2. It aims to reform global governance structures and amplify the voice of the Global South.
3. Institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB) enhance financial cooperation.

2. Challenges Facing BRICS

Internal Divergences

1. Differences in political systems and strategic priorities, especially between members like India and China.

Lack of Institutional Depth

1. BRICS lacks a strong institutional framework compared to organisations like the G20 or IMF.

Geopolitical Pressures

1. Global tensions and rivalries can affect cohesion and effectiveness.

3. India's Strategic Opportunity

Bridge Builder Role

1. India can act as a mediator between competing interests within BRICS.

Global South Leadership

1. Champion issues such as climate justice, development finance, and equitable growth.

Reform Agenda

1. Push for restructuring global institutions to reflect contemporary realities.

4. Key Areas of Transformation

Economic Cooperation

1. Strengthen trade, investment flows, and supply chain resilience among members.

Financial Architecture

1. Expand the role of the New Development Bank and reduce dependence on Western financial systems.

Technological Collaboration

1. Promote cooperation in digital infrastructure, AI, and innovation ecosystems.

Sustainable Development

1. Focus on climate action, renewable energy, and inclusive growth models.

5. Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness

1. Move towards structured decision-making mechanisms.
2. Strengthen coordination through regular ministerial and sectoral dialogues.
3. Improve implementation capacity of BRICS initiatives.

6. Risks and Limitations

1. Overexpansion of BRICS may dilute its coherence and effectiveness.
2. Dominance of larger economies could marginalise smaller members.
3. Balancing strategic autonomy with group cohesion remains a challenge.

7. Way Forward

1. Focus on pragmatic cooperation over ideological alignment.
2. Strengthen institutional mechanisms and accountability.
3. Enhance collaboration in critical sectors like energy, finance, and technology.
4. Promote inclusivity while maintaining operational efficiency.

Conclusion

India's presidency offers a critical opportunity to reposition BRICS as a dynamic and credible alternative in global governance. Success will depend on balancing internal differences with a shared vision for inclusive and sustainable development.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-brics-presidency-multi-nation-platform-global-south-reform-diplomacy-geopolitics-11776934170101.html

Question

Q. "India's presidency of BRICS provides an opportunity to reshape the grouping into an effective global institution." Discuss the challenges and prospects in this regard. (250 words)

Introduction

BRICS, as a grouping of major emerging economies, seeks to reform global governance and promote South-South cooperation. India's presidency comes at a crucial time when global institutions face legitimacy and effectiveness challenges.

Prospects under India's Leadership

1. India can position itself as a bridge-builder among diverse member interests.
2. It can strengthen the voice of the Global South on issues like climate justice and development finance.
3. Expansion of institutions like the New Development Bank can enhance financial cooperation.
4. Greater collaboration in technology and supply chains can improve economic resilience.

Challenges

1. Internal divergences, especially geopolitical tensions among members, limit cohesion.
2. Lack of institutional depth reduces implementation effectiveness.
3. Overexpansion risks diluting focus and operational efficiency.
4. External geopolitical pressures may constrain collective action.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen institutional mechanisms and decision-making processes.
2. Focus on practical cooperation in key sectors such as finance, energy, and technology.
3. Maintain balance between inclusivity and effectiveness.
4. Promote consensus-based approaches to address internal differences.

Conclusion

India's leadership can enhance BRICS' relevance in global governance. By focusing on pragmatic cooperation and institutional strengthening, BRICS can evolve into a more effective and influential platform.

Source: https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-brics-presidency-multi-nation-platform-global-south-reform-diplomacy-geopolitics-11776934170101.html

Editorial of the Day – 28.04.2026

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1. Gang of seven - On the AAP defections (TH)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance.
Topic - Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.
Sub-Topic - The Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Indian parliamentary landscape witnessed a significant shift as seven out of ten Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha MPs declared a merger with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The acceptance of this merger by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha has ignited a fierce constitutional debate. While the move provided the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with a decisive majority in the Upper House, it has simultaneously exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the Anti-Defection Law and raised fundamental questions about the sanctity of the voter mandate.

2. Numerical Impact and Political Strategy

The "Two-Thirds" Threshold - Under the Tenth Schedule, a merger is valid only if at least two-thirds ($\frac {2}{3} $) of the members of the legislature party agree to it. With 7 out of 10 MPs defecting, the numerical requirement for a "merger exception" was technically met.
NDA Majority - This shift increased the BJP's individual strength to 113 seats, allowing the NDA to cross the halfway mark in the Rajya Sabha for the first time, significantly easing the passage of contentious legislation.
Turncoat Politics - Critics label the move as "crass opportunism," where ideological commitments are sacrificed for political power. It reflects a trend of "turncoat politics" that undermines the stability of the multi-party system.

3. Internal Dynamics of the Defecting Bloc

Institutional Fragility - The episode highlights the lack of a robust institutional identity within the AAP beyond its core leadership.
Organic vs. Opportunistic Divide -
Organic Members - Leaders like Raghav Chadha and Sandeep Pathak are seen as the party's ideological core.
Opportunistic Members - The defecting MPs are perceived as having joined the party for personal gain, later exiting when strategic advantages shifted.
Ideological Contradiction - AAP, which had previously been a vocal critic of the "horse-trading" of Congress MLAs, now finds its own Rajya Sabha bloc collapsed under similar circumstances.

4. Constitutional & Legal Controversy - The Tenth Schedule

The "Gang of Seven" episode brings to the fore critical gaps in the Tenth Schedule -
The Merger Loophole - Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule protects members from disqualification in cases of mergers. However, legal experts argue the law is being "circumvented" to facilitate group defections rather than genuine ideological mergers of parent parties.
Conflating Party with Legislature - A primary legal challenge rests on whether a "Legislature Party" can decide to merge when the "Parent Political Party" remains intact and opposed to the move.

5. Judicial Backdrop - The 2023 Supreme Court Clarification

The AAP has challenged the Chairman's decision, citing the 2023 Supreme Court ruling which established a clear distinction -

Political Party Legislature Party - The Court held that the power to decide on a merger or issue a whip resides with the Political Party (the organizational wing), not just the Legislature Party (the elected wing).

Conflation Risk - Critics argue that by accepting the merger based solely on the MPs' decision, the Chairman may have conflated these two distinct entities, potentially violating the spirit of the 2023 judgment.

6. Institutional and Ethical Concerns

Erosion of the Mandate - Post-election shifts in loyalty undermine the trust of the voters who elected representatives based on a specific party symbol and manifesto.

Role of the Presiding Officer - The Chairman's role as an impartial arbiter is under scrutiny. Timely and transparent adjudication is essential to maintain the dignity of the office.

"Impotent" Legislation - The frequency of large-scale defections (as seen in various state assemblies and now the Rajya Sabha) suggests the Anti-Defection Law has failed to act as a deterrent.

7. Way Forward

Legal Clarity - There is an urgent need to amend the Tenth Schedule to clarify that a merger of a legislature party is only valid if the original political party also merges.

Time-Bound Adjudication - Implementing the Supreme Court's recommendation for an independent tribunal or a fixed timeframe for presiding officers to decide on disqualification petitions.

Ethical Reinforcement - Political parties must foster internal democracy and institutional loyalty to move beyond personality-driven structures.

Conclusion

The AAP-BJP merger episode serves as a stark reminder of the widening gap between the letter and the spirit of the Indian Constitution. While numerical majorities are essential for governance, they must not be achieved at the cost of institutional integrity. Strengthening the anti-defection framework is not merely a legal necessity but a moral imperative to safeguard the foundational principles of Indian parliamentary democracy.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/gang-of-seven-on-the-aap-defections/article70913116.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The Tenth Schedule was intended to strengthen the foundations of Indian democracy by curbing unprincipled defections; however, the 'merger' provision has frequently been utilized to circumvent the law's primary objective. Elaborate on the constitutional challenges arising from the 'two-thirds' merger rule and suggest reforms to prevent the subversion of the popular mandate." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Tenth Schedule, introduced via the 52nd Constitutional Amendment (1985), was designed to eliminate the "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" culture of opportunistic floor-crossing. While it penalizes individual defections, it provides an exception for "mergers." In the current political landscape, large-scale shifts—such as a group of legislators claiming a merger despite the parent political party remaining intact—have raised significant concerns regarding the subversion of democratic ethics.

2. The Constitutional Challenges of the Merger Exception

The "Merger" rule (Paragraph 4) presents several structural and legal challenges -

The Numerical Loophole - The law protects members from disqualification if two-thirds of the members of the legislature party agree to a merger. This has shifted the focus from individual "defection" to

"wholesale defection," where large groups switch loyalties to avoid penalties while claiming constitutional protection.

Conflation of Entities - As highlighted by the Supreme Court in the Subhash Desai v. Governor of Maharashtra (2023) case, there is a vital distinction between the Political Party (the organizational wing) and the Legislature Party (the elected wing). The current challenge arises when a legislature party decides to merge while the parent political party continues to exist and operate independently.

Role of the Presiding Officer - The Speaker or Chairman acts as a quasi-judicial authority. However, the lack of a fixed timeframe for deciding on disqualification petitions and the potential for perceived partisan bias in recognizing "mergers" often lead to judicial delays that render the mandate ineffective.

3. Subversion of the Popular Mandate

Erosion of Representative Accountability - Voters elect candidates based on a specific party manifesto and symbol. Post-election shifts in the Rajya Sabha or State Assemblies violate this "contract" between the representative and the voter.

Weakening of Parliamentary Scrutiny - Group defections often result in an artificially bolstered majority for the ruling coalition, hollowing out the Opposition and reducing the effectiveness of legislative oversight.

4. Suggested Reforms

To restore the integrity of the Tenth Schedule, the following measures are essential -

Clarification of 'Merger' - The law should be amended to state that a merger of the legislature party is valid only if the original political party (the organizational wing) also merges with the other party.

Independent Tribunal - Following the recommendations of the Supreme Court (Keisham Megha Chandra Singh case), the power to decide disqualifications should be transferred to an independent, permanent tribunal headed by a retired judge to ensure impartiality.

Time-Bound Adjudication - A mandatory timeframe (e.g., three months) should be established for presiding officers to dispose of defection cases to prevent the "legitimization" of defections through administrative delay.

Bar on Public Office - Members who defect should be barred from holding any remunerative political post or contesting elections for the remainder of the House term.

5. Conclusion

The 2026 developments in the Rajya Sabha underscore that while the Tenth Schedule provides a legal framework, it lacks the "teeth" to prevent strategic circumvention. Protecting the sanctity of the Indian democracy requires moving beyond mere numerical thresholds and anchoring the law in the Political Party's identity. Only by closing these procedural loopholes can the Constitution ensure that the mandate of the people is not traded for political expediency.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/gang-of-seven-on-the-aap-defections/article70913116.ece#google_vignette

2. How Iran war is testing the limits of 'fossilisation' of Indian farms (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and Issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development, and Employment; Agriculture.

Topic - Major crops-cropping patterns, different types of irrigation, storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Sub-Topic - Fossil Fuel Dependency and Input Vulnerability.

Introduction

The 2026 West Asia crisis, marked by disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, has illuminated a critical structural flaw in India's agrarian model - its overwhelming dependency on fossil fuel-based inputs. While the Green Revolution successfully decoupled India from "ship-to-mouth" food dependence, it inadvertently tethered national food security to global petroleum markets. With agriculture now a high-

input, energy-intensive sector, geopolitical volatility in energy-rich regions translates directly into farm-gate distress and potential food inflation.

1. The Structural Shift - From Animate to Mechanical Power

Indian agriculture has undergone a fundamental energy transition since the 1960s, moving from circular, renewable systems to linear, non-renewable ones.

Decline of Bovine-based Systems - Traditional farming utilized bullocks for draught power and animal waste as organic manure, creating a self-sustaining loop.

The Mechanization Milestone - Mechanical and electrical power overtook animate power in the 1990s.

Current Scale of Mechanization - Tractor sales reached a record 1.16 million units in 2025–26, signaling a point of no return for diesel-dependent primary tillage and transport.

Irrigation Transformation - The replacement of traditional Persian wheels with high-capacity electric and diesel pump sets has improved water access but cemented the sector's energy dependence.

2. Green Revolution and the "Petro-Chemical" Link

The productivity gains of the modern era are deeply rooted in petrochemical derivatives.

Input Intensification - High-Yielding Varieties (HYVs) are specifically engineered to respond to concentrated chemical nutrients, demanding a high-input ecosystem.

The Fertiliser-Energy Nexus - * **Nitrogenous Fertilisers (Urea) -** Production relies on ammonia, which uses natural gas as the primary feedstock.

Import Reliance - India's consumption surged to 32.9 million tonnes of NPK in 2024–25, with over 90% of P & K (Phosphatic and Potassic) demand met through imports of finished products or raw materials like sulphur.

Crop Protection - Pesticides and herbicides utilize petroleum-based solvents and emulsifiers, making crop health contingent on petrochemical supply chains.

3. Geopolitical Risks and Global Supply Chain Vulnerabilities

The 2026 tensions in West Asia serve as a "stress test" for India's agricultural resilience.

Strategic Chokepoints - Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz impact not just crude oil, but also the transit of LNG and finished fertilisers.

Commodity Architecture - Beyond crude, India relies on West Asia for 65.8% of its sulphur imports (critical for phosphatic fertilisers) and 60% of its natural gas.

Price Volatility - Geopolitical conflicts trigger "asymmetric shocks," where energy importers like India face a dual burden of higher import bills and rising agricultural subsidy requirements.

Export Restrictions - Strategic maneuvering by major producers (e.g., Russia, China) can lead to sudden supply shortages, threatening the Kharif and Rabi sowing cycles.

4. Socio-Economic and Environmental Implications

The energy-intensive nature of modern farming creates a cascading effect on the rural economy.

Farmer Distress - Rising diesel and fertiliser prices increase the cost of cultivation, shrinking profit margins for small and marginal farmers.

Fiscal Pressure - To maintain price stability, the government must increase fertiliser subsidies, which strains the national exchequer (estimated at ₹1.7 trillion for FY2026-27).

Ecological Degradation - Excessive reliance on chemical inputs leads to declining crop response, soil health deterioration, and multi-nutrient deficiencies.

5. Way Forward - Toward Decoupling and Resilience

To achieve "Strategic Autonomy" in food security, India must diversify its agricultural energy and input base.

Diversification of Inputs - * Promoting Organic and Bio-fertilisers to reduce the Urea-Natural Gas link.

1. Scaling the adoption of Nano-Urea to eliminate bulk import requirements.

Energy Diversification - * Encouraging Solar-powered irrigation (PM-KUSUM) to move away from diesel/grid electricity.

1. Promoting electric farm machinery and solar-powered cold chains.

Sustainable Practices - Shifting toward Natural Farming (Bhartiya Prakriti Krishi Paddhati) and Integrated Nutrient Management to restore soil health.

Domestic Self-Reliance - Reviving domestic fertiliser plants and securing long-term supply agreements with non-West Asian nations (e.g., Morocco, Russia, USA) to diversify risk.

Conclusion

The current vulnerability is a reminder that Food Security is Energy Security. While mechanization and chemicals were the engines of 20th-century growth, 21st-century resilience requires a "Circular Green Revolution." Reducing fossil fuel dependency through sustainable alternatives is no longer an ecological choice but a geopolitical and economic imperative for India's future.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/iran-war-fossilisation-indian-farms-10657145/

Question

"The transition of Indian agriculture into a high-input, energy-intensive sector has effectively made national food security a subset of global energy security. Discuss this statement in light of recent geopolitical instabilities and their impact on the Indian agrarian economy." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Post-Green Revolution, Indian agriculture shifted from a circular, animal-based system to a linear, fossil fuel-driven model. While this transformation was essential for achieving self-sufficiency in food grains, it created a structural dependency on petrochemical derivatives. In 2026, with the West Asia crisis disrupting energy chokepoints, it is evident that the "farm-to-fork" chain is now deeply tethered to the "well-to-wheel" energy cycle.

2. The Energy-Agriculture Nexus

The dependency of modern farming on fossil fuels is visible across three primary pillars -

The Fertilizer Link - Nitrogenous fertilizers (like Urea) are produced using ammonia derived from natural gas. India's massive consumption of 32.9 million tonnes of NPK (2024-25) relies heavily on imported gas and feedstock, making crop nutrition sensitive to global price spikes.

Mechanization & Diesel - The rapid mechanization of the sector, evidenced by 1.16 million tractor sales in 2025-26, has replaced draught animals with diesel engines. Fuel price volatility now directly dictates the cost of tillage, harvesting, and irrigation.

Agro-Chemicals - Pesticides and herbicides are largely petrochemical derivatives. Disruptions in the global petrochemical supply chain (especially from West Asian hubs) jeopardize crop protection and yield stability.

3. Impact of Geopolitical Instability (2026 Context)

The crisis in West Asia and the potential blockade of the Strait of Hormuz act as a stress test for this model -

Import Vulnerability - India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil and a significant share of its fertilizer raw materials. Supply disruptions lead to immediate shortages and "asymmetric shocks" to the sowing cycle.

Fiscal Burden - Rising global prices force the government to increase fertilizer and fuel subsidies (straining the exchequer) or pass the cost to farmers, leading to agrarian distress and food inflation.

Supply Chain Resilience - Strategic maneuvering by major energy exporters exposes India's food security to the "will of global players," compromising its strategic autonomy.

4. Way Forward - Decoupling Agriculture from Fossil Fuels

To safeguard food security, India must pursue a "Strategic Decoupling" strategy -

Input Diversification - Scaling Nano-Urea to reduce bulk imports and promoting Organic/Natural Farming to restore soil health through non-chemical means.

Energy Transition - Expanding the PM-KUSUM scheme to transition from diesel pumps to solar-powered irrigation.

Domestic Resilience - Investing in indigenous fertilizer production and securing long-term supply agreements outside volatile regions like West Asia (e.g., Morocco or Russia).

5. Conclusion

The current vulnerability proves that Food Security can no longer be viewed in isolation from Energy Security. While the Green Revolution gave India its "quantity," the current era demands a "Circular Green Revolution" focused on strategic resilience. Decoupling agriculture from its heavy fossil fuel dependency is not just an ecological goal but a geopolitical and economic imperative to ensure the long-term viability of the Indian farm sector.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/iran-war-fossilisation-indian-farms-10657145/

3. Aquiet revolution in depository architecture (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Financial market infrastructure
Sub-Topic - Capital markets and investor protection

Introduction

India's depository system, anchored by institutions like National Securities Depository Limited and Central Depository Services Limited, has undergone a structural transformation. While these reforms have enhanced efficiency and scale, they have also redefined institutional roles, raising new concerns for investor protection and regulatory accountability.

1. Evolution of Depository Architecture

1. Depositories have evolved from passive record-keeping entities to active financial intermediaries.
2. Expansion includes services such as settlement, voting rights, and asset servicing.
3. Integration with broader financial systems has increased their systemic importance.

2. Key Structural Shifts

Expansion of Functions

1. Depositories now manage diverse financial and quasi-financial assets beyond equities.

Widening Scope of Assets

1. Inclusion of bonds, mutual funds, insurance products, and other instruments.

Shift in Institutional Design

1. Movement from a principal-agent model to a membership-based framework.

3. From Agents to Members - Institutional Transformation

1. Earlier, depository participants (DPs) acted as agents of depositories.
2. Now, DPs function more like members with greater autonomy and influence.
3. This shift redistributes accountability and weakens direct control by depositories.

4. Implications for Investor Protection

Diffuse Accountability

1. Responsibility is no longer clearly centralised, complicating grievance redressal.

Regulatory Challenges

1. Regulators must now oversee a more complex, decentralised system.

Potential Conflict of Interest

1. Membership structures may blur lines between ownership and oversight.

5. Benefits of the Transformation

1. Improved efficiency and faster settlement processes.
2. Greater scalability and ability to handle high transaction volumes.
3. Enhanced financial inclusion through wider asset coverage.

6. Risks and Concerns

1. Increased systemic risk due to higher centrality in financial markets.

2. Weakening of traditional safeguards designed under earlier frameworks.
3. Need to redefine legal and regulatory accountability structures.

7. Role of Regulation

1. Securities and Exchange Board of India must adapt regulatory frameworks to evolving structures.
2. Strengthening oversight mechanisms and clarifying liability is essential.
3. Balancing innovation with investor protection remains a key challenge.

8. Way Forward

1. Clearly define roles and responsibilities within the new architecture.
2. Strengthen investor grievance redressal mechanisms.
3. Enhance transparency in operations and governance.
4. Continuously update regulatory frameworks to match structural changes.

Conclusion

The transformation of India's depository architecture marks a significant step in financial market evolution. However, ensuring robust investor protection and regulatory clarity is essential to sustain trust and stability in the system.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/a-quiet-revolution-in-depository-architecture/article70913286.ece

Question

Q. "Structural changes in India's depository system have enhanced efficiency but complicated investor protection." Discuss the implications of this transformation and suggest measures to address emerging challenges. (250 words)

Introduction

India's depository system has evolved significantly, transitioning from a simple record-keeping framework to a complex financial infrastructure. While these changes have improved efficiency, they have also introduced new challenges for investor protection.

Implications of Structural Changes

1. Expansion of functions has increased the systemic importance of depositories in financial markets.
2. The shift from an agency-based to a membership-based model has diffused accountability.
3. Greater autonomy of depository participants has reduced direct oversight by central institutions.
4. Increased complexity has made regulatory supervision more challenging.

Benefits

1. Faster and more efficient settlement processes have improved market functioning.
2. Broader asset coverage has enhanced financial inclusion.
3. Improved scalability supports growing transaction volumes.

Challenges

1. Lack of clarity in accountability complicates grievance redressal.
2. Potential conflicts of interest arise from overlapping roles of participants.
3. Existing regulatory frameworks may not fully address new risks.

Measures

1. Strengthen regulatory oversight and clearly define institutional responsibilities.
2. Enhance transparency and disclosure requirements.
3. Improve investor grievance redressal mechanisms.
4. Regularly update legal frameworks to align with structural changes.

Conclusion

The evolving depository architecture reflects the growing sophistication of India's financial markets. Ensuring effective regulation and investor protection will be critical to sustaining confidence and long-term stability.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/a-quiet-revolution-in-depository-architecture/article70913286.ece

4. Overhauling India's social security (BS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Social sector initiatives relating to welfare schemes
Sub-Topic - Labour reforms and formalisation of economy

Introduction

India's social security architecture, centred around Employees' Provident Fund Organisation and Employees' State Insurance Corporation, has expanded coverage but remains fragmented, inefficient, and misaligned with modern labour markets. With new labour codes in place, there is a need for comprehensive structural reform.

1. Evolution of India's Social Security System

1. Designed in the mid-20th century for a formal, stable workforce.
2. Focused on retirement savings (EPFO) and health insurance (ESI).
3. Expansion has increased coverage but not necessarily effectiveness or adequacy.

2. Key Structural Issues

Limited Coverage and Exclusion

1. Large sections of informal and gig workers remain outside the system.

Inefficiency and Underperformance

1. ESI healthcare services often fail to meet quality expectations.

High Compliance Burden

1. Employers face complex regulations, discouraging formalisation.

Poor Returns and Design Flaws

1. EPFO returns and rigid contribution structures limit flexibility for workers.

3. Fiscal and Operational Concerns

1. Significant funds remain underutilised or inefficiently allocated.
2. Cross-subsidisation and administrative inefficiencies reduce system effectiveness.
3. Mismatch between contributions and actual benefits received.

4. Changing Nature of Work

1. Rise of gig economy, contract work, and platform-based employment.
2. Traditional employer-employee models are becoming less relevant.
3. Social security systems must adapt to portable and flexible benefit structures.

5. Need for Comprehensive Reform

Universal and Portable Coverage

1. Extend benefits to informal and gig workers through flexible frameworks.

Simplification of Compliance

1. Reduce regulatory burden on employers to encourage formalisation.

Improving Service Delivery

1. Upgrade healthcare infrastructure and digital systems under ESI.

Rationalising Contributions

1. Align contributions with wages, inflation, and individual preferences.

6. Role of Technology and Integration

1. Use digital platforms and APIs for seamless portability of benefits.
2. Integrate EPFO, ESI, and other schemes into a unified social security system.
3. Improve transparency, efficiency, and real-time access to benefits.

7. Challenges in Reform

1. Political resistance due to perceived reduction in benefits.

2. Balancing fiscal sustainability with expanded coverage.
3. Ensuring administrative capacity for implementation.

8. Way Forward

1. Transition towards a universal, flexible, and technology-driven social security system.
2. Strengthen governance and accountability of institutions.
3. Encourage public-private partnerships in service delivery.
4. Align reforms with labour codes and evolving employment patterns.

Conclusion

Reforming India's social security system is essential to ensure inclusive growth and labour welfare in a changing economic landscape. A modern, integrated, and flexible framework will be key to achieving this goal.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/epfo-esi-overhaul-required-to-unlock-india-s-formal-jobs-potential-126042701415_1.html

Question

Q. "India's social security system requires structural reforms to align with the changing nature of employment." Discuss the challenges in the existing system and suggest measures for comprehensive reform. (250 words)

Introduction

India's social security system, anchored by EPFO and ESI, was designed for a formal workforce. However, changing employment patterns and structural inefficiencies necessitate comprehensive reforms.

Challenges in Existing System

1. Limited coverage excludes a large informal and gig workforce.
2. ESI healthcare services often underperform, reducing trust in the system.
3. High compliance burden discourages employers from formalisation.
4. Rigid contribution structures and modest returns limit flexibility and adequacy.
5. Administrative inefficiencies and underutilisation of funds reduce effectiveness.

Need for Reform

1. Expanding coverage to informal and gig workers is essential for inclusive growth.
2. Simplifying compliance can encourage formal job creation.
3. Improving service delivery will enhance credibility and utilisation.
4. Aligning contributions and benefits with modern economic realities is necessary.

Measures

1. Introduce universal and portable social security frameworks.
2. Integrate EPFO and ESI systems using digital platforms.
3. Rationalise contribution structures and improve investment efficiency.
4. Strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms.

Conclusion

A modern, flexible, and inclusive social security system is critical for India's economic transformation. Structural reforms will ensure better protection for workers while supporting sustainable growth.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/epfo-esi-overhaul-required-to-unlock-india-s-formal-jobs-potential-126042701415_1.html


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Editorial of the Day – 29.04.2026

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1. The RTE Act and the idea of social inclusion (TH)

GS Paper II - Social Justice / Governance.
Topic - Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.
Sub-Topic - Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

1. Introduction

In a landmark January 2026 judgment, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed the transformative potential of Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act, 2009. The Court characterized the provision—which reserves 25% of seats in private schools for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups—as a deliberate constitutional strategy.

Symbolizing the spirit of equality, the Court observed that this law allows the child of a Supreme Court Judge to share a bench with the child of an autorickshaw driver, thereby operationalizing "equality of status" through shared learning spaces.

2. Section 12(1)(c) as a Constitutional Strategy

Despite criticisms, the provision is a fundamental tool for social engineering rather than a mere administrative rule -

Equality of Status - It creates blended classrooms to ensure that the circumstances of a child's birth do not determine the boundaries of their social world.

Natural Participation - Private schools are viewed not as incidental actors but as natural participants in fulfilling the state's constitutional mandate for free and compulsory education.

Integrated Ecosystem - It fosters a "schooling ecosystem" where public and private sectors coexist to create integrated social spaces, rather than a zero-sum contest.

3. Addressing Common Misconceptions

The text clarifies two major mischaracterizations of the RTE mandate -

Not an "Outsourcing" of Duty - Section 12(1)(c) does not dilute the state's obligation to invest in public schools; rather, it acknowledges that shared learning must happen across all educational institutions.

Migration to Private Schools - The shift toward private schooling predates the RTE Act. Data from the ASER 2006 Report confirms that declining government school enrollment is rooted in infrastructure and perceived quality issues, not in the 25% reservation policy.

4. Evidence of Impact - Ground Realities

The implementation of the RTE Act has yielded significant pro-social and academic results -

Access & Retention - Over 5 million children have accessed elite educational spaces previously out of reach, with an average retention rate of over 90%.

Pro-Social Behavior - Research (e.g., Rao & Gautam, 2019) indicates that mixed classrooms lead to -

1. Increased generosity and reduced discrimination.
2. Stronger pro-social behavior among peers.

Zero adverse impact on academic outcomes or classroom discipline.

Stabilized Systems - State-level Management Information Systems (MIS) in Delhi and Ahmedabad have made reimbursements streamlined and low-discretion.
Social Capital - Disadvantaged children gain access to aspirations, peer networks, and institutional cultures that enhance their self-belief and ambition.

5. Persistent Challenges in Implementation

While successful in pockets, several hurdles remain -
Resistance and Inclusion - Some private schools still resist full integration and inclusive norms.
Hidden Costs - Families often struggle with the "ancillary costs" of education, such as uniforms, books, and study materials, which are not always covered.
Implementation Gaps - Transparency, grievance redressal, and last-mile outreach vary significantly across different states.
Disbursement Delays - Timely reimbursement from the state to private institutions remains a point of friction.

6. Way Forward - Strengthening the Framework

To match the ambition of the RTE Act with administrative seriousness, the following steps are required -
Enforceable Rules - Moving beyond moral persuasion to clear, enforceable administrative rules.
Digital Interventions - Scaling models from Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi, which use digital admission systems to ensure accountability.
Removal of Financial Barriers - States must proactively remove "hidden costs" to ensure true free education.
Institutional Support - Strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms to protect families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's reaffirmation makes it clear that Section 12(1)(c) is a vital instrument for social integration. The challenge is no longer just legal—it is administrative. The real test of the RTE Act lies in our ability to ensure that the "constitutional promise" of equality is experienced daily by every child, regardless of their socio-economic background.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-rte-act-and-the-idea-of-social-inclusion/article70917193.ece

Question

"Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act is a deliberate constitutional strategy to operationalise 'equality of status' rather than a mere administrative quota. Comment in the light of the recent Supreme Court observations and ground-level evidence." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In its January 2026 judgment, the Supreme Court of India elevated the discourse on Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act from a simple enrollment mandate to a profound constitutional mission. By observing that this provision allows the children of judges and street vendors to "sit on the same bench," the Court reaffirmed that the 25% reservation in private schools is a tool for social integration, aimed at ensuring that a child's birth does not dictate their social boundaries.

2. Intent - A Constitutional Strategy for Equality

The provision is designed to break the "siloed" nature of the Indian education system -
Operationalising Equality - It moves beyond formal equality (equal rules) to substantive equality by creating shared learning spaces.
Social Capital - For disadvantaged children, these classrooms provide access to peer networks, unexplored aspirations, and institutional cultures that are often gated in private schooling.
Shared Responsibility - It recognizes that private schools are not "incidental actors" but natural participants in fulfilling the state's mandate under Article 21A.

3. Ground Evidence - Success and Pro-Social Impact

Ground-level data and academic research support the effectiveness of this "blended" model -

Scale and Retention - Over 5 million children have accessed these spaces, with a remarkable 90% retention rate, proving that integrated education is sustainable.

Pro-Social Behavior - Research (e.g., Rao & Gautam, 2019) demonstrates that mixed classrooms increase generosity, reduce discrimination, and foster pro-social behavior among students from all backgrounds without compromising academic discipline.

Systemic Stabilization - Digital management systems in states like Rajasthan and Delhi have streamlined reimbursements and increased transparency, making the process more objective and less prone to local discretion.

4. Challenges - The Implementation Gap

Despite the high intent, the provision faces persistent administrative and social hurdles -

Hidden Financial Barriers - While tuition is free, families often struggle with "hidden costs" like uniforms, books, and extra-curricular materials, which can lead to a sense of "exclusion within inclusion."

Institutional Resistance - Some private schools continue to resist the spirit of inclusion, viewing it as a burden rather than a constitutional partnership.

Regional Disparity - Gaps in grievance redressal and outreach remain uneven across states, affecting the "last-mile" delivery of this right.

5. Conclusion

Section 12(1)(c) is a transformative promise that seeks to build a more egalitarian society from the classroom upward. However, for this "constitutional strategy" to succeed, it must transition from moral persuasion to administrative rigor. Strengthening digital monitoring, eliminating hidden costs, and ensuring timely state reimbursements are essential steps. The real test of our democracy lies in whether we can turn these "shared benches" into a permanent feature of our social fabric, ensuring that every child is an equal participant in India's growth story.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-rte-act-and-the-idea-of-social-inclusion/article70917193.ece

2. West Asia war - Does the growing risk of stagflation narrow India's policy space? (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Topic - Effects of liberalization on the economy; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Sub-Topic - Industrial Performance Indicators (IIP and Core Industries).

1. Introduction

In March 2026, India's industrial recovery faced a significant headwind, with the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) slowing to 4.1%, down from 5.1% in February. While this performance surpassed conservative market estimates, it signals the early transmission of global energy shocks stemming from the West Asia conflict. The contraction in core sectors suggests that while domestic demand remains a buffer, the industrial ecosystem is beginning to feel the "lagged impact" of heightened input costs and supply chain bottlenecks.

2. Understanding the Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

The IIP serves as a short-term leading indicator of the volume of industrial output.

Definition - Tracks the physical volume of production in the industrial sector over a specific period.

Sectoral Composition -

1. Manufacturing - The largest component; its health dictates the overall index.
2. Mining - Reflects extraction activity and raw material availability.

3. Electricity - Acts as a proxy for industrial demand and energy efficiency.

Base Year - Currently 2011-12, providing a standardized benchmark for longitudinal comparison.

GDP Linkage - Used by the NSO to estimate the quarterly and annual Value Added (GVA) for the industrial sector.

3. The Eight Core Industries - The "Backbone" Contracts

The Eight Core Industries represent approximately 40% of the weight in the IIP. Their performance usually precedes the general IIP data.

Components - Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement, and Electricity.

Recent Performance - Witnessed a contraction of 0.4% in March 2026.

Significance - Contraction in these infrastructure-heavy sectors acts as an early warning for a potential broader manufacturing slowdown in the upcoming quarters.

4. Sector-wise and Use-Based Performance (March 2026)

A. Sectoral Analysis

Sector	Growth Rate	Status/Inference
Mining	5.5%	Robust; reflects stable domestic extraction.
Manufacturing	4.3%	Moderate expansion; signals emerging caution.
Electricity	0.8%	Sharp slowdown; indicates supply constraints or gas shortages.

B. Use-Based Classification

Capital Goods (14.6%) - A standout performer. High growth indicates strong investment activity and capacity expansion by firms.

Construction Goods (6.7%) - Reflects the sustained push in government-led infrastructure and housing.

Consumer Durables (5.3%) - Points to resilient urban demand for white goods and electronics.

Consumer non-durables (1.1%) - Marginally positive, but underscores tepid rural demand and inflationary pressure on daily essentials.

5. Global Geopolitics and Economic Transmission

The West Asia crisis has moved from a geopolitical concern to a direct economic variable.

Energy Shocks - Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and regional instability have spiked input costs, particularly for energy-intensive sectors like chemicals and steel.

Cost-Push Inflation - As fuel and feedstock prices rise, producers face a squeeze on margins. If passed to consumers, it risks dampening the 5.3% growth seen in durables.

Supply Chain Latency - Unlike financial shocks, industrial shocks have a time lag. The 4.1% growth in March may not yet capture the full extent of gas rationing or shipping delays.

Business Sentiment - Uncertainty regarding future demand and input pricing often leads to "deferred investment," despite the current high growth in capital goods.

6. Challenges and the Way Forward

Major Challenges

External Vulnerability - Heavy reliance on energy imports makes the domestic "Make in India" engine sensitive to global "Black Swan" events.

Structural Inefficiencies - High logistics costs and infrastructure gaps continue to act as a tax on industrial competitiveness.

Input Shortages - Gas rationing in West Asia affects domestic production of fertilizers and petrochemicals.

Strategic Way Forward

Energy Decoupling - Accelerating the transition to renewable energy and green hydrogen to insulate industries from fossil fuel price volatility.

Supply Chain Localization - Strengthening the domestic MSME base to reduce reliance on imported components (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

Policy Support - Maintaining a stable interest rate regime and providing targeted fiscal incentives for energy-efficient manufacturing.
Infrastructure Synergy - Reducing logistics costs through the PM Gati Shakti framework to improve the speed and cost-effectiveness of industrial movement.

Conclusion

India's industrial sector is currently at a crossroads. While the robust growth in Capital Goods suggests a strong long-term investment cycle, the contraction in Core Industries and the slowdown in electricity growth are immediate red flags. Navigating this external shock will require a delicate balance between fiscal support for producers and managing the inflationary pressures of imported energy. Resilience in 2026 will be defined by how quickly India can diversify its energy mix and bolster domestic demand.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/west-asia-war-does-growing-risk-of-stagflation-narrow-indias-policy-space-10662666/

Question

"The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) remains a vital pulse of the Indian economy, but its recent volatility reflects a deepening nexus between global geopolitics and domestic manufacturing. Analyze the impact of external energy shocks on India's core sectors and evaluate the role of the capital goods sector in sustaining economic momentum." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) serves as a leading indicator of India's short-term economic health. In March 2026, industrial growth moderated to 4.1%, down from 5.1% in the previous month. This deceleration, coinciding with a 0.4% contraction in eight core industries, highlights how sensitive India's industrial "backbone" is to the energy shocks and supply chain disruptions triggered by the conflict in West Asia.

2. Impact of External Energy Shocks on Core Sectors

The Eight Core Industries, which constitute ~40% of the IIP, are the primary conduits for global shocks into the domestic economy -
Cost-Push Pressures - Rising crude oil and natural gas prices directly inflate the production costs of refinery products and fertilizers. This creates a cascading effect on downstream manufacturing.
Energy Constraints - The sharp slowdown in electricity growth (0.8%) suggests that gas rationing or coal supply bottlenecks are beginning to limit industrial capacity.
Infrastructure Slowdown - Contraction in core sectors acts as a "lagged signal." A decline in refinery output today leads to higher logistics and input costs for the broader manufacturing sector tomorrow.

3. Evaluation - Capital Goods as a Buffer

Despite the external turbulence, the Capital Goods sector recorded a robust growth of 14.6% in March 2026. This is significant for two reasons -
Investment Momentum - High growth in capital goods reflects strong "producer sentiment." It indicates that firms are continuing with capacity expansion and infrastructure projects, likely buoyed by government capital expenditure (Capex).
Long-term Resilience - While consumer non-durables (1.1%) reflect weak rural demand, the investment cycle suggests that the private sector is betting on long-term domestic recovery, providing a necessary counterweight to external volatility.

4. Sectoral Disparities and Consumption Trends

An analysis of use-based classification reveals a dual-speed economy -
Urban vs. Rural - Consumer durables (5.3%) show urban consumption is holding steady. However, the marginal growth in non-durables (1.1%) reflects rural distress, likely exacerbated by food and fuel inflation.

Lagged Transmission - The full economic impact of the West Asia crisis usually appears with a 2–3-month lag. Therefore, the moderate slowdown in manufacturing (4.3%) may intensify if energy prices remain elevated.

5. Way Forward - Building a Resilient Ecosystem

To reconcile domestic investment with external risks, India must -

Energy Decoupling - Accelerate the transition to renewable energy to reduce the "petro-link" in industrial manufacturing.

Supply Chain Localization - Use "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiatives to build domestic raw material buffers, reducing the sensitivity to global chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.

Strategic Policy Support - Targeted credit support for energy-intensive MSMEs to help them absorb temporary input price hikes without halting production.

Conclusion

In 2026, India's industrial performance is a tale of "Domestic Strength vs. External Stress." While the robust investment in capital goods is an encouraging sign of internal confidence, the contraction in core sectors is a structural warning. Sustaining a 6-7% GDP growth rate will depend on India's ability to protect its manufacturing engine from imported energy volatility while simultaneously reviving rural demand.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/west-asia-war-does-growing-risk-of-stagflation-narrow-indias-policy-space-10662666/

3. Agentic AI is set to Revolutionize The financial lives of households (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Science & Technology

Topic - FinTech and digital economy

Sub-Topic - Financial inclusion and digital governance

Introduction

The evolution of financial services is entering a new phase driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital platforms. From basic digitisation to intelligent automation, the focus is shifting towards personalised, proactive financial management, raising both opportunities and concerns around trust, privacy, and regulation.

1. Evolution of Financial Technology (FinTech)

1. Early phase focused on digitisation of financial services such as payments and banking.
2. Second phase enabled access through mobile penetration, UPI, and digital infrastructure.
3. Current phase leverages AI to deliver context-aware, personalised financial solutions.

2. Emergence of AI-Driven Financial Services

From Reactive to Proactive Systems

1. AI can anticipate user needs, automate savings, investments, and spending decisions.

Agentic Finance Concept

1. Systems act as intelligent financial assistants, managing finances on behalf of users.

Data-Driven Personalisation

1. Use of behavioural data enables customised financial advice and planning.

3. Benefits of AI in Personal Finance

Financial Inclusion

1. Simplifies access for first-time users and underserved populations.

Efficiency and Convenience

1. Reduces cognitive load by automating complex financial decisions.

Improved Financial Health

1. Encourages disciplined saving, budgeting, and investment behaviour.

4. Key Challenges and Risks

Trust Deficit

1. Users may hesitate to delegate financial decisions to AI systems.

Data Privacy Concerns

1. Extensive data collection raises risks of misuse and breaches.

Algorithmic Bias

1. AI systems may reinforce existing inequalities if not properly designed.

Regulatory Gaps

1. Existing frameworks may not adequately address AI-driven financial services.

5. Need for Trust-Centric Design

1. Transparency in AI decision-making processes is essential.
2. Strong data protection and consent mechanisms must be ensured.
3. Systems should provide user control and override options.

6. Role of Policy and Regulation

1. Develop frameworks for ethical AI use in financial services.
2. Strengthen consumer protection laws for digital financial products.
3. Ensure accountability of FinTech firms and AI systems.

7. Strategic Implications for India

1. India's digital public infrastructure (UPI, Aadhaar, Account Aggregator) provides a strong foundation.
2. AI-driven finance can accelerate financial inclusion and economic participation.
3. Balancing innovation with regulation is critical for sustainable growth.

8. Way Forward

1. Promote responsible AI innovation with clear regulatory guidelines.
2. Enhance digital and financial literacy among users.
3. Foster collaboration between regulators, industry, and academia.
4. Build secure and interoperable digital ecosystems.

Conclusion

AI-enabled financial services have the potential to transform personal finance in India. However, ensuring trust, transparency, and robust regulation will be crucial for realising their full benefits.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/ai/indias-financial-sector-eyes-productivity-revolution-through-agentic-ai-11776075911006.html

Question

Q. "Artificial Intelligence is transforming personal finance from a reactive to a proactive system." Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with AI-driven financial services in India. (250 words)

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping financial services by enabling personalised and proactive financial management. In India, this transformation is supported by strong digital infrastructure but also raises concerns about trust and regulation.

Opportunities

1. AI enables personalised financial planning based on user behaviour and preferences.
2. Automation of savings, investments, and payments improves efficiency and convenience.
3. It enhances financial inclusion by simplifying access for underserved populations.
4. AI-driven insights promote better financial decision-making and long-term financial health.

Challenges

1. Trust deficit among users may limit adoption of AI-driven financial systems.
2. Data privacy and security concerns arise due to extensive data usage.
3. Algorithmic biases may lead to unequal outcomes.
4. Regulatory frameworks are still evolving to address AI-specific risks.

Way Forward

1. Develop transparent and accountable AI systems with user control mechanisms.
2. Strengthen data protection laws and consumer safeguards.
3. Promote digital and financial literacy to build trust.
4. Encourage innovation while ensuring regulatory oversight.

Conclusion

AI-driven financial services hold immense potential for transforming India's financial ecosystem. A balanced approach that combines innovation with trust and regulation will be key to achieving inclusive and sustainable growth.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/ai/indias-financial-sector-eyes-productivity-revolution-through-agentic-ai-11776075911006.html

4. Jumping Ship (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic - Anti-defection law
Sub-Topic - Constitutional morality and ethics in politics

Introduction

Political defections—commonly termed "jumping ship"—continue to challenge India's democratic integrity despite the anti-defection framework under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The persistence of opportunistic party-switching reflects deeper issues of weak enforcement, political opportunism, and erosion of constitutional morality.

1. Nature of Political Defections

1. Legislators frequently change parties citing reasons such as ideology, development, or constituency interests.
2. In reality, defections are often driven by power, survival, and political expediency.
3. The phenomenon undermines voter mandate and democratic accountability.

2. Anti-Defection Law - Objectives and Evolution

1. Introduced through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment (1985) to curb political instability.
2. Strengthened by the 91st Constitutional Amendment (2003) to prevent large-scale defections.
3. Aims to ensure party discipline and stability in legislatures.

3. Key Loopholes in the Current Framework

Delayed Decision-Making

1. The Speaker's role in deciding disqualification leads to delays and political bias.

Mass Defection Exception

1. Provisions allowing mergers enable bulk defections under technical legality.

Lack of Independent Oversight

1. No external or judicial authority to ensure impartial adjudication.

4. Impact on Democratic Governance

Erosion of Constitutional Morality

1. Defections reflect disregard for ethical political conduct.

Undermining Voter Mandate

1. Electoral choices of citizens are nullified when representatives switch allegiance.

Political Instability

1. Frequent defections destabilise governments and disrupt governance.

5. Changing Dynamics of Defections

1. Defections have become more strategic and coordinated, often involving entire groups.
2. Increasing centralisation of leadership reduces internal party democracy.
3. Political competition incentivises opportunistic alignments.

6. Judicial and Institutional Concerns

1. Courts have emphasised constitutional morality but remain constrained in direct intervention.
2. The discretionary power of the Speaker raises concerns about neutrality.

7. Need for Reform

Independent Adjudicatory Authority

1. Transfer decision-making from Speaker to an independent tribunal or Election Commission.

Time-Bound Decisions

1. Mandate strict timelines for disqualification proceedings.

Stricter Provisions

1. Eliminate loopholes related to mergers and group defections.

Strengthening Political Ethics

1. Promote internal party democracy and accountability.

8. Way Forward

1. Reform the anti-defection framework to align with evolving political realities.
2. Enhance transparency and judicial oversight.
3. Foster a culture of constitutional morality and ethical political conduct.

Conclusion

Political defections highlight the tension between legal provisions and ethical governance. Strengthening institutional safeguards and reinforcing democratic values are essential to uphold the integrity of India's political system.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/jumping-ship-1503587277.html

Question

Q. "The anti-defection law has failed to curb political opportunism in India." Critically examine the limitations of the current framework and suggest reforms. (250 words)

Introduction

The anti-defection law under the Tenth Schedule was enacted to ensure political stability and discipline. However, frequent defections indicate persistent gaps in its effectiveness.

Limitations

1. The Speaker's discretionary power leads to delays and potential bias in disqualification decisions.
2. Provisions allowing mergers enable large-scale defections under legal cover.
3. Absence of an independent adjudicatory mechanism undermines fairness.
4. The law focuses on numbers rather than ethical considerations, ignoring constitutional morality.

Implications

1. Defections weaken democratic accountability and distort voter mandate.
2. Political instability increases due to frequent government changes.
3. Public trust in democratic institutions is eroded.

Reforms

1. Establish an independent tribunal or empower the Election Commission for adjudication.
2. Introduce time-bound procedures for decision-making.
3. Remove loopholes related to group defections and mergers.
4. Encourage internal party democracy and ethical political practices.

Conclusion

While the anti-defection law has addressed some aspects of political instability, comprehensive reforms are necessary to curb opportunism and strengthen democratic governance in India.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/jumping-ship-1503587277.html

Editorial of the Day – 30.04.2026

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1. **Cart before horse - On India and vehicle-to-vehicle communication technology (TH)** -01
2. **From Piprahwa to the peaks - The sacred journey of the Buddha's relics (IE)** -03
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1. Cart before horse - On India and vehicle-to-vehicle communication technology (TH)

GS Paper III - Science & Technology; Infrastructure.
Topic - Infrastructure - Roads; Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
Sub-Topic - Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS).

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Government of India announced plans to introduce Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication technology to address the nation's high rate of road fatalities. This move comes amid increasing Suo motu interventions by the Supreme Court of India, which has repeatedly emphasized that road safety is a fundamental facet of the Right to Life under the Constitution. While V2V promises a tech-driven safety revolution, its implementation faces a "cart before the horse" dilemma due to systemic infrastructure gaps and lack of standardization.

2. The Push for V2V and V2X Technology

Operational Mechanism - V2V technology enables vehicles to share real-time data regarding their location, speed, and movement to prevent collisions.
The Broader Ecosystem - V2V is a subset of V2X (Vehicle-to-Everything), which includes -

1. V2I (Vehicle-to-Infrastructure) - Interacting with smart traffic signals and road sensors.
2. V2P (Vehicle-to-Pedestrian) - Detecting and communicating with non-motorized users.

Strategic Objective - The primary goal is to reduce accident fatalities through digital safety interventions and real-time alerts.

3. The "Scale Challenge" and Infrastructure Readiness

The Chicken-and-Egg Problem - V2V requires a critical mass of adopted vehicles to be effective, yet high costs and low initial benefits deter large-scale adoption.
Standardization Ambiguity - India currently lacks clarity on global communication standards, specifically between DSRC (Dedicated Short-Range Communications) and C-V2X (Cellular V2X).
Regional Variation - Implementation capacity varies significantly across states, leading to a fragmented and potentially ineffective rollout.
Mixed Traffic Complexity - Indian roads feature a unique blend of two-wheelers, pedestrians, and non-motorized users, which complicates the digital sensing and communication environment.

4. Financial, Skill, and Security Challenges

Cost Burden - High compliance costs currently fall on vehicle owners, and there is a distinct lack of government subsidies or a competitive vendor ecosystem to drive prices down.
The Human Factor - Most drivers lack the training necessary to interpret digital alerts or manage complex digital interfaces while driving.
Cybersecurity Risks - The system is vulnerable to cyber threats, including the broadcast of fake signals or malicious hacking of vehicle networks.

Network Stability - Technical issues such as network congestion and data packet loss could undermine the reliability of safety alerts.

5. Structural Issues and Judicial Concern

Systemic Failures - Frequent accidents are often the result of poor road design, inadequate traffic management, and failed speed regulation rather than just a lack of technology.
Supreme Court Directives - The Court has called for the removal of highway obstructions and stricter enforcement of existing traffic laws as foundational steps before relying on high-tech solutions.
Tech-Infrastructure Gap - "Smart technology" can only function effectively when paired with "smart infrastructure" readiness, such as reliable backend systems and standardized road markings.

6. Way Forward - A Calibrated Approach

Phased Rollout - Implementation should occur in stages, starting with high-risk corridors and commercial fleets.
Infrastructure Investment - Priorities must include upgrading road systems and ensuring reliable network connectivity.
Capacity Building - Large-scale driver training programs are essential to ensure users can safely interact with the technology.
Financial Support - The government should consider subsidies to encourage early adopters and build the necessary market scale.

Conclusion

While V2V technology is a promising leap toward modern road safety, it cannot substitute for fundamental reforms in traffic management and road design. To ensure that technology serves its purpose, India must first bridge the gap between ambitious policy and ground-level readiness. A balanced approach that integrates infrastructure upgrades, capacity building, and robust cybersecurity will be essential to translate digital alerts into lives saved.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cart-before-horse-on-india-and-vehicle-to-vehicle-communication-technology/article70920996.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The integration of Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication technology is being hailed as a milestone for road safety in India, yet its implementation risks being a case of putting the 'cart before the horse.' Critically analyze the challenges and prerequisites for a successful V2X ecosystem in India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the push for Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication emerged as a key strategy to address India's rising road accident fatalities. While the technology aligns with the Supreme Court's emphasis on road safety as an extension of the Right to Life (Article 21), its success is contingent on bridging the significant gap between ambitious policy and ground-level infrastructure readiness.

2. The Potential of the V2V/V2X Ecosystem

Real-time Prevention - V2V enables vehicles to exchange data on location and movement, providing immediate alerts to prevent collisions.
Holistic V2X Integration - Beyond V2V, the system includes V2I (Infrastructure) and **V2P** (Pedestrians), creating a comprehensive digital safety net for all road users.
Judicial Mandate - Tech-driven interventions respond to the Supreme Court's calls for systemic improvements and the removal of highway obstructions.

3. Critical Challenges - The "Cart before the Horse" Dilemma

Infrastructure Deficit - India currently lacks the backend systems and "smart infrastructure" (V2I) necessary for a cohesive digital transport network.

Standardization Ambiguity - There is no clarity on the communication standards to be adopted (DSRC vs C-V2X), leading to uncertainty among manufacturers and the public.
The Scale Challenge - For V2V to be effective, it requires mass adoption, but high costs and lack of subsidies create a "chicken-and-egg" problem for early adopters.
Mixed Traffic Complexity - Indian roads feature a unique blend of two-wheelers, pedestrians, and non-motorized users, which complicates the sensing and communication environment.
Cybersecurity and Human Factors - Risks of hacking, fake signals, and the inability of drivers to interpret complex digital interfaces pose significant safety threats.

4. Prerequisites for Success

Phased Rollout - Implementation should begin on high-risk corridors with commercial fleets before moving nationwide.
Infrastructure Synergy - Technology must complement foundational reforms in road design, traffic management, and speed regulation.
Capacity Building - Targeted driver training is essential to ensure users can safely interact with new digital alerts.
Subsidies and Incentives - The government must support a competitive vendor ecosystem to lower compliance costs for vehicle owners.

5. Conclusion

While V2V technology offers a promising path toward modernizing road safety, it cannot act as a substitute for systemic structural reforms. To avoid a "partial or ineffective rollout," India must ensure that its road infrastructure and regulatory standards are "smart-ready" before mandating advanced communication systems. Only a calibrated approach—balancing investment in technology with foundational road design—will translate digital alerts into lives saved.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cart-before-horse-on-india-and-vehicle-to-vehicle-communication-technology/article70920996.ece#google_vignette

2. From Piprahwa to the peaks - The sacred journey of the Buddha's relics (IE)

GS Paper I - Art & Culture
Topic - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times (Buddhism).
Sub-Topic - Buddhist Philosophy and Stupa Architecture.

1. Introduction

In April 2026, on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima, India launched a two-week-long public exposition of the sacred Piprahwa relics in Ladakh along the Indus River. This government-led initiative marks the first time these specific relics are being displayed in India for public veneration since their historic repatriation in 2025. The event underscores India's identity as the birthplace of Buddhism and positions Ladakh as a pivotal hub in the global Buddhist cultural landscape.

2. Buddhism in India - Origins and Expansion

Foundational Period - Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BCE, led by the teachings of Gautama Buddha as a reform movement against ritualism.
Core Philosophy - The religion emphasizes ethical living, compassion, and mental discipline.

The Philosophical Core -

Four Noble Truths - Identifying the nature of suffering and the path to its cessation.
Eightfold Path - Guidelines for moderation and liberation.
Global Spread - Through ancient trade routes and royal patronage, Buddhism became a dominant cultural force in Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

Enduring Legacy - Despite a historical decline within India due to socio-political shifts, its influence persists through monuments, philosophy, and global soft power.

3. The Tradition of Relics and Stupa Culture

Maha Parinirvana - Following the Buddha's passing, his mortal remains were divided among eight rulers, becoming sacred objects of reverence.
Stupas as Symbols - Relics were enshrined in stupas, which evolved into pilgrimage sites symbolizing the Buddha's spiritual presence.
Mauryan Patronage - Emperor Ashoka redistributed these relics across his empire, facilitating the construction of numerous stupas and the religion's widespread expansion.

4. The Piprahwa Relics - Discovery and Repatriation

Archaeological Discovery - Found in the 1890s by William Claxton Peppé at Piprahwa.
Authenticity - Urns found at the site contain Brahmi inscriptions linking the remains to the Buddha's Sakya clan.
Colonial Context - Like many cultural assets, the relics were displaced during the colonial era, raising modern issues of cultural appropriation.
Restitution (2025) - India successfully secured the return of part of these relics in 2025, a landmark achievement in preserving national heritage.

5. Ladakh - The Buddhist Cultural Gateway

Geographical Context - Historically situated along trade routes connecting India to Central Asia, Ladakh was a vital corridor for cultural exchange.
Monastic Heritage - The region hosts ancient monasteries and archaeological sites, such as the Mulbah Maitreya and Sani Stupa.
Modern exposition - Hosting the two-week veneration along the Indus River reinforces Ladakh's global identity as a center of Buddhist practice.

6. Strategic Diplomacy and Economic Potential

A. Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

Aspect	Strategic Impact
Soft Power	Enhances global influence through spiritual leadership.
Bilateral Ties	Strengthens relations with Asian nations like Japan, Thailand, and Sri Lanka.
Engagement	Positions India as a "Vishwa guru" (Global Teacher) in spiritual values.

B. Spiritual Tourism

Economic Driver - Spiritual tourism is a rapidly growing sector that boosts local economies and generates employment.
Sustainability - Development in Ladakh must balance improved connectivity with the preservation of the region's fragile ecological balance.

7. Contemporary Relevance of Buddha's Teachings

The Middle Path - Advocates for moderation, a principle essential for resolving modern societal conflicts.
Anitya (Impermanence) - Provides a psychological framework to cope with global uncertainty.
Universal Brotherhood - Aligns with international ideals of peace, empathy, and non-violence.

8. Conclusion and Way Forward

The exposition of the Piprahwa relics serves as a symbol of India's civilizational depth. Moving forward, India must focus on -
Heritage Preservation - Strengthening legal and physical protections for cultural assets.
Global Collaboration - Engaging with other Buddhist nations for exchange programs.
Infrastructure - Developing sustainable spiritual destinations to attract international pilgrims while supporting local communities.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/from-piprahwa-to-the-peaks-the-sacred-journey-of-the-buddhas-relics-10662976/

Question

"The practice of 'relic diplomacy' serves as a potent vehicle for India to leverage its civilizational heritage in the modern global order. In light of the recent Piprahwa relics exposition in Ladakh, discuss how India utilizes its Buddhist identity to enhance its soft power and strategic depth." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 public exposition of the sacred Piprahwa relics in Ladakh marks a landmark moment in India's cultural and diplomatic history. By showcasing these authentic remains of Gautama Buddha, India reinforces its status as the "Land of the Buddha" and utilizes spiritual heritage to forge deeper emotional and strategic connections with the global Buddhist community.

2. Relic Diplomacy - A Tool of Soft Power

India's "Relic Diplomacy" serves as a unique instrument for international engagement -

Cultural Restitution and Pride - The 2025 repatriation of the Piprahwa relics—originally discovered in the 1890s and moved abroad during the colonial era—represents a successful effort in preserving national heritage and correcting historical displacement.

Global Engagement - Veneration events attract international Buddhist communities from nations like Japan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, positioning India as a spiritual leader and a hub for ancient traditions.

Shared Values - Buddhist diplomacy promotes mutual understanding and cooperation based on shared ideals of peace, compassion, and non-violence.

3. Ladakh as a Strategic Cultural Hub

The choice of Ladakh for the 2026 exposition is strategically significant -

Historical Connectivity - Ladakh lies along ancient trade routes that once connected the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia, facilitating the original spread of Buddhist philosophy.

Monastic Preservation - The region is home to ancient monasteries and archaeological sites, such as the Mulbah Maitreya and Sani Stupa, which provide a living backdrop to Buddhist practice.

Revival of Spiritual Tourism - Such high-profile expositions boost the local economy, create employment, and establish Ladakh as a premier global destination for spiritual seekers.

4. Contemporary Relevance of Buddhist Teachings

India's diplomatic outreach is anchored in the enduring relevance of Buddha's philosophy -

The Middle Path - Advocates for moderation, a crucial principle in resolving contemporary societal and geopolitical conflicts.

Compassion and Universal Brotherhood - These values align with global goals of harmony and coexistence, providing a "spiritual vocabulary" for international relations.

Coping with Change - The concept of Anitya (Impermanence) offers a framework for nations and individuals to navigate modern uncertainties.

5. Challenges and Way Forward

Infrastructure and Sustainability - Promoting spiritual tourism in fragile ecosystems like Ladakh requires integrated planning and sustainable development to preserve ecological balance.

Integrated Preservation - Efforts must be strengthened to protect and restore ancient cultural assets while enhancing global collaboration through exchange programs.

Education and Awareness - Promoting knowledge of Buddhist values within India fosters social harmony and national pride in civilizational assets.

Conclusion

The Piprahwa relic exposition is not merely a religious event but a masterstroke of civilizational diplomacy. By blending ancient traditions with modern diplomatic initiatives, India successfully uses its "Buddhist Soft Power" to build long-term partnerships and uphold its image as a global spiritual teacher.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/from-piprahwa-to-the-peaks-the-sacred-journey-of-the-buddhas-relics-10662976/

3. Why the rupee has fallen steeply (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III - Indian Economy
Topic - External sector and exchange rate management
Sub-Topic - Global economic developments and their impact on India

Introduction

The recent depreciation of the Indian rupee reflects a combination of external vulnerabilities and domestic structural factors. Despite stable macroeconomic fundamentals, pressures from capital outflows, interest rate differentials, and global uncertainty have contributed to a sharp currency decline.

1. Role of Capital Flows

Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) Outflows

1. Persistent outflows reduce demand for rupee assets, weakening the currency.
2. Capital flight reflects changing global risk sentiment and better returns abroad.

Sensitivity to Global Liquidity

1. Tight monetary conditions in advanced economies trigger capital reallocation.
2. Emerging markets like India face disproportionate pressure.

2. Interest Rate Differentials

1. Exchange rates are influenced by relative returns across economies.
2. Higher interest rates in developed countries attract capital away from India.
3. Expectations of depreciation can become self-fulfilling, reinforcing currency weakness.

3. Exchange Rate Dynamics

Market-Determined Nature

1. The Reserve Bank of India intervenes mainly to curb volatility, not to fix a specific rate.

Adjustment Mechanism

1. Currency depreciation reflects adjustment to global financial conditions.
2. Exchange rates act as shock absorbers in an open economy.

4. Limited Export Gains

1. Depreciation does not always boost exports due to -
    1. High import dependence in production (e.g., energy, intermediates).
    2. Weak global demand conditions.
2. Cost advantages are often offset by rising input costs.

5. Inflationary Pressures

1. Depreciation increases import costs, especially for crude oil and essential goods.
2. These fuels imported inflation, affecting domestic price stability.
3. Monetary policy faces trade-offs between inflation control and growth.

6. Global Economic Factors

1. Strength of the US dollar and geopolitical uncertainties drive currency volatility.
2. Trade disruptions and capital market instability amplify pressures on emerging economies.

7. Structural Factors in India

1. Persistent current account pressures due to import dependence.
2. Limited diversification in exports and reliance on external capital.

3. Gradual but incomplete transmission of structural reforms.

8. Policy Response

Monetary Measures

1. RBI intervenes to smooth volatility and manage liquidity.

External Sector Management

1. Diversification of exports and strengthening foreign exchange reserves.

Structural Reforms

1. Enhancing competitiveness and reducing import dependence.

9. Way Forward

1. Strengthen macroeconomic resilience through prudent fiscal and monetary policies.
2. Promote export diversification and domestic manufacturing.
3. Maintain adequate forex reserves to manage external shocks.
4. Improve investor confidence to stabilise capital flows.

Conclusion

Rupee depreciation reflects broader global and domestic economic dynamics. A balanced policy approach focusing on stability, competitiveness, and resilience is essential to manage exchange rate pressures effectively.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/why-the-rupee-has-fallen-steeply/article70921489.ece

Question

Q. "Depreciation of the Indian rupee is driven more by global capital flows than domestic fundamentals." Examine the causes and implications of recent rupee depreciation. (250 words)

Introduction

The Indian rupee has experienced significant depreciation despite relatively stable domestic fundamentals. This trend highlights the growing influence of global financial dynamics on exchange rate movements.

Causes of Depreciation

1. Sustained foreign portfolio investment outflows have reduced demand for rupee assets.
2. Interest rate differentials between India and advanced economies have encouraged capital flight.
3. Strengthening of the US dollar and global uncertainties have increased pressure on emerging market currencies.
4. Expectations of depreciation have reinforced currency weakness through speculative behaviour.

Implications

1. Depreciation raises import costs, leading to inflationary pressures.
2. Export competitiveness gains are limited due to high import dependence.
3. Capital market volatility increases, affecting investment sentiment.
4. External sector vulnerabilities, including current account deficits, may widen.

Policy Response

1. The RBI intervenes to manage volatility without targeting a fixed exchange rate.
2. Strengthening foreign exchange reserves provides a buffer against shocks.
3. Structural reforms to boost exports and reduce import dependence are essential.

Conclusion

Rupee depreciation reflects the interplay of global capital flows and domestic factors. Strengthening economic fundamentals and enhancing resilience will be crucial for long-term exchange rate stability.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/why-the-rupee-has-fallen-steeply/article70921489.ece

4. The 0.01 trap - India's GDP must not remain aloof from its people (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III - Indian Economy
Topic - Inclusive growth and employment
Sub-Topic - Informal sector and labour markets

Introduction

India's high GDP growth has not translated into proportional improvements in employment and household incomes, indicating a deeper structural issue. The persistence of informality and weak labour absorption suggests the economy may be experiencing a "0.01 trap", where growth does not significantly enhance economic well-being.

1. Growth–Employment Disconnect

1. Economic growth remains robust, but employment elasticity has sharply declined.
2. Output expansion is not generating sufficient jobs, especially for youth.
3. This reflects a jobless or job-poor growth trajectory.

2. Structural Nature of the "0.01 Trap"

Low Household Income Growth

1. High GDP growth coexists with stagnant real incomes for a large population.

Weak Demand Linkages

1. Limited purchasing power constrains consumption-driven growth.

Inequality Concerns

1. Growth benefits are concentrated among capital-intensive sectors and top income groups.

3. Dominance of Informal Economy

1. A large proportion of the workforce remains in low-productivity informal jobs.
2. Informal enterprises lack access to credit, technology, and markets.
3. Financial inclusion remains constrained due to limited collateral and documentation.

4. Productivity and Structural Transformation Issues

Capital-Intensive Growth Pattern

1. Growth driven by sectors that generate limited employment.

Slow Industrialisation

1. Manufacturing has not absorbed surplus labour from agriculture.

Urbanisation Challenges

1. Migration does not always lead to stable, productive employment.

5. Role of Digital and Financial Infrastructure

1. Initiatives like digital payments and formalisation efforts aim to improve inclusion.
2. However, they cannot fully substitute for structural job creation and income growth.

6. Demographic Challenges

1. India's demographic dividend risks turning into a liability due to insufficient job creation.
2. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain high.

7. Policy Constraints

1. Fragmented reforms and limited coordination across sectors.
2. Over-reliance on growth without adequate focus on employment quality.
3. Inadequate social security and labour market protections.

8. Way Forward

Labour-Intensive Growth Strategy

1. Promote sectors like textiles, MSMEs, and services with high employment potential.

Strengthening Manufacturing

1. Enhance industrial policy to absorb surplus labour.

Boosting Household Incomes

1. Focus on wage growth and rural income enhancement.

Improving Financial Access

1. Expand credit access for informal and small enterprises.

Human Capital Development

1. Invest in skills, education, and health to improve productivity.

Conclusion

India's challenge is not merely sustaining growth but ensuring that it translates into broad-based employment and income gains. Breaking the "0.01 trap" requires a shift towards inclusive, labour-intensive, and structurally balanced development.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-economy-boomed-generated-jobs-0-01-trap-gdp-growth-unemployment-jobs-joblessness-11777362787070.html

Question

Q. "India's economic growth has not translated into commensurate employment and income gains." Examine the structural reasons behind this phenomenon and suggest policy measures. (250 words)

Introduction

India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing major economies. However, the disconnect between growth and employment highlights structural challenges in translating economic expansion into broad-based welfare gains.

Structural Reasons

1. Declining employment elasticity indicates that growth is not generating sufficient jobs.
2. Capital-intensive sectors dominate, limiting labour absorption.
3. A large informal sector with low productivity constrains income growth.
4. Weak demand due to low household incomes reduces multiplier effects.
5. Inadequate industrialisation limits the shift of labour from agriculture to manufacturing.

Implications

1. Rising inequality and uneven distribution of growth benefits.
2. Persistent unemployment and underemployment, especially among youth.
3. Risk of demographic dividend turning into a demographic burden.

Measures

1. Promote labour-intensive sectors such as MSMEs and manufacturing.
2. Strengthen skill development and human capital formation.
3. Improve access to finance for small and informal enterprises.
4. Enhance social security and labour protections.
5. Align growth strategies with employment generation objectives.

Conclusion

Bridging the gap between growth and employment is critical for inclusive development. A structural shift towards labour-intensive and productivity-enhancing sectors will be essential for sustainable economic progress.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-economy-boomed-generated-jobs-0-01-trap-gdp-growth-unemployment-jobs-joblessness-11777362787070.html

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1. Embers in the air - On wildfires in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu (TH)

GS Paper III - Environment & Disaster Management.
Topic - Conservation, environmental degradation, and disaster management.
Sub-Topic - Wildfire dynamics, climate variability, and forest ecosystem resilience.

1. Introduction

In late April and early May 2026, severe wildfires escalated into a major crisis across the Nilgiris and adjacent forest divisions. The scale of the blazes was so extensive that the Indian Air Force (IAF) was called in to assist with aerial firefighting. This episode highlights the growing risk of seasonal fires being intensified by a combination of climate variability, accumulated dry biomass, and human-induced triggers.

2. Extent and Geographical Impact

The wildfires affected multiple forest divisions and critical wildlife habitats -
Primary Affected Zones - Nilgiris district, Mudumalai, Coimbatore, and Erode Forest divisions.
Worst-Hit Areas - Parsons Valley and Pykara witnessed the most severe impact.
Other Regions - Significant blazes were reported in the Singara and Masinagudi ranges, as well as a rapidly spreading fire in the Wenlock Downs.

3. Environmental and Seasonal Triggers

While fires are a seasonal reality, the 2026 season was marked by unusual intensity -
Peak Season - The period from February to May remains the most vulnerable fire window.
Climatic Drivers - Record high temperatures and strong winds acted as force multipliers.
Wind Dynamics - Strong winds carried embers across established firelines, rendering traditional containment methods less effective and causing the fires to burn longer.
Biomass Accumulation - A heavy build-up of dry biomass and invasive undergrowth significantly increased the fuel load, leading to higher fire intensity.

4. Human-Induced Causes

The crisis was further complicated by various human activities, ranging from traditional practices to accidental negligence -
Livelihood Practices - Burning of grasslands by herders to promote fresh fodder growth and tribal wood collection for broom-making.
Accidental Triggers - Discarded cigarettes in or near forest fringes.
Administrative Friction - Allegations surfaced regarding uncoordinated "controlled burning" by officials in Kerala, which may have crossed borders.
Deliberate Acts - Authorities suspected some fires were intentionally set, possibly linked to local grievances.

5. Operational Challenges and Response

Firefighting in the Nilgiris is hampered by the unique geography of the Western Ghats -

Difficult Terrain - Steep slopes and poor road access significantly slowed the movement of ground crews and heavy equipment.
Response Measures - Authorities deployed firelines, established specialized control rooms, and launched awareness drives.
Crisis Escalation - The scale and persistence of the blazes eventually required the intervention of the Indian Air Force to provide water-dropping capabilities in inaccessible regions.

6. Long-Term Management and Way Forward

The 2026 crisis underscores the need for a shift in how India manages forest fires in the era of climate change -
Rising Baseline Risk - Hotter and drier summers due to climate variability are making "severe" fires the new baseline.
Socio-Ecological Balance - Strategies must move beyond short-term fixes to balance ecological protection with the livelihoods of local and tribal communities.
Climate-Adaptive Planning - There is an urgent need for better inter-state coordination, sustainable livelihood alternatives for forest-dwellers, and technology-backed early warning systems.

Conclusion

The "Embers in the Air" crisis in the Nilgiris serves as a warning of the increasing vulnerability of India's forests to the combined forces of climate stress and human activity. While immediate suppression remains critical, the long-term survival of these ecosystems depends on proactive, climate-adaptive management and the integration of local communities into the conservation framework.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/embers-in-the-air-on-wildfires-in-the-nilgiris-tamil-nadu/article70925232.ece

Question

"The recurring forest fires in the Nilgiris represent a complex interplay between climate-driven extremes and anthropogenic activities. Critically analyze the factors intensifying wildfire risks in the Western Ghats and evaluate the efficacy of current disaster management strategies in fragile mountain ecosystems." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Nilgiris district and surrounding forest divisions like Mudumalai and Coimbatore witnessed a severe wildfire crisis that necessitated the intervention of the Indian Air Force (IAF). While seasonal fires are characteristic of the February–May window, the 2026 blazes in areas such as Parsons Valley and Pykara highlighted an unprecedented escalation in intensity and duration.

2. Intensifying Factors - Nature and Human Conflict

The 2026 crisis underscores a "Perfect Storm" of factors -
Climatic Multipliers - High temperatures and strong winds—which carry embers across established firelines—have intensified fire behaviour.
Ecological Fuel Load - The accumulation of dry biomass and invasive species undergrowth significantly increased fire duration and intensity.
Anthropogenic Triggers - Livelihood-driven practices, such as herders burning grasslands for fodder and tribal wood collection for broom-making, remain significant triggers.
Negligence and Grievances - Fires are frequently caused by discarded cigarettes or deliberate acts linked to local grievances.

3. Efficacy of Current Management Strategies

While preventive measures exist, the 2026 event exposed critical systemic limitations -
Operational Hurdles - Steep terrain and poor road access significantly slowed the movement of ground crews and equipment in the Western Ghats.

Limit of Ground Response - The transition of seasonal blazes into a full-scale crisis requiring aerial firefighting (IAF) suggests that traditional ground-level firelines and control rooms are no longer sufficient against climate-intensified fires.
Inter-State Friction - Allegations of uncoordinated controlled burning across borders (e.g., Kerala-Tamil Nadu) highlight a lack of unified regional fire management.
Socio-Economic Gaps - Management strategies often focus on short-term "fixes" rather than addressing the livelihood-dependent traditions that drive fire-setting practices.

4. Way Forward

Climate-Adaptive Planning - Moving toward a long-term strategy that incorporates hotter, drier summers as the "new baseline".
Community Integration - Balancing ecological protection with local livelihoods through sustainable alternatives for forest-dwellers.
Technological Synergy - Strengthening early warning systems and improving road access in high-risk zones to reduce reliance on emergency military assistance.

5. Conclusion

The Nilgiris wildfires are a stark reminder that as climate variability increases baseline risks, technology-driven responses must be paired with structural reforms in forest governance. A successful disaster management framework for fragile mountain ecosystems must transcend immediate suppression and move toward a model of cooperative regional management and community-led conservation.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/embers-in-the-air-on-wildfires-in-the-nilgiris-tamil-nadu/article70925232.ece#google_vignette

2. Normal monsoon is one more warning - India must pay heed to water stress (IE)

GS Paper I - Geography
Topic - Important Geophysical phenomena (Monsoon, ENSO); Changes in critical geographical features; Water security and disaster mitigation.
Sub-Topic - Monsoon variability and its socio-economic impacts.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a sobering forecast - a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA). While "below-normal" might sound like a mild critique of a school report card, in the context of the Indian monsoon, it signals a high-stakes struggle against water stress and prolonged heatwaves. Driven by a rapidly developing El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), this climate variability threatens to destabilize both rural livelihoods and urban infrastructure.

2. ENSO and Monsoon Linkage - The Pacific Pivot

The relationship between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian subcontinent remains a primary driver of monsoon health.
El Niño Effect - Characterized by the warming of Pacific waters, it reduces moisture transport to India, typically weakening the southwest monsoon and resulting in rainfall deficits.
La Niña Effect - The cooling counterpart that strengthens monsoon circulation, leading to above-normal precipitation and cooler temperatures.
ENSO Cycle - Occurring every 2–7 years, the cycle is showing an alarming trend of increasing frequency and intensity.
The IOD Buffer - The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) can counter El Niño effects. A positive IOD may provide partial relief, though its ability to fully compensate for 2026 rainfall deficits remains uncertain.

3. Changing Rainfall Patterns - Quality Over Quantity

Even in deficit years, the *way* it rains is changing, often for the worse.

Spatial Concentration - Rainfall is increasingly geographically concentrated, leaving some regions parched while others face surplus imbalances.

Temporal Concentration - Steady showers are being replaced by shorter, intense bursts. This increases runoff losses and soil erosion while failing to adequately recharge groundwater.

The Disaster Disconnect - The increase in extreme rainfall events means that floods can occur even during a "deficit" year, highlighting that total rainfall is no longer a reliable proxy for disaster risk.

Climate Change Driver - Global warming is fundamentally altering monsoon dynamics, making them less predictable and more erratic.

4. Heatwaves in India - A Rising Threat

Heatwaves are no longer just "hot days"; they are becoming structural climate events.

IMD Classification - A heatwave is defined by temperatures 5°C above normal for two consecutive days; a 7°C deviation constitutes a severe heatwave.

Vulnerability Zones - The core zone includes northwestern, central, and parts of eastern India. Coastal regions like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha are also seeing spikes due to disrupted sea breezes and hot inland winds.

The ENSO Connection - El Niño years typically suffer from more frequent and severe heatwaves due to reduced cloud cover and increased solar radiation.

The Lag Effect - Temperatures often peak even more intensely in the year *following* an El Niño event, leading to prolonged climate stress.

5. Water Stress and Management Challenges

The mismatch between rainfall and storage is creating a "perfect storm" for water scarcity.

Runoff Losses - Intense rain leads to rapid runoff, causing the loss of fertile topsoil rather than water absorption.

Urban Crisis - Cities face acute shortages despite heavy rain due to inadequate storage infrastructure.

Inefficient Reuse - India reuses only 3% of its treated wastewater. By contrast, global leaders like Singapore treat wastewater as a critical resource, a model India has yet to fully adopt.

The Decline of Tradition - Historical structures like tanks and stepwells, which once ensured water security during dry spells, have largely been neglected or destroyed by urbanization.

6. Policy, Governance, and Disaster Management

Effective mitigation is currently hampered by institutional and fiscal gaps.

Pricing Challenges - Water is chronically underpriced, encouraging waste. Conversely, the thriving "tanker markets" demonstrate a public willingness to pay for reliability.

Institutional Fragmentation - Management is split across multiple agencies with limited coordination, leading to policy gaps.

Heat Action Plans (HAPs) - While many states have HAPs for water access and shelters, implementation remains uneven, leaving vulnerable populations unprotected.

Notified Disaster Status - A significant policy hurdle is that heatwaves are not yet recognized as "notified disasters," which limits access to federal disaster relief funds. The Finance Commission has recently recommended changing this classification.

7. Way Forward - Toward Resilience

Water Conservation - Prioritize rainwater harvesting and aggressive groundwater recharge to decouple water security from monsoon uncertainty.

Circular Water Economy - Shift toward recycling wastewater as a standard resource.

Climate-Resilient Planning - Integrate heat and water risks into the DNA of urban and rural planning.

Governance Reform - Implement transparent water pricing and improve service delivery to build public trust.

Advanced Forecasting - Leverage data analytics to enhance early warning systems for both heatwaves and erratic rain.

Conclusion

The 2026 below-normal monsoon forecast is a warning that India's climate stress is becoming the "new normal". Addressing this requires moving beyond seasonal reactive measures toward a structural shift in water management and proactive climate policy.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/below-normal-monsoon-warning-india-water-stress-10664743/

Question

"The increasing frequency of 'below-normal' monsoons and intense heatwaves in India is a byproduct of both global atmospheric cycles and local governance failures. Critically analyze the impact of ENSO on India's hydrological cycle and the adequacy of the current policy framework to address these emerging climate risks." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast for 2026 indicates a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA), primarily driven by a rapidly developing El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). This development signals more than just a rainfall deficit; it represents a deepening cycle of water stress and extreme heat that challenges India's traditional disaster and water management systems.

2. Impact of ENSO on the Hydrological Cycle

The ENSO phenomenon significantly alters India's rainfall and temperature profiles -

Reduced Moisture Transport - El Niño leads to the warming of Pacific Ocean waters, which suppresses the southwest monsoon circulation and reduces moisture transport to the Indian landmass.

The Heatwave Feedback Loop - El Niño years are typically associated with reduced cloud cover and higher solar radiation, leading to more frequent and severe heatwaves.

Temporal and Spatial Imbalances - Modern rainfall patterns show a "disaster disconnect," where rainfall occurs in short, intense bursts rather than steady showers, leading to rapid runoff instead of groundwater recharge. This often results in localized floods even during a "deficit" year.

3. Adequacy of Current Policy Framework

While the government has initiated various responses, critical gaps persist -

Disaster Classification - Currently, heatwaves are not recognized as "notified disasters" at the national level, which restricts access to federal disaster relief funds. The Finance Commission has recently recommended this change to improve funding and response.

Implementation Gaps in HAPs - **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** implemented by states often lack uniform effectiveness and fail to protect the most vulnerable populations.

Water Inefficiency - India reuses only about 3% of its treated wastewater, reflecting a significant failure to transition toward a circular water economy.

Institutional Fragmentation - Multiple agencies manage water with limited coordination, leading to policy gaps and inefficient water pricing that encourages overuse.

4. Way Forward - Toward Structural Resilience

Circular Water Management - Adopting global models, such as those in Singapore, to treat wastewater as a resource rather than waste.

Traditional and Modern Synergy - Reviving historical structures like tanks and stepwells to supplement modern reservoirs for better groundwater recharge.

Climate-Resilient Planning - Integrating heat and water risks into urban and rural planning through advanced data analytics and impact-based forecasting.

Conclusion

The 2026 monsoon reality proves that climate stress is no longer a seasonal anomaly but a structural challenge. Critically, while the ENSO cycle provides the atmospheric trigger, it is the fragmented governance and infrastructure gaps that translate climate variability into human disasters. Transitioning toward transparent water pricing, unified institutional coordination, and the recognition of heatwaves as notified disasters is essential to securing India's climate-resilient future.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/below-normal-monsoon-warning-india-water-stress-10664743/

3. New credit loss norm could hurt (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Banking sector reforms
Sub-Topic - Credit flow to MSMEs and startups

Introduction

The shift by the Reserve Bank of India to an Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework marks a transition from backward-looking provisioning to forward-looking risk assessment. While this enhances prudential regulation, it may also restrict credit access, especially for asset-light borrowers.

1. What is the ECL Framework?

1. ECL requires banks to anticipate future credit losses rather than recognise losses after default.
2. It integrates three key parameters -
    1. Probability of Default (PD)
    2. Loss Given Default (LGD)
    3. Exposure at Default (EAD)
3. Loans are classified into stages based on risk deterioration, with progressively higher provisioning.

2. Rationale Behind the Shift

Strengthening Financial Stability

1. Reduces delayed recognition of stress seen in earlier NPA regimes.

Global Best Practice Alignment

1. Aligns India with international accounting standards (e.g., IFRS 9).

Early Risk Identification

1. Enables proactive management of credit risks.

3. Key Concerns with ECL Implementation

Credit Rationing

1. Banks may reduce lending to borrowers perceived as risky.

Bias Towards Collateralised Lending

1. Asset-heavy firms may receive preference over asset-light enterprises such as startups and MSMEs.

Exclusion of Capable Borrowers

1. Borrowers with strong business models but limited collateral may face denial of credit.

4. Impact on Credit Markets

Reduced Credit Availability

1. Stricter provisioning increases cost of lending.

Shift in Lending Behaviour

1. Banks prefer safer borrowers to minimise provisioning burdens.

Market Inefficiencies

1. Potential misallocation of credit away from productive but riskier sectors.

5. Interest Rate and Pricing Dynamics

1. Instead of raising interest rates, banks may restrict access to credit.
2. Risk is managed through credit denial rather than pricing adjustments.

3. This reflects the "credit rationing" phenomenon in imperfect markets.

6. Implications for Economic Growth

Impact on MSMEs and Startups

1. Limited access to credit can constrain innovation and entrepreneurship.

Growth vs Stability Trade-off

1. Excessive prudence may slow economic expansion.

Financial Inclusion Concerns

1. Smaller and informal borrowers may be disproportionately affected.

7. Balancing Prudence and Growth

1. ECL improves resilience but may over-correct risk perception.
2. Need to ensure that risk management does not stifle productive lending.

8. Way Forward

Refined Risk Assessment Models

1. Incorporate qualitative factors beyond collateral.

Support for MSMEs

1. Credit guarantee schemes to offset risk aversion.

Regulatory Calibration

1. Gradual implementation to avoid credit shocks.

Enhanced Data and Analytics

1. Improve accuracy of risk estimation models.

Conclusion

While the ECL framework strengthens financial stability, its unintended consequences on credit access must be carefully managed. A balanced approach is essential to ensure both prudence and inclusive economic growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/new-credit-loss-norm-could-hurt/article70925762.ece

Question

Q. "The shift to the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework improves financial stability but may restrict credit flow in the economy." Critically examine. (250 words)

Introduction

The adoption of the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework represents a shift towards forward-looking risk management in India's banking sector. While it enhances prudential regulation, it raises concerns about credit availability.

Benefits

1. ECL enables early recognition of credit risk, reducing the likelihood of large NPAs.
2. It aligns India with global best practices in financial regulation.
3. It strengthens the resilience of the banking system during economic shocks.

Challenges

1. Higher provisioning requirements may lead banks to restrict lending.
2. Asset-light borrowers, such as MSMEs and startups, may face exclusion.
3. Credit rationing may replace risk-based pricing, reducing market efficiency.
4. Overly conservative lending may slow economic growth.

Way Forward

1. Improve risk assessment models to better capture borrower potential.
2. Strengthen credit guarantee mechanisms for vulnerable sectors.
3. Ensure calibrated implementation to avoid disruption in credit flow.
4. Balance prudential norms with growth-oriented lending policies.

Conclusion

The ECL framework is a necessary reform for financial stability, but its success depends on maintaining a balance between risk management and adequate credit flow to sustain economic growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/new-credit-loss-norm-could-hurt/article70925762.ece

4. Labour unrest in India reflects a spike in the price of cooking gas (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Inflation and its impact on different sectors
Sub-Topic - Energy pricing and subsidies

Introduction

The recent surge in cooking gas (LPG) prices highlights the interlinkage between energy inflation and labour welfare. Rising household energy costs not only strain real incomes but also contribute to labour unrest and wage pressures, reflecting deeper structural challenges in India's economy.

1. LPG Price Rise and Household Burden

1. Cooking gas is a critical consumption good, especially for low- and middle-income households.
2. Rising LPG prices significantly increase cost of living, reducing disposable income.
3. The burden is higher for urban poor and informal workers with limited income buffers.

2. Link Between Inflation and Labour Unrest

Erosion of Real Wages

1. Inflation reduces purchasing power, leading to dissatisfaction among workers.

Wage Demands and Industrial Action

1. Workers demand higher wages to compensate for rising living costs.

Impact on Industrial Relations

1. Increased tensions between labour and employers can disrupt production.

3. Structural Issues in Labour Markets

1. A large informal workforce lacks wage indexation and social protection.
2. Weak bargaining power limits workers' ability to secure fair compensation.
3. Labour markets remain fragmented with uneven wage growth across sectors.

4. Energy Prices as a Macroeconomic Driver

1. LPG prices are influenced by global crude oil markets and subsidy policies.
2. Reduction in subsidies exposes households to international price volatility.
3. Energy inflation has spillover effects on overall inflation and economic stability.

5. Policy Trade-offs

Fiscal Constraints vs Welfare

1. Subsidies reduce fiscal space but protect vulnerable households.

Market Pricing vs Social Protection

1. Deregulation improves efficiency but increases price volatility for consumers.

6. Productivity–Wage Nexus

1. Higher wages must be supported by productivity improvements to sustain growth.
2. Investment in skills, technology, and working conditions is essential.
3. Wage increases without productivity gains may fuel inflation further.

7. Suggested Policy Measures

Targeted Subsidies

1. Direct benefit transfers for vulnerable households to offset LPG price shocks.

Wage Support Mechanisms
1. Strengthen minimum wage frameworks and wage indexation systems.

Productivity Enhancement
1. Invest in skill development and industrial efficiency.

Energy Diversification
1. Promote alternative clean energy sources to reduce dependence on LPG.

8. Way Forward
1. Balance energy pricing reforms with social protection measures.
2. Integrate labour welfare with broader macroeconomic policy.
3. Ensure sustainable wage growth aligned with productivity gains.

Conclusion
The rise in LPG prices underscores the complex relationship between energy inflation, labour welfare, and economic stability. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach that ensures both affordability for households and sustainability for the economy.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/labour-unrest-can-india-turn-an-energy-shock-into-a-wage-led-economic-growth-impulse/amp-11777469512872.html

Question

Q. "Energy price shocks have significant implications for labour markets and wage dynamics." Discuss with reference to the recent rise in LPG prices in India. (250 words)

Introduction
Energy price shocks, particularly in essential fuels like LPG, directly affect household expenditure and real wages. In India, rising LPG prices have intensified labour concerns and wage pressures.

Impact on Labour Markets
1. Increased cost of living reduces real wages, leading to dissatisfaction among workers.
2. Labour unrest may arise as workers demand higher wages to maintain living standards.
3. Informal workers are disproportionately affected due to lack of social protection.

Economic Implications
1. Higher wages without productivity gains may increase production costs and inflation.
2. Industrial relations may be strained, affecting output and economic growth.
3. Energy inflation contributes to broader macroeconomic instability.

Policy Measures
1. Provide targeted subsidies or direct benefit transfers to vulnerable households.
2. Strengthen wage policies and labour protections.
3. Invest in productivity-enhancing measures such as skill development.
4. Promote alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on LPG.

Conclusion
Energy price shocks have far-reaching implications for labour markets. A balanced policy approach that combines social protection with productivity growth is essential for sustainable economic stability.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/labour-unrest-can-india-turn-an-energy-shock-into-a-wage-led-economic-growth-impulse/amp-11777469512872.html

Editorial of the Day – 02.05.2026

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1. Work in progress - On the Household social consumption (health) survey (TH)

GS Paper II – Social Justice / Governance.
Topic – Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub-Topic – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.

1. Introduction

Launched in 2018, Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is the world's largest government-funded health assurance scheme. As the flagship initiative of the broader Ayushman Bharat Programme, it represents a paradigm shift from member-based to family-based health coverage, aiming to provide a safety net for nearly 50 crore of India's most vulnerable citizens

2. Primary Objectives

The scheme is designed to address the systemic barriers to healthcare in India -
Universal Health Coverage (UHC) - Acting as a core pillar to ensure all citizens receive the health services, they need without financial hardship.
Financial Protection - Safeguarding families against "catastrophic health expenditure," which is a leading cause of poverty in India.
Access to Specialized Care - Ensuring poor families have access to quality secondary and tertiary healthcare services.
Reducing OOPE - Lowering out-of-pocket expenditure, which currently accounts for a significant portion of total health spending in India.

3. Key Features and Beneficiary Coverage

Annual Coverage - Provides a health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalization.
Target Population - Covers over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore individuals) identified via the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data.
Inclusive Design - There is no restriction on family size, age, or gender, ensuring that senior citizens and women are not excluded.
Comprehensive Care - Includes all pre- and post-hospitalization expenses, including diagnostics and medicines.
Service Delivery - Offers cashless and paperless treatment at any empanelled public or private hospital nationwide.

4. Implementation Mechanism

The operational success of PM-JAY relies on a decentralized, flexible framework -
National Health Authority (NHA) - The apex body responsible for implementing the scheme at the central level.
State Participation - Implemented by State Health Agencies (SHA), states have the flexibility to choose their operational model -

1. Insurance Model - Premiums paid to insurance companies.
2. Trust Model - Claims managed directly by the state.
3. Mixed Model - A combination of both.

Hospital Empanelment - States have the autonomy to empanel hospitals based on local health infrastructure and needs.

5. Strategic Benefits

Promoting Equity - Bridge the gap in healthcare access between the rich and the poor.
Infrastructure Strengthening - By providing assured payments for treatments, it encourages both public and private hospitals to upgrade their facilities.
Economic Impact - Reduces the risk of families slipping back into poverty due to medical debts.
Early Diagnosis - Encourages families to seek timely treatment rather than delaying care due to cost concerns.

6. Challenges and Structural Gaps

Identification Issues - Difficulties in accurately identifying and reaching all eligible beneficiaries listed in the SECC data.
Awareness Deficit - Low levels of awareness among the rural poor regarding their rights and the scheme's benefits.
Fraud and Misuse - Concerns regarding hospitals overcharging or performing unnecessary surgeries.
Supply-Side Constraints - Uneven distribution of empanelled hospitals, with significant shortages in rural and remote areas.
Workforce Gaps - A persistent need for more trained healthcare professionals to handle the increased patient load.

7. Recent Developments (May 2026 Context)

ABDM Integration - Full integration with the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) to create digital health IDs and interoperable health records.
Increased Funding - Government has boosted budgetary allocations to expand beneficiary coverage and update treatment packages.
Network Expansion - Ongoing efforts to empanel more specialty hospitals and refine the list of covered procedures.
Transparency Measures - Increased use of AI and data analytics for real-time fraud detection and monitoring of hospital performance.

8. Conclusion

Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is a transformative step toward establishing a robust, affordable healthcare ecosystem in India. While it has already provided a vital lifeline to millions, its long-term success depends on strengthening rural health infrastructure, ensuring last-mile awareness, and maintaining rigorous oversight to prevent fraud. As it integrates deeper with digital initiatives, PM-JAY remains the most critical vehicle for achieving India's goal of Universal Health Coverage.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/work-in-progress-on-the-household-social-consumption-health-survey/article70928796.ece

Question

"Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY represents a paradigm shift in India's healthcare from a member-based to a family-based health assurance model. Critically analyse the efficacy of PM-JAY in achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) while addressing the structural and operational challenges it currently faces." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Launched in 2018 as the world's largest government-funded health assurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is a cornerstone of India's strategy to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC). By providing a safety net of ₹5 lakh per family annually for secondary and tertiary hospitalization,

the scheme aims to prevent nearly 50 crore vulnerable individuals from falling into poverty due to catastrophic medical expenses.

2. Efficacy in Advancing Universal Health Coverage

PM-JAY has significantly altered the healthcare landscape through several key mechanisms -

Financial Protection - It targets a reduction in Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE), which has historically driven poor families into debt.

Equity and Inclusivity - The scheme uses Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data to reach the most deprived rural and urban categories. Notably, it places no restrictions on family size, age, or gender.

Cashless Service Delivery - By offering cashless and paperless treatment at both public and private empanelled hospitals, it lowers the barrier to entry for quality care.

Digital Integration - The recent integration with the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) enhances transparency and creates a more cohesive digital health ecosystem.

3. Structural and Operational Challenges

Despite its ambitious scale, several hurdles limit the scheme's impact -

Infrastructure Disparity - There is a significant uneven distribution of empanelled hospitals, particularly in rural areas, which forces many beneficiaries to travel long distances for specialized care.

Identification and Awareness Gaps - Many eligible families remain unaware of their status or the specific benefits provided, leading to underutilization of the scheme.

Integrity Concerns - The system faces ongoing challenges related to fraud and misuse, requiring a constant evolution of detection mechanisms.

Supply-Side Weaknesses - While the scheme provides demand-side financing, it must contend with a lack of adequate healthcare workforce and public infrastructure in many states.

4. Recent Evolutionary Steps

The government has proactively addressed some of these gaps through -

Enhanced Packaging - Expanding treatment packages and the hospital network to improve service accessibility.

Transparency Measures - Placing an increased focus on fraud detection to ensure funds reach the intended beneficiaries.

State-Level Flexibility - Allowing states to choose between insurance, trust, or mixed models for implementation to suit local administrative strengths.

5. Conclusion

Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is a transformative vehicle moving India closer to Universal Health Coverage. While it has successfully democratized access to tertiary care, its long-term viability rests on strengthening rural healthcare infrastructure and ensuring last-mile awareness. Ultimately, it must evolve from a hospitalization insurance plan into a broader health system that prioritizes early diagnosis and infrastructure equity across all regions.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/work-in-progress-on-the-household-social-consumption-health-survey/article70928796.ece

2. 'Criticism essential in democracy' - Allahabad HC junks plea seeking FIR against Rahul Gandhi (IE)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance.

Topic - Indian Constitution—features, significant provisions, and basic structure;
Separation of powers between various organs;
Dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Sub-Topic - Fundamental Rights - Freedom of Speech and Expression (Article 19).

1. Introduction

On May 2, 2026, the Allahabad High Court dismissed a plea seeking an FIR against Rahul Gandhi, establishing a significant precedent for democratic discourse. The Court observed that criticism of the government is not merely a right but an essential component of a functioning parliamentary democracy. This ruling reinforces the distinction between political disagreement and anti-national activity.

2. Judicial Ruling - Key Observations

Criticism vs. Offence - The Court rejected claims that political statements were "anti-national," noting that ideological disagreement with the government does not automatically constitute an offence.
Lack of Evidence - The petitioner failed to provide material evidence that the statements threatened the sovereignty of India or impacted public order.
Contextual Interpretation - The Court clarified that terms like "fight" used in a political context signify opposition through democratic means rather than an incitement to violence.
Elected Representatives' Role - The judiciary highlighted that MPs act as a vital bridge between citizens and the government, fulfilling their duty by voicing public concerns.

3. Constitutional Framework - Article 19

Freedom of Speech (19(1)(a)) - Guarantees the right to free expression, which is foundational for political discourse and democratic participation.
Reasonable Restrictions (19(2)) - This right is not absolute and is subject to restrictions related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the state, public order, and morality.
Transparency and Accountability - Free speech allows citizens to question authority, ensuring governance remains transparent and informed.
Judicial Guardianship - The courts act as the ultimate protectors of these rights against arbitrary state suppression.

4. Dynamics of Parliamentary Democracy

Representative Accountability - In a representative system, citizens elect individuals specifically to voice their grievances in the legislative process.
The Check on Power - The Opposition prevents authoritarianism by critiquing policies, acting as a crucial check on executive power.
Constructive Criticism - Healthy debate and dissent are seen as tools that improve policy outcomes and enhance governance efficiency.
Political Expression - Statements made during political rallies reflect ideological differences and must be protected as legitimate democratic dialogue.

5. National Security and the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)

Statutory Provisions - Section 152 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita deals with acts that threaten the sovereignty and unity of India, replacing older interpretations of sedition.
Requirement of Intent - For a statement to attract criminal provisions, there must be clear evidence of intent and a tangible impact on national security.
Safeguards Against Misuse - Courts are tasked with ensuring that security laws are not weaponized to curb legitimate political dissent.
Balance of Rights - Legal principles must balance the preservation of order with the protection of individual constitutional freedoms.

6. Importance of Judicial Review

Guardian of the Constitution - The judiciary ensures that executive and legislative actions conform to constitutional principles.
Separation of Powers - Judicial review maintains the balance among the three organs of government, preventing any single branch from overreaching.

Decriminalizing Dissent - By reviewing the misuse of legal provisions, courts prevent the criminalization of criticism.
Rule of Law - Judicial decisions based on evidence rather than perception strengthen public trust in democratic institutions.

7. Contemporary Relevance and Challenges

Political Polarisation - There is an increasing trend of using legal machinery to settle political scores, raising concerns about the misuse of law against dissent.
Boundaries of Expression - The case highlights the ongoing national debate regarding where free speech ends and a threat to national security begins.
Impact of Media - In an era where statements are widely circulated and often taken out of context, the court's role in contextual understanding becomes even more critical.

8. Way Forward

Refining Legal Standards - There is a need to define the boundaries between free speech and national security threats more clearly to reduce legal ambiguity.
Fostering Tolerance - Strengthening a democratic culture requires a greater societal and political tolerance for criticism and dissent.
Judicial Vigilance - Continued protection of fundamental rights by the courts is essential to ensure freedoms are not eroded over time.
Public Education - Increasing citizen awareness of their constitutional rights and responsibilities will lead to more informed participation in democracy.

Conclusion

The Allahabad High Court judgement serves as a vital reminder that criticism of the government is a cornerstone of any resilient democracy. Sustaining constitutional values requires a delicate balance where national security is maintained without sacrificing the freedom of speech that makes democratic governance possible.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/allahabad-hc-junks-plea-fir-against-rahul-gandhi-indian-state-remark-10666548/

Question

"Criticism of the government is a cornerstone of a functioning democracy, yet it is often conflated with acts against the state. In light of recent judicial pronouncements, analyse the importance of protecting political dissent and the role of the judiciary in balancing Article 19(1)(a) with national security concerns." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Allahabad High Court reaffirmed that ideological disagreement or criticism of the government does not automatically constitute an offense. By dismissing a plea seeking an FIR for political statements, the court emphasized that dissent is essential for a parliamentary democracy. This underscores the critical distinction between a "political fight" for accountability and a threat to national sovereignty.

2. The Essentiality of Dissent in Parliamentary Democracy

Representative Accountability - MPs act as a vital bridge between citizens and the state, voicing public concerns through political discourse.
Check on Executive Power - The opposition party critiques policies to prevent authoritarian tendencies and ensure transparency in decision-making.
Constructive Governance - Healthy criticism is not "anti-national" but a tool to improve policy outcomes and governance efficiency.
Informed Participation - Article 19(1)(a) allows citizens to question authority, which is necessary for a mature and resilient democracy.

3. Judicial Guardianship and Contextual Interpretation

The judiciary plays a pivotal role in preventing the criminalization of political speech -

Contextual Meaning - Courts have observed that words like "fight" must be understood in a political context (opposition) rather than as an incitement to violence.

Burden of Proof - Mere perceptions of a threat are insufficient; the law requires clear evidence of intent and a tangible impact on national security.

Protection Against Misuse - Judicial review acts as a safeguard against the arbitrary application of security laws by the executive to suppress dissent.

Defending Fundamental Rights - Courts act as guardians, ensuring that "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2) are not used to erode the core right to free expression.

4. National Security Framework - The BNS Context

The transition to the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), specifically Section 152, necessitates a rigorous legal standard -

Evidence-Based Adjudication - To attract charges related to sovereignty and unity, there must be a clear link between the statement and a threat to the state.

Decriminalizing Criticism - Recent rulings reinforce that criticizing government actions is not a criminal act, provided it does not incite violence or disorder.

5. Conclusion

The preservation of a parliamentary democracy depends on the ability of its citizens and representatives to critque those in power without fear of legal retribution. As political polarization rises, the judiciary's role as the "Guardian of the Constitution" becomes paramount in ensuring that national security is maintained without sacrificing the freedom of speech. Defining clear legal standards and fostering a culture of tolerance for dissent are essential for sustaining India's constitutional values.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/allahabad-hc-junks-plea-fir-against-rahul-gandhi-indian-state-remark-10666548/

3. Iran War Leaves India with Few Good Choices (BI)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations

Topic - India and its neighbourhood / extended neighbourhood

Sub-Topic - Energy security and foreign policy

Introduction

Escalating tensions involving Iran have placed India in a complex strategic dilemma. Balancing ties with Iran, the United States, Israel, and Gulf partners requires careful diplomatic calibration, especially given India's dependence on West Asia for energy security, trade, and diaspora interests.

1. Strategic Importance of Iran for India

1. Iran is central to India's connectivity ambitions, especially via Chabahar Port and access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
2. It serves as a gateway to bypass Pakistan for regional trade.
3. Strong civilisational and cultural ties reinforce long-term engagement.

2. Impact of Iran-Related Conflicts

Geopolitical Polarisation

1. Intensifying US–Iran and Israel–Iran tensions complicate India's neutral stance.

Security of Sea Lanes

1. Threats to the Strait of Hormuz affect energy supply routes.

Regional Instability

1. Conflicts in West Asia disrupt trade, investment, and diaspora safety.

3. India's Balancing Strategy

1. India maintains relations with multiple actors - US, Israel, Iran, and Gulf countries.

2. Strategic partnerships with countries like UAE and Saudi Arabia have deepened.
3. India avoids overt alignment, preferring strategic autonomy.

4. Energy Security Concerns

1. A significant share of India's crude oil imports comes from West Asia.
2. Disruptions can lead to price volatility and inflationary pressures.
3. Reduced engagement with Iran limits diversification of energy sources.

5. Connectivity and Trade Implications

1. Projects like Chabahar face delays due to sanctions and geopolitical risks.
2. India's access to Central Asia and Afghanistan is affected.
3. Regional trade corridors remain underdeveloped.

6. Diplomatic Constraints

US Sanctions Pressure

1. Limits India's economic engagement with Iran.

Gulf Relations

1. India's ties with Saudi Arabia and UAE require balancing against Iran relations.

Limited Strategic Leverage

1. India lacks the influence to shape outcomes in West Asian conflicts.

7. Risks of Strategic Drift

1. Marginalisation in regional geopolitics if India fails to engage proactively.
2. Loss of long-term connectivity and energy opportunities.
3. Reduced credibility as an independent strategic actor.

8. Way Forward

Revitalising Iran Engagement

1. Pursue pragmatic cooperation within permissible diplomatic space.

Diversifying Energy Sources

1. Reduce dependence on volatile regions.

Strengthening Multilateral Diplomacy

1. Engage in regional forums to promote stability.

Balancing Strategic Partnerships

1. Maintain autonomy while deepening ties with multiple stakeholders.

Conclusion

India's approach to Iran must balance strategic interests, energy security, and geopolitical realities. A nuanced and proactive diplomacy is essential to safeguard long-term national interests.
Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/iran-war-tightens-squeeze-on-india-s-diplomacy-amid-shifting-alliances-126050101044_1.html

Question

Q. "India's engagement with Iran reflects the challenges of balancing strategic autonomy with geopolitical constraints." Discuss in the context of recent developments in West Asia. (250 words)

Introduction

India's relationship with Iran is shaped by strategic, economic, and cultural considerations. However, evolving geopolitical tensions in West Asia have complicated this engagement.

Importance of Iran

1. Iran provides strategic access to Central Asia through connectivity projects like Chabahar Port.
2. It is a key partner for energy security and regional trade.

Challenges

1. US sanctions restrict India's economic and energy engagement with Iran.
2. Rising tensions between Iran and Israel/US increase regional instability.

3. Balancing relations with Gulf countries and Iran creates diplomatic constraints.

Implications

1. Disruptions in energy supply routes increase economic vulnerability.
2. Connectivity projects face delays, limiting regional integration.
3. India's strategic autonomy is tested in a polarised geopolitical environment.

Way Forward

1. Maintain balanced diplomacy while protecting core strategic interests.
2. Diversify energy imports to reduce vulnerability.
3. Strengthen regional engagement through multilateral platforms.

Conclusion

India must adopt a pragmatic and balanced approach to Iran, ensuring that geopolitical constraints do not undermine its long-term strategic and economic interests.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/amp/opinion/columns/iran-war-tightens-squeeze-on-india-s-diplomacy-amid-shifting-alliances-126050101044_1.html

4. Dual Challenge - El Niño and Global Tensions (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Environment
Topic - Climate change and its impact on agriculture
Sub-Topic - Energy security and inflation

Introduction

India faces a dual macro-environmental challenge from climatic variability driven by El Niño Southern Oscillation and geopolitical disruptions affecting energy markets. Together, they create a compound risk scenario impacting agriculture, inflation, and overall economic stability.

1. Understanding El Niño and Its Impact

1. El Niño refers to abnormal warming of Pacific Ocean waters, disrupting global weather patterns.
2. It weakens the Indian monsoon, leading to rainfall deficits and erratic precipitation.
3. Consequences include droughts, reduced crop yields, and water stress.

2. Impact on Agriculture and Food Security

Reduced Agricultural Output

1. Lower rainfall affects sowing cycles and crop productivity.

Price Volatility

1. Food shortages lead to rising prices of essential commodities.

Rural Distress

1. Farmers face income losses, increasing vulnerability and indebtedness.

3. Water Stress and Resource Pressure

1. Declining reservoir levels and groundwater depletion intensify water scarcity.
2. Reduced irrigation availability impacts both agriculture and drinking water supply.
3. Increased competition for water resources across sectors.

4. Energy and Geopolitical Tensions

1. Global conflicts disrupt supply chains and energy markets.
2. Rising crude oil prices increase import bills and inflation.
3. India's dependence on energy imports amplifies vulnerability.

5. Combined Economic Impact

Inflationary Pressures

1. Food and fuel price increases contribute to overall inflation.

Macroeconomic Instability

1. Rising import costs widen current account deficits.

Growth Challenges

1. Reduced agricultural output and higher costs impact economic growth.

6. Disaster and Climate Resilience

1. Increasing frequency of extreme weather events requires adaptive strategies.
2. Strengthening early warning systems and climate-resilient agriculture is essential.
3. Disaster preparedness must integrate climate and economic risks.

7. Policy Responses

Agricultural Adaptation

1. Promote drought-resistant crops and efficient irrigation techniques.

Water Management

1. Enhance water conservation, storage, and distribution systems.

Energy Diversification

1. Reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels through renewables.

Inflation Management

1. Use fiscal and monetary tools to stabilise prices.

8. Role of Governance and Institutions

1. Coordination between central and state governments is crucial.
2. Strengthening institutional capacity for disaster response and resource management.
3. Public awareness and community participation in resilience-building.

9. Way Forward

1. Integrate climate and economic policies for holistic risk management.
2. Invest in resilient infrastructure and sustainable resource use.
3. Enhance data-driven decision-making and forecasting systems.
4. Build long-term strategies for food, water, and energy security.

Conclusion

The simultaneous challenges of El Niño and global tensions highlight the need for integrated, forward-looking policy responses. Strengthening resilience across agriculture, Ater, and energy sectors is essential for ensuring sustainable development.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/dual-challenge-el-nino-global-tensions

Question

Q. "Climate variability and geopolitical tensions together pose a compound risk to India's economy." Discuss with reference to El Niño and global energy disruptions. (250 words)

Introduction

India's economy is increasingly exposed to both climatic and geopolitical risks. El Niño-induced monsoon variability and global energy disruptions together create a compound challenge affecting agriculture, inflation, and growth.

Impact of El Niño

1. Reduced and erratic rainfall affects agricultural productivity and food security.
2. Water scarcity increases due to declining reservoir and groundwater levels.
3. Rural incomes decline, leading to economic distress.

Impact of Geopolitical Tensions

1. Disruptions in energy supply chains increase crude oil prices.
2. Higher import bills contribute to inflation and external sector pressures.
3. Economic uncertainty affects investment and growth prospects.

Combined Effects

1. Simultaneous rise in food and fuel prices leads to inflationary pressures.
2. Macroeconomic stability is challenged due to widening deficits.

3. Vulnerable populations face heightened economic stress.

Measures

1. Promote climate-resilient agriculture and efficient water management.
2. Diversify energy sources and strengthen renewable capacity.
3. Enhance disaster preparedness and early warning systems.
4. Implement coordinated fiscal and monetary policies to manage inflation.

Conclusion

Addressing the dual challenge of climate variability and geopolitical tensions requires integrated and proactive policies. Building resilience across key sectors will be critical for sustainable economic stability.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/dual-challenge-el-nino-global-tensions

Editorial of the Day – 04.05.2026

Index

1. **Doctors decide - On legal abortion (TH)** -01
2. **First-of-its-kind satellite by Indian start-up flies on SpaceX rocket (IE)** -02
3. **India's capital account obsession (BS)** -05
4. **When Truth Becomes a Target (TP)** -07

1. Doctors decide - On legal abortion (TH)

GS Paper II - Social Justice
Subject - Governance, Constitution, and Social Sector (Health)
Topic - Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to the development and management of the Social Sector relating to Health
Sub-Topic - Reproductive Rights and Autonomy

1. Introduction

In May 2026, a Supreme Court Bench led by Justice Surya Kant triggered a national debate by urging a revisit of legal abortion time limits. This follows the Court's decision to permit a minor rape survivor to terminate a pregnancy at 30 weeks—significantly beyond the standard legal threshold—emphasizing that reproductive autonomy must often take precedence in exceptional circumstances.

2. Key Details of the Recent Judicial Intervention

Case Specifics - The Supreme Court permitted the termination of a 30-week pregnancy for a minor rape survivor, surpassing the established 24-week legal limit.
Autonomy Focus - The ruling prioritized reproductive autonomy, particularly in cases where a minor demonstrates a clear and consistent unwillingness to carry the pregnancy to term.
Legislative Suggestion - The Court suggested that abortion laws should be revisited to potentially remove gestational limits entirely for exceptional cases involving minor rape survivors.
Expert Opposition - Medical experts from institutions like the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) cautioned against the decision, citing extreme health risks associated with late-stage procedures.

3. Freedom vs. Responsibility in Reproductive Choice

Awareness of Consequences - Reproductive autonomy cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be exercised with a full understanding of medical and social repercussions.
Need for Safeguards - Expanding freedoms without robust safeguards risks leading to uninformed decisions that could be physically or mentally harmful.
The Individual-Clinical Tension - The debate centres on the friction between a person's right to choose and the necessity for responsible, safe decision-making.
Safety Thresholds - Courts face the challenge of ensuring that the pursuit of autonomy does not overrule critical clinical safety considerations.

4. Judicial Reasoning and Ethical Dilemmas

Prevention of Unsafe Practices - The Court warned that rigid restrictions often push women toward dangerous, illegal abortions.
Context of Forced Pregnancy - The judiciary stressed that the element of choice is paramount in pregnancies resulting from "forced or illegitimate" circumstances.
Criticism of Judicial Reach - Critics argue that such rulings may inadvertently downplay rigorous clinical evaluations in Favor of rights-based rhetoric.
The Ethical Balancing Act - The core dilemma remains - how to protect the human right to bodily integrity while simultaneously ensuring medical safety for the mother.

5. Medical Perspectives and Legal Constraints

Life-Threatening Risks - AIIMS experts noted that termination at 30 weeks poses severe dangers to the life of the minor mother.
Current Statutory Limits - Indian law generally permits abortion only up to 24 weeks of gestation, reflecting global scientific and clinical consensus on increasing complications past this mark.
Scientific Thresholds - Clinical limits are designed to protect maternal health, as gestational age is a central factor in determining the feasibility of a safe procedure.

6. The Core Conflict - Gestational Limits vs. Clinical Safety

Late-Stage Risks - Decisions made late in the pregnancy without thorough expert medical input can lead to compromised health outcomes.
Expertise Gap - Minors and their families frequently lack the technical expertise to independently assess the complex medical risks of late-term abortions.
Institutional Role - True empowerment is viewed as the combination of personal autonomy with professional medical guidance and institutional support.
Timely Access - The systemic challenge is ensuring that victims have access to safe, legal options early enough to avoid these late-stage ethical and medical crises.

7. Conclusion

The 2026 Supreme Court observation underscores the delicate intersection of reproductive rights and medical safety. While the right to choose is essential—particularly for victims of sexual violence—decisions must be grounded in expert clinical oversight. Moving forward, a balanced framework that combines legal autonomy with parental support and strict clinical safeguards is necessary to ensure both ethical and safe outcomes for minors.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/doctors-decide-on-legal-abortion/article70935243.ece

2. First-of-its-kind satellite by Indian start-up flies on SpaceX rocket (IE)

GS Paper III - Science and Technology; Infrastructure
Topic - Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotechnology, and Biotechnology
Sub-Topic - Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology

1. Introduction

On May 4, 2026, the Indian space startup GalaxEye achieved a global breakthrough by launching its first satellite, "Drishti," aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from California. This mission marks the deployment of the world's first satellite capable of simultaneous optical and radar imaging, signaling a new era in Earth observation and the increasing prowess of India's private space industry.

2. The "Drishti" Technological Breakthrough

The satellite represents a departure from traditional Earth observation systems -
World First - It is the first satellite to combine optical and radar imaging capabilities simultaneously, overcoming the data gaps inherent in single-sensor systems.
Launch Details - Launched as part of a multi-payload mission on a Falcon 9 rocket, highlighting a deep global collaboration between Indian startups and international launch providers.
OptoSAR Technology - The core innovation involves integrating optical sensors with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), allowing for continuous monitoring regardless of lighting or weather conditions.

3. Understanding Earth Observation (EO) Systems

Definition - EO satellites use remote sensing to collect data on the planet's surface for use in agriculture, defines, and urban planning.
Optical Sensors - Similar to standard cameras, these capture images using reflected sunlight but are rendered ineffective by nightfall or heavy cloud cover.

Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) - This system uses microwave signals to "see" through clouds and operate in all-weather conditions, though the resulting data often requires expert interpretation.
The Problem - Most current systems rely on either optical or SAR separately, which leads to time delays when trying to combine different datasets for real-time accuracy.

4. OptoSAR - The Core Innovation

Simultaneous Capture - OptoSAR ensures that both optical and radar data are captured for the exact same location at the exact same time.
Engineering Feat - The primary challenge was the synchronization, alignment, and onboard processing required to calibrate two vastly different sensor types.
AI Integration - Artificial Intelligence is utilized onboard to convert complex SAR data into optical-like images, making the information accessible to non-expert users.
Real-time Reliability - By eliminating the need to merge datasets from separate satellites, Drishti provides more accurate and reliable real-time observation.

5. Strategic Significance for India

The launch of Drishti offers specific advantages for the Indian subcontinent -
Tropical Resilience - India's frequent cloud cover and monsoon variability often hinder traditional satellites; OptoSAR ensures uninterrupted monitoring during these periods.
Disaster Management - The technology enhances early warning systems and response times for flood mapping, landslide detection, and rescue operations.
Precision Agriculture - Provides farmers and planners with accurate, real-time land-use and crop data to improve productivity.
National Security - Strategic applications include enhanced border monitoring and surveillance capabilities, strengthening national security.

6. The Rise of India's Private Space Sector

Policy Catalysts - Reforms such as IN-Space have opened the sector to private investment and innovation, reducing sole dependence on government agencies.
Emerging Ecosystem - Startups like Sky root Aerospace and Agni Kul Cosmos are joining GalaxEye in making a global impact on rocket and satellite technology.
Global Positioning - India is becoming a competitive player in the global space economy by leveraging its strength in cost-effective innovation.

7. Challenges in Space Innovation

Precision Engineering - Integrating multiple advanced systems into a single satellite involves immense technological complexity and rigorous testing.
Capital Intensity - Startups remain heavily dependent on continuous funding and supportive government policies due to the high financial resources required for space missions.
Data Security - Handling sensitive satellite data requires clear regulatory frameworks to balance commercial growth with national security and privacy.
International Competition - To stay competitive, Indian startups must innovate rapidly to challenge the dominance of established global space powers.

8. Way Forward

R&D Funding - Strengthening indigenous technological capabilities requires increased investment in research and development.
Synergy with ISRO - Enhancing collaboration between ISRO and private startups will improve the scalability and efficiency of Indian missions.
Regulatory Clarity - Establishing clear rules for data sharing and commercial operations is essential to ensure both growth and security.
International Partnerships - Engaging in global collaborations will facilitate technology transfer and market expansion.

Conclusion

The launch of Drishti by GalaxEye represents a significant milestone in India's journey toward space leadership. By successfully merging cutting-edge innovation with practical, real-world applications, India is effectively addressing terrestrial challenges while cementing its status as a technological powerhouse in the global space sector.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/galaxeye-drishti-satellite-spacex-launch-opto-sar-technology-explained-10669686/

Question

"The launch of the 'Drishti' satellite marks a paradigm shift in Earth observation through the fusion of disparate sensing technologies. Elucidate the technological innovation of 'OptoSAR' and its strategic and socio-economic significance for India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The launch of "Drishti" by the Indian startup GalaxEye aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket signifies a major milestone in global space technology. As the world's first satellite to combine optical and radar imaging simultaneously, it addresses the fundamental limitations of traditional Earth observation systems that rely on a single imaging modality.

2. Elucidating "OptoSAR" Technology

The core innovation of the Drishti satellite lies in its OptoSAR technology, which integrates two distinct sensing systems into one platform -

Fusion of Sensors - It synchronizes Optical sensors (which capture images via reflected sunlight) with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) (which uses microwave signals to penetrate clouds).

All-Weather Monitoring - Unlike traditional optical satellites that are hindered by night or cloud cover, OptoSAR ensures continuous monitoring regardless of lighting or weather conditions.

AI-Powered Accessibility - The system utilizes Artificial Intelligence onboard to convert complex, microwave-based SAR data into optical-like images, making the data accessible for non-expert users.

Data Reliability - By capturing both datasets for the same location simultaneously, it eliminates the need for complex, time-delayed merging of data from multiple satellites.

3. Socio-Economic Significance for India

For a tropical country like India, the ability to "see" through the atmosphere is a critical socio-economic asset -

Tropical Resilience - During India's frequent monsoons and high cloud-cover periods, OptoSAR ensures uninterrupted data flow.

Precision Agriculture - Real-time land-use and crop data support farmers in improving productivity and resource planning.

Disaster Management - The technology provides vital real-time imaging for flood mapping, landslide detection, and early warning systems, significantly reducing response times during crises.

4. Strategic and Policy Implications

National Security - The ability to monitor borders continuously, even at night or through heavy weather, provides a strategic edge in surveillance and defines applications.

Commercial Leadership - This mission demonstrates the success of India's policy shift toward privatization and commercialization, supported by institutions like IN-Space.

Global Competitive Edge - By producing cost-effective innovations that solve real-time data gaps, Indian startups are positioning the country as a major player in the global space economy.

5. Conclusion

The Drishti satellite is more than just a successful launch; it is a testament to the indigenization of high-end technology and the rising maturity of the Indian private space sector. By bridging the gap

between technological complexity and practical utility, India is not only securing its borders and resources but also setting a new global standard for Earth observation.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/galaxeye-drishti-satellite-spacex-launch-opto-sar-technology-explained-10669686/

3. India's capital account obsession (BS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Balance of Payments
Sub-Topic - Current account vs capital account

Introduction

India's macroeconomic strategy has often prioritised capital inflows over strengthening the current account, leading to a structural imbalance in the Balance of Payments. This "capital account obsession" raises concerns about long-term sustainability, external vulnerability, and growth quality.

1. Understanding Current vs Capital Account

Current Account

1. Reflects trade in goods and services, income, and transfers.
2. A deficit indicates that imports exceed exports.

Capital Account

1. Represents inflows of foreign investment and borrowing.
2. Used to finance current account deficits.

2. Historical Policy Orientation

1. Post-independence strategy focused on capital-intensive industrialisation.
2. Policy emphasis shifted toward attracting foreign capital rather than boosting exports.
3. Institutional control over capital flows gradually replaced earlier trade-focused strategies.

3. The "Capital Account Obsession"

Dependence on Foreign Capital

1. Growth increasingly financed through external investments.

Neglect of Export Competitiveness

1. Limited focus on enhancing manufacturing and trade capacity.

Short-Term Stability Bias

1. Preference for managing deficits through capital inflows rather than structural reforms.

4. Consequences of the Approach

External Vulnerability

1. Reliance on volatile capital flows increases susceptibility to global shocks.

Current Account Weakness

1. Persistent deficits reflect structural trade imbalances.

Distorted Economic Priorities

1. Overemphasis on financial flows over real sector development.

5. Impact on Growth and Development

1. Capital inflows may support short-term growth but do not ensure sustainable economic expansion.
2. Insufficient export growth limits job creation and industrialisation.
3. Exposure to sudden capital outflows can destabilise the economy.

6. Role of Policy Institutions

1. Institutions like the Ministry of Finance have prioritised capital flow management.
2. Trade and industrial policies have not adequately supported export competitiveness.

7. Need for Rebalancing

Strengthening Current Account

1. Promote exports through manufacturing and services competitiveness.

Reducing Import Dependence

1. Encourage domestic production in key sectors.

Balanced External Strategy

1. Combine capital inflows with strong trade performance.

8. Way Forward

1. Shift focus from capital inflows to export-led growth strategies.
2. Enhance industrial policy and global value chain integration.
3. Maintain prudent management of capital flows to avoid volatility.
4. Strengthen macroeconomic fundamentals to reduce external imbalances.

Conclusion

India's reliance on capital inflows highlights a structural imbalance in its external sector. A strategic shift towards strengthening the current account and export competitiveness is essential for long-term economic stability.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-capital-account-obsession/article70935720.ece

Question

Q. "India's external sector strategy has been excessively focused on capital inflows rather than strengthening the current account." Critically examine the implications and suggest corrective measures. (250 words)

Introduction

India's Balance of Payments reflects a structural imbalance where current account deficits are often financed through capital inflows. This approach raises concerns about long-term sustainability.

Implications

1. Dependence on volatile capital flows increases vulnerability to global financial shocks.
2. Persistent current account deficits indicate weak export competitiveness.
3. Overemphasis on financial inflows distorts economic priorities away from real sector development.
4. Sudden capital outflows can destabilise exchange rates and macroeconomic stability.

Reasons

1. Historical focus on capital-intensive industrialisation.
2. Insufficient emphasis on export-oriented manufacturing.
3. Policy preference for managing deficits through financial flows.

Measures

1. Promote export diversification and integration into global value chains.
2. Reduce import dependence through domestic production.
3. Strengthen industrial and trade policies.
4. Ensure balanced management of capital inflows and external liabilities.

Conclusion

A sustainable external sector strategy requires strengthening the current account alongside prudent capital flow management. Rebalancing these priorities is essential for long-term economic resilience.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indias-capital-account-obsession/article70935720.ece

4. When Truth Becomes a Target (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic - Freedom of speech and expression
Sub-Topic - Issues relating to transparency and accountability

Introduction

In the contemporary information age, journalism faces not only traditional constraints but also systemic threats from misinformation, digital manipulation, and declining institutional trust. The challenge is no longer limited to press freedom; it extends to preserving the integrity of truth itself in democratic societies.

1. Changing Nature of Threats to Journalism

From Physical to Systemic Risks

1. Journalists face violence, intimidation, and censorship in many regions.
2. Digital ecosystems have introduced new threats such as online harassment and disinformation.

Erosion of Truth Ecosystem

1. The proliferation of false narratives weakens the credibility of verified information.

2. Rise of Misinformation and Digital Manipulation

1. Social media platforms enable rapid spread of unverified information.
2. Advanced technologies, including AI, facilitate deepfakes and synthetic media.
3. Information warfare has become a tool in both domestic and international politics.

3. Impact on Democracy

Undermining Informed Citizenship

1. Citizens struggle to distinguish between fact and falsehood.

Weakening Accountability

1. Governments and institutions face reduced scrutiny when truth is contested.

Polarisation of Society

1. Misinformation amplifies divisions and erodes social cohesion.

4. Crisis of Trust in Media

1. Declining public confidence in traditional media institutions.
2. Perception of bias and influence by political or corporate interests.
3. Fragmentation of information sources reduces shared understanding of facts.

5. Ethical and Professional Challenges

1. Journalists must navigate pressures from state, market, and digital platforms.
2. Speed of information dissemination often compromises verification standards.
3. Maintaining editorial independence is increasingly difficult.

6. Role of Technology

Double-Edged Nature

1. Technology enables wider access to information but also amplifies misinformation.

Algorithmic Influence

1. Content prioritisation based on engagement may promote sensational or false content.

7. Need for Institutional and Policy Response

Strengthening Media Ethics

1. Reinforce standards of verification, accountability, and transparency.

Regulation of Digital Platforms

1. Ensure responsibility in content moderation without undermining free speech.

Promoting Media Literacy

1. Equip citizens to critically evaluate information.

8. Safeguarding Journalism

1. Protect journalists from physical and digital threats.
2. Ensure independence of media institutions.
3. Encourage investigative journalism and public-interest reporting.

9. Way Forward

1. Develop a balanced framework that protects both freedom of expression and integrity of information.
2. Foster collaboration between governments, media, and civil society.
3. Invest in technological solutions to detect and counter misinformation.

Conclusion

The survival of democracy depends on the credibility of information. Safeguarding journalism today requires not only protecting press freedom but also defending the very foundation of truth in the digital age.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/when-truth-becomes-a-target

Question

Q. "In the digital age, the challenge is not just protecting press freedom but preserving the integrity of truth." Discuss the threats to journalism and suggest measures to strengthen democratic information systems. (250 words)

Introduction

The digital transformation of information ecosystems has fundamentally altered the nature of threats to journalism. Beyond physical risks, misinformation and declining trust now challenge the very foundation of truth.

Threats to Journalism

1. Spread of misinformation and fake news undermines credible reporting.
2. Digital platforms amplify unverified content through algorithmic biases.
3. Journalists face intimidation, censorship, and online harassment.
4. Declining trust in media institutions weakens their role in democracy.

Implications

1. Citizens are unable to make informed decisions due to information distortion.
2. Accountability of governments and institutions is weakened.
3. Social polarisation increases, affecting democratic stability.

Measures

1. Strengthen ethical standards and fact-checking mechanisms in journalism.
2. Regulate digital platforms to ensure accountability without restricting free speech.
3. Promote media literacy to help citizens identify misinformation.
4. Protect journalists and ensure independence of media institutions.

Conclusion

Preserving truth in the digital age is essential for democratic governance. A balanced approach combining regulation, ethical journalism, and informed citizenry is necessary to address emerging challenges.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/when-truth-becomes-a-target

Editorial of the Day – 05.05.2026

Index

1. **How Forest Rights Act Was Reaffirmed by Allahabad HC Order (TH)** -01
2. **What To Know About Hantavirus, The Illness Suspected in A Cruise Ship Outbreak (IE)** -02
3. **An Agenda for Risk Mitigation (BI)** -04
4. **A Historic Dawn - The 2026 Mandate for Governance, Culture, And Pro-Incumbency (TP)** -06

1. How Forest Rights Act Was Reaffirmed by Allahabad HC Order (TH)

GS Paper II – Social Justice
Topic – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.
Sub-Topic – Rights of Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court reaffirmed that the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, holds legal primacy over any conflicting past laws, interim court orders, or administrative directives. By striking down the rejection of forest rights claims for the Tharu tribal community, the Court exposed significant institutional lapses and reaffirmed the state's constitutional obligation to protect vulnerable forest dwellers.

2. Background of the Case

The Contesting Parties – The case involved the District Level Committee (DLC) in Lakhimpur, Uttar Pradesh, and members of the Tharu community.
The DLC Decision (2021) – The DLC had rejected the forest rights claims of the Tharu community, basing its decision on an outdated interim order from the Supreme Court of India (2000).
Nature of the Dispute – The DLC wrongly believed that the 2000 interim order, which restricted forest de-reservation, prevented them from granting rights under the FRA.

3. Key Legal Principles & The Ruling

Legal Hierarchy – The High Court declared that earlier court orders lose validity if they conflict with a subsequent law passed by Parliament.
The "Notwithstanding" Clause – The FRA explicitly contains a clause stating that its provisions apply "notwithstanding anything in any other law," granting it absolute supremacy in matters of forest rights.
Invalidation of DLC Action – The Court held that relying on a 2000 judicial order to bypass a 2006 parliamentary act was a legal violation and a punishable offense.
Supremacy of FRA – The ruling confirms that the FRA is the final word on forest rights, even in protected areas where it recognizes grazing and habitation rights.

4. Institutional Lapses and Procedural Concerns

Reliance on Outdated Frameworks – The DLC failed to recognize that the FRA, being a later law, overrides inconsistent earlier judicial interpretations.
Bypassing the Gram Sabha – While the FRA empowers the Gram Sabha to initiate action against violations via a 60-day notice to the State-Level Monitoring Committee, the High Court did not invoke this specific mechanism.
Directives for Reconsideration – Instead of initiating penal action, the Court asked the DLC to reconsider its decision—a step that is not explicitly detailed as a procedure under the FRA but serves as a judicial corrective.

5. Wider National Concerns & Significance

Persistent Implementation Gap - Despite legal safeguards, many states continue to use outdated laws like the Tamil Nadu Forest Act, 1882, to dismiss claims.

Judicial Inconsistency - Previous rulings, such as those from the Madras High Court, have led to evictions and grazing bans that conflict with the spirit of the FRA.

Protection of Livelihoods - The ruling reasserts that forest dwellers have legally protected rights to habitation and grazing, which cannot be arbitrarily curtailed by administrative committees.

6. Conclusion

The Allahabad High Court's judgment is a vital step toward protecting the vulnerable forest communities from administrative overreach. While it strengthens the legal primacy of the FRA, it also highlights the implementation gap caused by judicial and administrative inconsistencies. Realizing the true intent of the Act requires empowering Gram Sabhas, ensuring institutional accountability, and harmonizing all judicial interpretations with the 2006 Act.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/how-forest-rights-act-was-reaffirmed-by-allahabad-hc-order-explained/article70938642.ece#google_vignette

2. What To Know About Hantavirus, The Illness Suspected in A Cruise Ship Outbreak (IE)

GS Paper III - Science & Technology

Topic - Emerging infectious diseases, global health security, and zoonotic threats.

Sub-Topic - Public health response, disease surveillance, and the rodent-human interface.

1. Introduction - The Cape Verde Incident

In May 2026, a suspected Hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship near Cape Verde reignited global anxieties regarding infectious disease management in closed environments. While cruise ships are designed for leisure, the quarantine of approximately 150 passengers highlights how quickly these "floating cities" can transform into clinical hotspots. The refusal of docking permissions by national authorities underscores a growing trend toward preventive containment as a primary tool for public health security.

2. Scientific Profile - Understanding the Hantavirus

The Hantavirus is not a single entity but a group of viruses primarily hosted by rodents. Its name is derived from the Hantan River in South Korea, where it was first isolated in the 1970s.

Pathological Strains - The virus manifests in two primary clinical forms - Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), affecting the lungs, and Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS), which targets the kidneys.

Global Footprint - While rare, cases are sporadically reported across Asia, Europe, and the Americas, maintaining its status as a high-fatality global threat.

Lethality - With mortality rates reaching 30–40%, it ranks among the more dangerous zoonotic diseases currently circulating.

3. Transmission and Clinical Manifestations

Unlike many of the airborne pathogens that have recently dominated headlines, Hantavirus transmission is distinctly localized but environmentally persistent.

Mechanism of Spread

Zoonotic Interface - The virus is shed in the urine, droppings, and saliva of infected rodents.

Aerosolization - Humans typically contract the virus by inhaling airborne particles contaminated with rodent waste.

Human-to-Human Limitation - Large-scale pandemic risks are mitigated by the fact that person-to-person transmission is extremely rare.

Clinical Progression

Stage	Symptoms	Observations
Early (1–5 Days)	Fever, fatigue, muscle aches, and headaches.	Often misdiagnosed as common flu due to non-specific symptoms.
Advanced (4–10 Days)	Severe coughing, shortness of breath, and fluid accumulation in lungs.	Critical window; delay in medical attention at this stage significantly increases fatality risk.

4. Global Governance and Health Preparedness

The Cape Verde outbreak serves as a stress test for international health regulations and the role of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Supportive Care Limitations - In the absence of a targeted antiviral cure, management is limited to supportive care such as oxygen therapy and hydration.

Coordination Gaps - The incident reveals that many nations still lack the rapid response infrastructure required for rare but lethal zoonotic events.

The Zoonotic Trend - Hantavirus belongs to a rising trend of zoonoses (including Ebola and Nipah) driven by increased human-animal interaction, urbanization, and deforestation.

5. The Indian Context and Strategic Way Forward

India, with its high population density and significant biodiversity, remains a high-risk zone for zoonotic spillover.

Vulnerability Factors - Rapid urbanization and poor sanitation in certain regions can increase rodent-human contact, necessitating localized surveillance.

Surveillance Systems - Strengthening early detection and hospital capacity is essential to reduce the economic and mortality impact of potential outbreaks.

Research Investment - There is a critical need for global investment in vaccines and antiviral treatments to move beyond mere "supportive" management.

Conclusion

The 2026 Hantavirus outbreak is a reminder that in a globalized world, health security is only as strong as its weakest link. While the virus may lack the "explosive" transmission of respiratory pandemics, its high fatality rate and rodent-borne nature demand a paradigm shift toward integrated disease monitoring and cross-border cooperation. Strengthening the public health infrastructure today is the only viable insurance against the emerging infectious diseases of tomorrow.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/world/us-news/what-is-hantavirus-rare-infection-linked-to-cruise-ship-deaths-10671394/

Question

"The recent Hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship underscores the critical vulnerability of global transit hubs to zoonotic spillover. Analyze the unique challenges posed by such emerging infectious diseases and the imperative for a robust global health security framework." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The May 2026 Hantavirus outbreak near Cape Verde, involving international cruise passengers, has highlighted the persistent threat of zoonotic diseases in a hyper-connected world. With a high fatality rate of 30–40% and the lack of a targeted antiviral cure, such outbreaks demand a shift from reactive containment to proactive global surveillance.

2. Challenges in Managing Emerging Zoonotic Threats

Closed-Environment Vulnerability - Closed systems like ships serve as "petri dishes," where the close proximity of people accelerates the risk of localized outbreaks and complicates quarantine measures.

Diagnostic Ambiguity - Early symptoms—such as fever, fatigue, and muscle aches—closely resemble common influenza, leading to delays in identifying lethal conditions like Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS).

Transmission Dynamics - While human-to-human spread is rare for Hantavirus, its transmission through aerosolized rodent waste makes it an environmental hazard that is difficult to monitor in mobile infrastructure.

Clinical Limitations - The absence of specific antiviral treatments forces reliance on supportive care (oxygen/hydration), which is often insufficient for severe respiratory failure in late-stage infections.

3. Global Health Governance and Imperatives

Containment vs. Sovereignty - The refusal of docking permissions by national authorities reflects a prioritization of territorial health security, though it creates a humanitarian crisis for those quarantined onboard.

Preparedness Gaps - Many national health systems lack the rapid response protocols required to manage rare, high-fatality pathogens, revealing a significant disparity in global health infrastructure.

The Zoonotic Link - As human-animal interactions increase due to urbanization and deforestation, diseases like Hantavirus, Ebola, and Nipah are moving from rural niches to global transit routes.

4. India's Strategic Position

High-Risk Landscape - India's high population density and biodiversity make it a prime candidate for zoonotic spillovers.

Infrastructure Needs - To mitigate future risks, India must strengthen its surveillance systems, enhance hospital capacity for emergency respiratory care, and invest in indigenous R&D for vaccines and antivirals.

5. Conclusion

The Hantavirus incident serves as a stark reminder that international health security is interdependent. A robust global framework must move beyond national containment and prioritize One Health principles, cross-border information sharing, and international cooperation to prevent localized outbreaks from escalating into global health crises.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/world/us-news/what-is-hantavirus-rare-infection-linked-to-cruise-ship-deaths-10671394/

3. An Agenda for Risk Mitigation (BI)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Indian economy and issues relating to planning
Sub-Topic - Balance of Payments and external sector

Introduction

India's economic growth remains closely linked to global capital flows, particularly Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI). While such flows provide liquidity and investment support, excessive dependence on volatile external capital exposes the economy to financial instability. Therefore, India needs a comprehensive strategy for risk mitigation through stronger domestic savings, reduced Current Account Deficit (CAD), and resilient macroeconomic institutions.

1. Why Risk Mitigation is Necessary

Exposure to Global Shocks

1. International crises, geopolitical tensions, and monetary tightening in advanced economies affect capital flows to emerging markets like India.

Volatility of Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)

1. FPIs can enter and exit rapidly, causing exchange rate instability and stock market fluctuations.

Macroeconomic Vulnerability

1. Persistent CAD and dependence on foreign capital increase external sector risks.

2. Role of Domestic Savings

Savings as a Stable Source of Investment

1. Higher household and institutional savings reduce dependence on foreign capital.

Need to Improve Financial Savings

1. Productive financial instruments should attract household savings away from unproductive assets.

Importance of Long-Term Capital Formation

1. Domestic savings support infrastructure, manufacturing, and productive investment.

3. Reducing Current Account Deficit (CAD)

Strengthening Export Competitiveness

1. Diversifying exports and enhancing manufacturing capacity can improve external balances.

Reducing Import Dependence

1. Lower reliance on imported energy and critical goods improves resilience.

Promoting Domestic Production

1. Initiatives such as local manufacturing and supply-chain development help reduce trade imbalances.

4. Structural Reforms for Stability

Deepening Financial Markets

1. Strong domestic bond and equity markets can mobilise long-term capital.

Institutional Strengthening

1. Stable regulations and credible policy frameworks improve investor confidence.

Fiscal Discipline

1. Sustainable public finances reduce macroeconomic stress.

5. Role of Global Integration

Balanced Integration

1. India must remain integrated with global financial systems while avoiding excessive dependence.

Diversification of Capital Sources

1. Encouraging FDI over speculative short-term flows improves stability.

6. Challenges Before India

1. Low household financial savings relative to investment needs.
2. Import dependence in energy and technology sectors.
3. Vulnerability to global interest rate cycles and currency fluctuations.

7. Way Forward

Boost Domestic Savings

1. Encourage pension reforms, insurance penetration, and financial inclusion.

Enhance Export Capacity

1. Strengthen manufacturing competitiveness and logistics infrastructure.

Promote Stable Capital Flows

1. Prioritise long-term FDI over volatile portfolio investments.

Maintain Macroeconomic Stability

1. Ensure prudent fiscal and monetary policies.

Conclusion

India's long-term economic resilience depends on reducing external vulnerabilities through stronger domestic savings, lower CAD, and stable institutional frameworks. Sustainable growth requires balancing global integration with domestic economic strength.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/an-agenda-for-risk-mitigation/article70939619.ece/amp/

Question

Q. India's growing dependence on volatile foreign capital flows increases macroeconomic vulnerability. Discuss the need for a comprehensive risk mitigation strategy for the Indian economy. (250 words)

Introduction

Foreign capital flows, particularly Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI), play an important role in India's economy. However, excessive dependence on such flows exposes the economy to global financial volatility and external shocks.

Risks Associated with External Dependence

1. Sudden FPI outflows can destabilise stock markets and exchange rates.
2. Persistent Current Account Deficit (CAD) increases external vulnerability.
3. Global monetary tightening can reduce capital inflows into emerging economies like India.

Need for Risk Mitigation

1. Strong domestic savings reduce dependence on external financing.
2. Lower CAD improves macroeconomic stability and external resilience.
3. Stable institutions and sound fiscal management enhance investor confidence.

Measures Required

1. Promote household financial savings through pension and insurance expansion.
2. Strengthen manufacturing and exports to reduce trade deficits.
3. Encourage long-term Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) instead of speculative flows.
4. Improve financial market depth and institutional credibility.

Conclusion

India must adopt a balanced external sector strategy that combines global integration with domestic economic resilience. Sustainable growth requires reducing vulnerability to volatile capital flows while strengthening internal economic fundamentals.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/an-agenda-for-risk-mitigation/article70939619.ece/amp/

4. A Historic Dawn - The 2026 Mandate for Governance, Culture, And Pro-Incumbency (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic - Representation of People Act
Sub-Topic - Role of democracy and governance in development

Introduction

The 2026 Assembly election outcomes in several Indian States highlight important trends in Indian democracy, including pro-incumbency, welfare politics, regional identity, coalition politics, and governance-based electoral mandates. The results demonstrate that voters increasingly evaluate governments on delivery, leadership credibility, and social stability rather than relying solely on anti-incumbency sentiment.

1. Changing Nature of Electoral Politics in India

Decline of Automatic Anti-Incumbency

1. Earlier elections often witnessed routine rejection of ruling governments.
2. Increasingly, voters are rewarding administrations perceived as effective and stable.

Rise of Performance-Based Politics

1. Governance delivery, welfare implementation, and infrastructure development influence voting behaviour.

2. Significance of Pro-Incumbency Trend

Trust in Governance Continuity

1. Voters may prefer continuity where governments are seen as stable and responsive.

Importance of Welfare Delivery

1. Direct benefit transfers, welfare schemes, and targeted social support strengthen political legitimacy.

Leadership-Centric Politics

1. Strong leadership and political communication shape electoral outcomes significantly.

3. Regional Political Dynamics

Tamil Nadu

1. Regional identity and Dravidian political traditions continue to influence electoral outcomes.
2. Welfare politics and linguistic-cultural mobilisation remain central.

West Bengal

1. Competitive politics reflects strong regional political mobilisation and ideological contestation.

Kerala

1. Governance performance, social indicators, and coalition structures strongly shape voting patterns.

Assam and North-East

1. Electoral outcomes indicate increasing importance of development, connectivity, and national integration narratives.

4. Role of Welfare Politics

Expansion of Social Protection

1. Welfare schemes increasingly influence electoral preferences.

Shift from Identity Alone to Delivery-Based Politics

1. Citizens evaluate governments based on implementation effectiveness.

Risks of Competitive Populism

1. Excessive dependence on subsidies and short-term electoral promises may affect fiscal sustainability.

5. Democratic Significance of Electoral Mandates

1. Peaceful elections reinforce democratic legitimacy.
2. Electoral participation reflects public engagement with governance.
3. Mandates provide governments with policy direction and political authority.

6. Challenges in Contemporary Electoral Politics

Polarisation and Identity Politics

1. Religious, linguistic, and regional narratives can deepen social divisions.

Centralisation of Political Campaigns

1. Personality-driven politics may weaken institutional debate.

Influence of Money and Media

1. Electoral competition increasingly depends on financial and communication resources.

7. Implications for Governance

Pressure for Better Delivery

1. Governments must maintain credibility through continuous governance performance.

Need for Inclusive Development

1. Electoral legitimacy must translate into social and economic outcomes.

Strengthening Federal Democracy

1. Regional mandates reflect India's plural democratic structure.

8. Way Forward

1. Strengthen issue-based democratic discourse.
2. Balance welfare with fiscal prudence and long-term development.

3. Enhance transparency, accountability, and institutional governance.
4. Promote cooperative federalism while respecting regional aspirations.

Conclusion

The 2026 electoral outcomes underline the evolution of Indian democracy from simple anti-incumbency politics to a more complex mix of governance evaluation, welfare expectations, leadership appeal, and regional identity. Sustaining democratic legitimacy requires converting electoral mandates into inclusive and accountable governance.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/a-historic-dawn-the-2026-mandate-for-governance-culture-and-pro-incumbency

Question

Q. "Recent electoral trends in India indicate the rise of governance-based pro-incumbency rather than automatic anti-incumbency." Examine the factors behind this shift and discuss its implications for Indian democracy. (250 words)

Introduction

Indian electoral politics has traditionally been associated with anti-incumbency. However, recent election outcomes increasingly show that voters reward governments perceived as effective in governance and welfare delivery.

Factors Behind the Shift

1. Expansion of welfare schemes and direct benefit transfers has strengthened citizen-state connections.
2. Improved infrastructure, public services, and governance delivery influence voter perceptions.
3. Strong leadership and political communication shape public trust.
4. Regional political parties have adapted welfare and governance models to local aspirations.

Implications for Democracy

1. Electoral politics is becoming more performance-oriented.
2. Governments face pressure to maintain delivery and accountability.
3. Democratic participation is strengthened when citizens evaluate governance outcomes.
4. However, excessive welfare competition may affect fiscal sustainability.
5. Personality-centric politics may weaken institutional democratic culture.

Way Forward

1. Promote issue-based democratic debates.
2. Ensure welfare policies remain fiscally sustainable.
3. Strengthen institutional accountability and transparency.
4. Encourage inclusive governance that balances development with social cohesion.

Conclusion

The rise of governance-based pro-incumbency reflects the maturity of Indian democracy. Sustained democratic legitimacy, however, depends on converting electoral success into inclusive, accountable, and institution-driven governance.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/a-historic-dawn-the-2026-mandate-for-governance-culture-and-pro-incumbency

Editorial of the Day – 06.05.2026

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1. Building bridges - On India's solar generation, battery storage (HE)

GS Paper III - Economic Development (Infrastructure)
Topic - Infrastructure - Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
Sub-Topic - Energy Storage Systems (ESS).

1. Introduction

In May 2026, India's power sector presents a paradoxical picture - a record-shattering peak demand met with historic solar contributions during the day, contrasted by a near-total reliance on conventional sources as soon as the sun sets. The metaphor of a "half-built bridge" aptly describes the current state of India's solar journey—where the infrastructure for generation is robust, but the "bridge" to nighttime reliability (storage) remains missing.

2. The Peak vs. Daily Reality Gap

The data from April 25, 2026, highlights the drastic fluctuations in solar performance -
Record Peak Demand - India achieved a historic peak electricity demand of 256.1 GW.
Afternoon Dominance - During peak sunshine hours, solar energy supplied a record 21.5% of the afternoon demand.
Full Day Contribution - Despite the afternoon surge, solar contributed only 10.8**%** to the total daily generation.
Evening Crisis - After sunset, solar contribution plummeted to a negligible 0.1%, exposing the grid's vulnerability during evening peaks.

3. Capacity–Generation Mismatch

The rapid expansion of solar infrastructure has outpaced the actual growth in effective power supply -
Surge in Capacity - Solar's share in India's total installed capacity rose from approximately 15% in 2022 to 28% in 2026.
Modest Output Growth - Actual generation increased much slower, moving from 5.6% in 2022 to 10.8% in 2026.
Interpretation - This discrepancy indicates that simply adding panels and land is not translating proportionately into usable energy due to grid integration and storage limitations.

4. Storage Bottlenecks and Grid Constraints

The primary hurdle is no longer the "hardware" of generation, but the "buffer" of storage -
Infrastructure Shift - The core issue has shifted from a lack of land or solar panels to a critical deficit in battery storage.
Energy Wastage - Without battery infrastructure, surplus solar energy generated during the day cannot be shifted to meet evening demand.
Curtailment for Stability - State utilities are often forced to "curtail" (intentionally reduce) solar supply to prevent grid instability, leading to significant underutilization of renewable potential.

5. Economic Burden of Solar Curtailment

The lack of storage is creating a direct drain on public finances -

Quantifying Waste - In 2025, India curtailed 2.3 TWh of solar energy, which is equivalent to 18% of the average monthly solar output.
Peak Waste Period - Approximately 0.9 TWh was wasted in the single month of October 2025.
Financial Impact - Under current Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), producers are often compensated for curtailed energy, meaning the public exchequer pays for electricity that was never actually consumed.

6. Climate Pressure and Monsoon Outlook

External climate factors are making solar efficiency more urgent -
Weak Monsoon Forecast - With a forecast of a below-normal monsoon in 2026, agricultural and cooling demand is expected to surge.
Hydropower Limitations - A weak monsoon reduces the ability of hydroelectric dams to provide a "balancing" power source, placing even greater pressure on the solar-storage duo.

7. Way Forward - Execution and Integration

To bridge the gap, the focus must shift from capacity addition to systemic integration -
Falling Battery Costs - The cost of battery storage has significantly dropped from ₹2.21 lakh to ₹1.48 lakh per MW/month in 2025, providing a window for rapid scaling.
Installation Targets - While currently low (0.7 GWh in 2025), storage capacity is expected to reach 2 GWh by 2026. This pace must accelerate.
Policy to Implementation - There is an urgent need to transition from "policy announcements" to the actual commissioning of projects.
Mandatory Pairing - Future solar projects should ideally be paired with Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) from the tender stage to ensure "round-the-clock" (RTC) renewable supply.

Conclusion

India's solar story is currently a tale of two cities - daytime abundance and evening scarcity. To secure grid stability and economic efficiency, the nation must pivot its strategy toward energy storage. Falling battery costs provide the perfect economic incentive, but the execution must match the urgency of climate and demand pressures. Only by integrating storage can solar move from being a "daytime supplement" to a "round-the-clock" pillar of India's energy security.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/building-bridges-on-indias-solar-generation-battery-storage/article70943412.ece

Question

"Despite a record-breaking surge in installed capacity, India's solar sector is increasingly described as a 'half-built bridge.' Examine the factors leading to the underutilization of solar energy and the economic implications of grid curtailment in the current energy landscape." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's energy transition reached a milestone on April 25, 2026, when solar power met a historic 21.5% of afternoon peak demand. However, this success is eclipsed by a "half-built bridge" reality - solar energy contributed only 10.8% to total daily generation and a negligible 0.1% during the critical evening peak.

2. Factors Leading to Underutilization

The "Examine" lens reveals several structural bottlenecks -
The Storage Deficit - The core constraint is not land or solar panels but a lack of battery infrastructure. While solar performs strongly in the daytime, it cannot meet the reliability requirements of the evening grid without massive storage.
Capacity-Generation Mismatch - While Solar's share in installed capacity rose significantly from ~15% (2022) to ~28% (2026), the actual effective output has only reached 10.8%. This indicates that adding hardware has not translated proportionately into grid-ready supply.

Grid Integration Hurdles - Without storage, excess solar power generated during peak sun hours often cannot be utilized later, forcing states to "curtail" supply to maintain grid stability.

3. Economic Implications of Curtailment

Curtailment—the intentional reduction of output—imposes a heavy burden on public and private finances -

Wasted Energy Potential - In 2025 alone, India curtailed 2.3 TWh of solar energy, equivalent to 18% of an average monthly solar output.

Financial Drain - Under many power purchase agreements, producers are still compensated for curtailed power, forcing the public exchequer to pay for electricity that was never consumed.

Compounded Climatic Risk - A below-normal monsoon outlook for 2026 threatens to spike demand while potentially reducing hydro-balancing options, making solar inefficiencies even more costly.

4. Way Forward

The transition must shift from simple capacity addition to systemic execution -

Leveraging Falling Costs - Battery costs have plummeted from ₹2.21 lakh to ₹1.48 lakh per MW/month in 2025, offering an opportunity to scale storage.

Installation Focus - The expected rise to 2 GWh of installed storage by the end of 2026 must be prioritized to ensure solar projects are "bridgeable" to nighttime demand.

Conclusion

The 2026 energy crisis highlights that solar expansion without storage remains an incomplete solution. To ensure sustainable and cost-effective energy security, India must accelerate the integration of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and move beyond policy announcements to actual grid-level execution. Bridging this gap is essential to transforming solar from a "daytime supplement" into a reliable, round-the-clock pillar of national infrastructure.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/building-bridges-on-indias-solar-generation-battery-storage/article70943412.ece

2. Pollution shift - Delhi's air quality dashboard shows rise in Ozone as NO2, CO decline (IE)

GS Paper III - Environment

Topic - Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Sub-Topic - Air Quality Trends, Secondary Pollutants (Ozone), and Governance Frameworks (NCAP/BS-VI)

1. Introduction

Recent data from a new air quality dashboard, based on Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) records as of May 2026, reveals a paradigm shift in urban air quality. While long-term trends show a decline in traditional combustion-related pollutants such as Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2) and Carbon Monoxide (CO), there is a concerning rise in ground-level ozone across Delhi-NCR, signaling a new and complex phase of urban atmospheric chemistry.

2. Changing Pollution Trends - Key Data Points

The pollution profile is shifting from primary emissions to secondary formations -

Decline in Primary Pollutants (2015–2025) -

1. PM2.5 - Levels dropped from 117.5 µg/m³ in 2015 to 96.4 µg/m³ in 2025.
2. PM10 - Fell from 244 µg/m³ to 197 µg/m³ in the same period.
3. NO_2 and CO - Have shown consistent declining trends due to improved fuel standards.

Rise in Secondary Pollutants (2021–2025) -

4. Ozone - Annual average ozone levels in Delhi rose from 52 µg/m³ in 2021 to 66 µg/m³ in 2025.

3. Pollutant Types and Sources

Primary Pollutants - Directly emitted from sources like vehicles, industries, construction dust, and biomass burning.

Secondary Pollutants - Formed through chemical reactions in the atmosphere. Ozone is the most prominent, formed via photochemical reactions involving precursor gases under sunlight.

Particulate Matter (PM) -

1. **PM2.5 -** Fine particles that penetrate deep into the lungs.
2. **PM10 -** Coarser particles affecting the upper respiratory tract.

4. Ground-Level Ozone - The New Challenge

Ground-level ozone is distinct from the "good" stratospheric ozone as it forms near the surface -

Formation Process - It is a photochemical reaction between NOx (Nitrogen Oxides) and VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) in the presence of strong sunlight.

Health Risks - Causes respiratory issues, lung function reduction, and aggravates asthma, particularly in children and the elderly.

Environmental Impact - Damages crops, reduces agricultural productivity, and contributes to climate change.

Control Difficulty - Because it is not directly emitted, it cannot be controlled by simple end-of-pipe emission reductions; it requires managing complex precursor interactions.

5. Seasonal and Meteorological Variability

Winter (October–February) - Sharp peaks in PM2.5 and PM10 due to temperature inversion and stagnant air that trap pollutants near the surface.

Summer (March–June) - Peak ozone levels due to intense sunlight and high temperatures.

Monsoon - Significant dip in levels as rainfall washes out pollutants and winds aid dispersion.

6. Governance and Policy Framework

Government Initiatives

NCAP (National Clean Air Programme) - Aims for a 20–30% reduction in PM pollution through city-specific action plans.

BS-VI Norms - Stricter vehicular emission standards that have successfully reduced NO_2 and CO emissions.

GRAP (Graded Response Action Plan) - Emergency measures (e.g., construction bans) triggered during severe pollution episodes.

Governance Challenges

Fragmented Governance - Multiple agencies leading to coordination gaps.

Regional Nature - Pollution in Delhi is heavily influenced by nearby NCR cities (Noida, Ghaziabad, Meerut), where trends are often worsening.

Construction Dust - Rapid urbanization without adequate dust regulation keeps PM10 levels high.

7. Way Forward

Integrated Strategy - Policies must move beyond primary pollutants to address the chemical precursors of ozone.

Regional Cooperation - Strengthening coordination among NCR states through a unified framework (Cooperative Federalism).

Technological Solutions - Aggressive promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs), clean energy, and advanced dust-control tech.

Public Awareness - Increasing awareness regarding ozone risks to foster behavioral changes among citizens.

Conclusion

While Delhi-NCR has made progress in curbing traditional pollutants through BS-VI and NCAP, the emergence of ozone as a dominant summer pollutant represents a shift toward more complex atmospheric challenges. A comprehensive, adaptive, and regional policy approach is essential to manage these evolving pollution dynamics and ensure long-term urban sustainability.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/pollution-shift-delhis-air-quality-dashboard-shows-rise-in-ozone-as-no2-co-decline-10674852/

Question

"The air pollution profile of Delhi-NCR is witnessing a transition from primary combustion-related emissions to a more complex challenge of secondary pollutants. Analyse the factors behind the rising levels of ground-level ozone and the limitations of current policy frameworks in addressing this shift." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Recent air quality data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) highlights a significant shift in Delhi-NCR's atmospheric trends. While traditional primary pollutants like nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) and carbon monoxide (CO) are declining due to stricter fuel standards, ground-level ozone is emerging as a critical secondary pollutant, with annual averages rising from 52 µg/m³ in 2021 to 66 µg/m³ in 2025.

2. Factors Behind the Rise of Ground-Level Ozone

Ground-level ozone is not directly emitted but is formed through complex atmospheric processes -

Photochemical Reactions - Ozone forms when precursor gases like Nitrogen Oxides (NOx) and Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) react in the presence of strong sunlight.

Seasonal Dynamics - Unlike winter smog driven by PM2.5, ozone peaks during the hot and sunny summer months (March–June), creating a new seasonal pollution window.

Declining Primary Pollutants - The success of BS-VI norms and cleaner fuels has reduced NO_2 and CO, yet the remaining precursors still interact under intense solar radiation to accelerate ozone formation.

Regional Influence - Pollution is not localized; worsening conditions in NCR cities like Meerut and Noida contribute to a regional "pool" of precursors that facilitate ozone production across the corridor.

3. Limitations of Current Policy Frameworks

Current governance structures face several hurdles in tackling this secondary pollutant -

Focus on Primary Pollutants - National initiatives like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) primarily target Particulate Matter (PM) reductions (20–30%), often overlooking secondary gases like ozone.

Control Complexity - Because ozone is not released directly, it cannot be managed through simple emission-reduction technology at the source; it requires integrated management of multiple precursor gases.

Fragmented Governance - Air quality management is split across multiple agencies, leading to coordination gaps that hinder the multi-sectoral approach needed for ozone control.

Regional vs. City-level Action - Existing policies often focus on city-specific plans, whereas ozone formation is a regional phenomenon requiring coordinated action across state boundaries.

4. Way Forward

To address this shift, a multi-pronged strategy is essential -

Integrated Pollution Control - Policies must address primary and secondary pollutants simultaneously by reducing both NOx and VOCs.

Regional Cooperation - Strengthening the unified policy framework among NCR states to manage pollution as a single "airshed".

Public Awareness - Increasing communication regarding the distinct health risks of ozone, which affects lung function and aggravates asthma differently than particulate matter.

Conclusion

The transition of Delhi's pollution profile from primary emissions to complex secondary chemistry like ozone signals a new era of environmental challenges. While progress in reducing NO_2 and PM levels is commendable, the rising ozone threat necessitates a more comprehensive, adaptive, and scientifically driven policy approach to safeguard urban health and agricultural productivity.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/pollution-shift-delhis-air-quality-dashboard-shows-rise-in-ozone-as-no2-co-decline-10674852/

3. Can the WTO get back on track? (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic - Important international institutions and agreements
Sub-Topic - India's interests in international trade negotiations

Introduction

The World Trade Organization (WTO), once regarded as the backbone of rules-based global trade, is facing one of its deepest crises. The recent Ministerial Conference at Yaoundé reflected growing divisions among developed and developing countries over agriculture, fisheries, digital trade, subsidies, and dispute settlement reforms. The deadlock raises concerns about the future relevance of multilateral trade governance.

1. Why the WTO Matters

Foundation of Global Trade Governance

1. The WTO provides a rules-based framework for international trade relations among member countries.
2. It helps reduce arbitrary trade barriers and promotes predictability in global commerce.
3. The organisation acts as a forum for trade negotiations and dispute settlement.

Importance for Developing Countries

1. Developing economies depend on multilateral rules to prevent domination by stronger economies.
2. WTO norms provide smaller countries legal mechanisms to challenge unfair trade practices.

2. Major Outcomes and Deadlocks at the Ministerial Conference

Failure to Achieve Consensus

1. Member countries failed to reach meaningful agreements on several core trade issues.
2. Negotiations reflected deep geopolitical and economic divisions within the global trading system.

Deadlock on Agriculture

1. Developing countries demanded flexibility in public stockholding and food security support.
2. Developed economies pushed for stricter subsidy disciplines.

Dispute over Fisheries Subsidies

1. Members could not fully resolve concerns relating to harmful fisheries subsidies.
2. Coastal developing countries argued for policy space to protect livelihoods.

Electronic Commerce Moratorium Debate

1. Several countries opposed indefinite continuation of customs duty exemptions on electronic transmissions.
2. Concerns emerged regarding revenue losses and policy constraints in the digital economy.

3. Structural Crisis Facing the WTO

Weakening of Multilateralism

1. Countries increasingly prefer bilateral and regional trade agreements over WTO-led negotiations.
2. Consensus-based decision-making has slowed reforms significantly.

Paralysis of Dispute Settlement Mechanism

1. The Appellate Body crisis has weakened the WTO's enforcement credibility.
2. Lack of functional dispute resolution reduces confidence in rules-based trade governance.

Rise of Protectionism

1. Strategic competition among major powers has increased tariff barriers and industrial subsidies.
2. Trade is increasingly linked with geopolitical considerations and national security concerns.

4. Role of Major Powers in the Crisis

United States

1. The US has criticised the WTO's dispute settlement process and treatment of developing country status.
2. It has increasingly pursued unilateral trade measures.

China

1. China's state-supported economic model has generated tensions regarding subsidies and market access.

European Union

1. The EU supports reform but seeks stronger regulatory frameworks on sustainability and trade standards.

5. Implications for India

Opportunities

1. India can position itself as a leading voice of the Global South in trade negotiations.
2. Greater flexibility in agriculture and industrial policy may support domestic development goals.

Challenges

1. Export-oriented sectors may face uncertainty due to weakening multilateral trade norms.
2. Fragmentation of global trade could reduce market access opportunities.

India's Key Concerns

1. Food security and public stockholding.
2. Policy flexibility for digital trade and industrial development.
3. Preservation of Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) provisions for developing countries.

6. Why WTO Reform is Necessary

Restoring Credibility

1. A functional dispute settlement system is essential for enforcing trade rules.

Adapting to New Trade Realities

1. The WTO framework must address digital trade, supply chains, climate-linked regulations, and emerging technologies.

Protecting Developing Country Interests

1. Reforms should ensure fairness and policy space for development-oriented strategies.

7. Challenges to WTO Reform

Consensus-Based System

1. Every member has significant negotiating power, making reform extremely difficult.

Divergent National Interests

1. Developed and developing countries have conflicting priorities on subsidies, digital trade, and market access.

Geopolitical Rivalries

1. Strategic competition between major powers increasingly affects economic negotiations.

8. Way Forward

Reforming the Dispute Settlement Mechanism

1. Restore and modernise the Appellate Body system.

Flexible Multilateralism

1. Encourage issue-based plurilateral agreements without undermining inclusiveness.

Strengthening Developmental Concerns

1. Ensure food security, livelihood protection, and industrialisation concerns of developing countries are addressed.

Digital Trade Governance

1. Develop balanced rules for e-commerce, data flows, and digital taxation.

Rebuilding Trust in Multilateralism

1. Major powers must avoid excessive unilateralism and protectionism.

Conclusion

The WTO stands at a critical crossroads. Without meaningful reforms, the organisation risks losing relevance in a fragmented and protectionist global economy. Reviving the WTO requires balancing efficiency, fairness, and developmental priorities while restoring confidence in multilateral cooperation.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/can-the-wto-get-back-on-track/article70944091.ece

Question

Q. The World Trade Organization is facing a deep crisis of legitimacy and effectiveness. Examine the reasons behind the present deadlock and discuss the reforms needed to revitalise the WTO. (250 words)

Introduction

The WTO has played a central role in promoting rules-based global trade since 1995. However, growing geopolitical tensions, protectionism, and institutional paralysis have pushed the organisation into a serious crisis.

Reasons Behind the WTO Deadlock

1. Consensus-based decision-making has slowed negotiations and reforms.
2. The dispute settlement mechanism remains weakened due to the Appellate Body crisis.
3. Developed and developing countries disagree on subsidies, agriculture, and Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT).
4. Rising protectionism and strategic rivalries have undermined multilateral cooperation.
5. Increasing preference for bilateral and regional trade agreements has reduced WTO centrality.

Implications

1. Weakening of rules-based trade governance increases uncertainty in global commerce.
2. Smaller and developing countries may face disadvantages against major economic powers.
3. Fragmentation of global trade can affect supply chains and economic growth.

Reforms Needed

1. Restore the dispute settlement mechanism and Appellate Body.
2. Modernise WTO rules for digital trade, climate measures, and supply chains.
3. Ensure balanced treatment of developmental concerns and food security issues.
4. Promote flexible plurilateral agreements while preserving multilateral principles.
5. Strengthen transparency and trust among member states.

Conclusion

Revitalising the WTO is essential for preserving a fair and predictable global trading system. Sustainable reform requires balancing the interests of developed and developing countries while reaffirming commitment to multilateral cooperation.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/can-the-wto-get-back-on-track/article70944091.ece

4. Why We Need a New Information World Order (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Science and Technology/Internal Security
Topic - Important international institutions and agreements
Sub-Topic - India's interests in international trade negotiations

Introduction

The modern world is witnessing an unprecedented explosion of information through digital platforms, artificial intelligence, social media, and instant communication technologies. While information access has expanded enormously, the ability of societies to distinguish truth from manipulation has weakened. This has created a crisis not merely of communication, but of trust, clarity, and democratic stability, leading to calls for a new global information order.

1. Meaning of a "New Information World Order"

Concept

1. A New Information World Order refers to a global framework that ensures fair, reliable, transparent, and ethical flow of information.
2. It seeks to balance freedom of expression with accountability, accuracy, and public trust.

Need for the Idea

1. Existing information systems were designed for slower and more centralised communication structures.
2. Digital technologies have fundamentally transformed how information is produced, distributed, and consumed.

2. Nature of the Present Information Crisis

Information Overload

1. Individuals are exposed to enormous volumes of information every day.
2. Excessive information often creates confusion rather than clarity.

Blurring of Truth and Opinion

1. Facts, opinions, propaganda, satire, and misinformation increasingly appear together in digital ecosystems.

Speed Over Verification

1. Social media prioritises rapid dissemination over accuracy and fact-checking.

3. Role of Technology in the Crisis

Social Media Algorithms

1. Platforms amplify emotionally charged and polarising content to maximise engagement.
2. Echo chambers reduce exposure to diverse perspectives.

Artificial Intelligence and Deepfakes

1. AI-generated content can manipulate public opinion and spread convincing false narratives.

Virality Culture

1. Content spreads based on emotional appeal rather than factual accuracy.

4. Democratic and Social Implications

Erosion of Public Trust

1. Citizens lose confidence in institutions, media, and governance systems.

Polarisation of Society

1. Misinformation intensifies social, ideological, and political divisions.

Threat to Democratic Processes

1. Elections, policymaking, and public debates can be influenced through manipulated narratives.

Weakening of Informed Citizenship

1. Democracies depend on informed citizens capable of rational public discussion.

5. Geopolitical Dimension of Information Warfare

Strategic Use of Information

1. States increasingly use cyber campaigns, propaganda, and disinformation as strategic tools.

Hybrid Warfare

1. Information manipulation has become part of broader geopolitical conflicts.

Global Fragmentation of Narratives

1. Competing national narratives create mistrust and weaken international cooperation.

6. Challenges in Creating a New Information Order

Balancing Freedom and Regulation

1. Excessive regulation may threaten free speech and democratic rights.

Cross-Border Nature of Digital Platforms

1. Information flows transcend national jurisdictions.

Corporate Dominance

1. A few large technology companies control global information ecosystems.

Technological Complexity

1. Rapidly evolving AI tools outpace regulatory frameworks.

7. Principles for a New Information World Order

Transparency

1. Algorithms and content moderation systems should be more transparent.

Accountability

1. Digital platforms must take responsibility for harmful misinformation.

Media Literacy

1. Citizens should be equipped to critically evaluate digital content.

Ethical AI Governance

1. AI systems must include safeguards against manipulation and disinformation.

Protection of Democratic Values

1. Free expression and open debate must remain protected.

8. India's Relevance and Role

Large Digital Democracy

1. India has one of the world's largest internet and social media user bases.

Vulnerability to Misinformation

1. Diverse linguistic and social environments increase challenges of fake news management.

Policy Importance

1. India must strengthen digital literacy, cyber governance, and institutional credibility.

Global Leadership Opportunity

1. India can contribute to international norms on ethical digital governance.

9. Way Forward

Strengthen Independent Journalism

1. Promote fact-based public discourse and media ethics.

Improve Digital Literacy

1. Citizens should learn to verify information and identify misinformation.

International Cooperation

1. Countries must collaborate on AI governance and cyber norms.

Platform Responsibility

1. Technology companies should ensure transparency and reduce algorithmic amplification of harmful content.

Conclusion

The modern information crisis is not merely about excessive data but about the weakening of shared truth and trust. Building a new information world order requires balancing freedom, accountability, ethics, and technological innovation to protect democratic societies in the digital age.
Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/why-we-need-a-new-information-world-order

Question

Q. "The contemporary information crisis is not merely a technological challenge but a democratic and governance challenge." Discuss the need for a new information world order in the age of artificial intelligence and social media. (250 words)

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies, social media, and artificial intelligence has transformed global communication systems. However, the spread of misinformation and manipulation has created a crisis of trust and democratic stability.

Nature of the Information Crisis

1. Social media platforms prioritise virality and emotional engagement over factual accuracy.
2. AI-generated content and deepfakes make misinformation more sophisticated.
3. Information overload weakens citizens' ability to distinguish facts from propaganda.

Democratic and Governance Challenges

1. Public trust in institutions and media declines.
2. Social and political polarisation increases.
3. Democratic processes can be manipulated through disinformation campaigns.
4. Governance becomes difficult in environments shaped by misinformation.

Need for a New Information World Order

1. Ensure transparency and accountability in digital platforms.
2. Promote ethical governance of artificial intelligence.
3. Strengthen media literacy and fact-checking mechanisms.
4. Encourage international cooperation on cyber and information governance.
5. Protect democratic freedoms while preventing harmful manipulation.

Conclusion

The information ecosystem has become central to democracy, governance, and international security. A balanced and ethical information order is essential to preserve trust, informed citizenship, and democratic resilience in the digital age.
Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/why-we-need-a-new-information-world-order

Editorial of the Day – 07.05.2026

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1. **Fixing structural deficits in India's health system (TH)** -01
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1. Fixing structural deficits in India's health system (TH)

GS Paper II - Social Justice
Topic - Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
Sub-Topic - Human Resources for Health (HRH).

1. Introduction

Despite India's aggressive push to expand medical education—approving record numbers of seats for the 2025-26 academic year—the "bricks-and-mortar" growth has not translated into "stethoscopes-on-ground." The public health system remains crippled by a structural deficit, particularly at the secondary level, where the shortage of specialists in rural areas has reached an alarming 79.9%.

2. Expansion of Medical Education - Numbers vs. Impact

On March 11, 2026, the government sanctioned a significant increase in medical seats -
Capacity Increase - 43 new medical colleges were established, adding 11,682 MBBS seats and 8,967 postgraduate (PG) seats for the 2025-26 session.
The Private Sector Gap - A majority of these new institutions are in the private sector. Unlike government colleges, these have no mandate to provide doctors for public service or rural bonds.
Policy Disconnect - There is currently no integrated national policy to ensure that this surge in specialists is funnelled into filling the vacancies in public hospitals and Community Health Centres (CHCs).

3. The Specialist Crisis in Rural India

The shortage is most acute at the Community Health Centre (CHC) level, which serves as the first point of specialized care -
The Statistics - Against a requirement of 21,964 specialists, only 4,413 are currently available in rural CHCs nationwide—a 79.9% vacancy rate.
Stagnant Progress - Despite the steady increase in PG seats since 2014, the specialist shortfall in rural areas has remained virtually unchanged for over a decade.
Patient Burden - This gap forces the rural and tribal poor to travel long distances to district hospitals or private clinics, often leading to debt or delayed treatment.

4. Root Causes of Physician Reluctance

Specialists often avoid rural postings due to a lack of an "enabling environment" -
Infrastructure Deficits - A lack of essential medical equipment, diagnostic tools, and reliable electricity makes specialized practice (like surgery or paediatrics) nearly impossible.
Living Conditions - Inadequate housing (staff quarters), poor schooling for children, and lack of peer medical support discourage doctors from moving their families.
Institutional Vacancies - Even premier institutes like AIIMS suffer from nearly 40% faculty vacancies, which dilutes the quality of training and research for the next generation of specialists.

5. Weaknesses in Infrastructure Planning

Fund-Driven Construction - States often build new CHCs to exhaust central grants, without a corresponding plan to staff them.

Non-Functional Centres - Out of 5,491 CHCs in India, only approximately 882 (16%) are fully functional due to the lack of specialist teams.
Budgetary Imbalance - The health budget remains skewed toward infrastructure creation (buildings), neglecting operational essentials such as medicines, emergency care maintenance, and competitive staffing.

6. Proposed Structural Reforms

Geographical Classification - PHCs and CHCs should be categorized into Normal, Difficult, and Most Difficult zones to allow for targeted, tiered incentive structures.
Incentive Bundles - Doctors in high-difficulty areas should receive -

1. Higher financial compensation.
2. Priority for future PG seats or fellowships.
3. Assured staff accommodation and better schooling facilities for dependents.

Service Linkage - Government-sponsored PG seats should be legally linked to mandatory service in CHCs or District Hospitals via enforceable service bonds.

7. Way Forward

Team-Based Posting - Instead of posting a single surgeon or paediatrician in isolation, specialists should be deployed in complete clinical teams to ensure effective healthcare delivery.
Operational Priority - Shift focus from building new centres to upgrading existing ones with functioning Operation Theatres (OTs), ICUs, and Labour Rooms.
Equitable Delivery - Strengthening the rural public health system is non-negotiable, as it remains the primary—and often only—healthcare source for India's marginalized communities.

Conclusion

India's healthcare challenge is not just a lack of seats, but a crisis of distribution and retention. Solving the structural deficit requires moving beyond "medical education as a numbers game" toward a system that values operational delivery, rural infrastructure, and human-centric incentives. Without these fixes, the expansion of medical colleges remains an expensive but incomplete solution to India's health crisis.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/fixing-structural-deficits-in-indias-health-system/article70948106.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The mere expansion of medical education and infrastructure is insufficient to address the deep-rooted structural deficits in India's rural health system. Critically evaluate the challenges in specialist retention in rural areas and suggest measures to bridge the urban-rural healthcare divide." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

While India has made significant strides in expanding medical education—approving 43 new colleges and over 20,000 seats for 2025-26—this "quantity-first" approach has failed to resolve the qualitative crisis in rural healthcare. The persistent 79.9% vacancy rate of specialists in Community Health Centres (CHCs) highlights a "half-built bridge" between medical training and rural service delivery.

2. The Challenge - Why Numbers Aren't Enough

A critical evaluation reveals that the specialist shortage is not merely a lack of doctors, but a lack of an enabling ecosystem -
Capacity-Distribution Mismatch - The surge in postgraduate (PG) seats has not moved the needle on rural vacancies because newly trained specialists gravitate toward urban private sectors.
Infrastructure Deficit - Specialists (Surgeons, Obstetricians, etc.) require functional Operation Theatres (OTs) and ICUs. Without these, their training is rendered obsolete in rural settings, leading to professional frustration.

Social and Personal Barriers - Remote postings often lack basic family infrastructure, such as quality housing and schooling for children, making them "career graveyards" for young specialists.
Policy Gaps - Private medical colleges, which form the bulk of the recent expansion, have no mandatory obligation to fill public sector vacancies, leading to a "leaky bucket" effect in human resources.

3. Infrastructure Planning - A Flawed Strategy

Building without Staffing - States often construct CHCs to utilize central funds, resulting in "ghost buildings" that lack the teams necessary to perform secondary-level care.
Fragmented Postings - Posting a lone specialist in an understaffed center is ineffective; specialized healthcare is a team-based effort requiring nurses, technicians, and peer support.

4. Suggested Measures to Bridge the Divide

To transform the structural deficit into a surplus, a multi-pronged strategy is required -
Tiered Incentive Models - Classify PHCs/CHCs into Normal, Difficult, and Most Difficult zones, providing graded financial incentives and career fast-tracking for those in high-difficulty areas.
Team-Based Deployment - Shift from individual postings to "Clinical Team Postings" to ensure that a surgeon has an anaesthetist and a scrub nurse to work with.
Binding PG Admissions - Government-sponsored PG seats should be strictly linked to vacancies in CHCs through enforceable, long-term service bonds.
Upgrading Living Standards - Prioritize "Specialist Colonies" with staff quarters and amenities to reduce the "hardship" associated with rural life.

5. Conclusion

Solving India's healthcare crisis requires moving beyond the "brick-and-mortar" expansion of colleges. True Social Justice in health will only be achieved when governance shifts focus from building infrastructure to building environments where specialists can practice effectively. Strengthening CHCs with dedicated teams and operational support is essential for an equitable and resilient national health system.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/fixing-structural-deficits-in-indias-health-system/article70948106.ece#google_vignette

2. Those forced to consume acid also entitled to state support - Why SC expanded definition of 'acid attack victim' (IE)

GS Paper II - Social Justice
Topic - Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.
Sub-Topic - * Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016.

1. Introduction

In a significant stride toward inclusive justice, the Supreme Court of India ruled on May 7, 2026, that individuals forced to ingest acid, resulting in severe internal injuries, must be recognized as "acid attack victims" under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016. This judgment, arising from a petition by survivor Shaheen Malik, moves the legal needle from a narrow focus on "visible disfigurement" to a broader understanding of "functional disability."

2. Expanding the Legal Definition

From External to Internal - The Court held that internal injuries—such as burns to the mouth, throat, and stomach—are as disabling as external scars.
Purposive Interpretation - By interpreting the statutory term "disfigured" expansively, the Court ensured that survivors with "invisible" injuries are no longer excluded from welfare benefits.
Retrospective Effect - The ruling applies retrospectively from 2016 (when the RPWD Act commenced), allowing previously denied survivors to seek legal recognition and support.

3. Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

Article 14 (Right to Equality) - The Court found it arbitrary to differentiate between victims based on the *method* of the attack (throwing vs. administering). The harm remains comparable.
Article 21 (Right to Dignity) - Access to medical care and rehabilitation is framed as a prerequisite for living a life with dignity.
Alignment with Criminal Law - The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) already treats throwing and administering acid as equivalent offenses. The Court rectified the inconsistency where welfare law was lagging behind criminal law.
International Alignment - The ruling reinforces India's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), moving from a "charity-based" to a "rights-based" model.

4. Impact on Welfare and Certification

Disability Certification - A certificate is the "entry point" for state support. Previously, those with only internal injuries were often denied these, barring them from -

1. Financial compensation and social security.
2. Reservations in education and employment.
3. Institutional healthcare and rehabilitation.

Social & Functional Recognition - The judgment recognizes that disability is a social and functional issue rather than merely an aesthetic one.

5. Systemic Concerns - Deterrence and Justice

The Court expressed grave concern over the current state of acid attack management -
Ineffective Deterrence - Existing punishments have failed to curb the crime. The Court suggested shifting the burden of proof to the accused and fixing stricter accountability on acid sellers.
Pendency of Cases - High backlogs in states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar were termed a "mockery of the system."
Acid Sale Regulation - Despite existing guidelines, the retail sale of acid remains inadequately regulated in many states.

6. Way Forward

To translate this judicial victory into systemic change, the following steps are essential -
Legislative Amendment - The government should formally amend the RPWD Act's language to explicitly include internal injuries, removing all ambiguity for local authorities.
Stricter Enforcement - Rigorous implementation of Supreme Court guidelines on the sale and distribution of corrosive substances.
Comprehensive Rehabilitation - Survivors need long-term medical, psychological, and financial support for true social reintegration.
Fast-Track Justice - Strengthening fast-track courts to ensure that the delay in trials does not prolong the trauma of survivors.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling is a masterclass in purposive interpretation, ensuring that the law serves the spirit of justice rather than the letter of a restrictive definition. By validating the trauma of internal injuries, the judiciary has not only expanded welfare access but has also reaffirmed that the constitutional promise of dignity applies to every survivor, regardless of the visibility of their scars.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/supreme-court-acid-attack-definition-rpwd-act-expansion-10675177/

Question

"The Supreme Court's inclusion of internal injuries within the definition of acid attacks reflects a transition from a 'visibility-centric' medical model to a 'dignity-centric' functional model of disability. Elucidate this shift in the light of the recent judicial interpretation of the RPWD Act, 2016." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Supreme Court delivered a landmark ruling in the *Shaheen Malik* case, holding that survivors of forced acid ingestion suffering from internal injuries must be treated as "acid attack victims" under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016. By doing so, the Court used purposive interpretation to correct a legislative gap where welfare benefits were previously restricted to those with "visible disfigurement."

2. Transition from Visibility to Functionality

The judgment elucidates a profound shift in Indian disability jurisprudence -

Beyond the Surface - Traditionally, disability was viewed through a "medical model" where only physical, visible scars qualified for state aid. The Court has now moved to a "functional model," recognizing that damage to the throat, stomach, and respiratory system is equally disabling and requires the same rehabilitative support.

Purposive Interpretation of 'Disfigured' - The Court clarified that "disfigurement" should not be interpreted narrowly as skin-deep. If an organ's function is "disfigured" or destroyed, the survivor deserves legal recognition.

Article 21 and Human Dignity - The ruling frames disability rights not as an act of state charity, but as a prerequisite for the Right to Live with Dignity. Access to healthcare and social security is essential for the reintegration of survivors into society.

3. Constitutional and Legislative Harmony

The ruling synchronizes different branches of law to ensure "Constitutional Equality" -

Article 14 Alignment - The Court noted that differentiating between a victim of "acid throwing" and "acid ingestion" is arbitrary and unreasonable, as both suffer comparable trauma and long-term disability.

Consistency with Criminal Law - The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) already penalizes both acts equally. The Court rectified the anomaly where the perpetrator was punished for both, but the victim was only compensated for one.

Retrospective Justice - By making the ruling applicable from 2016, the Court ensured that those historically excluded by technical definitions can now claim their rightful benefits.

4. Impact on Social Justice and Welfare

Entry to Welfare - A **Disability Certificate** is the gateway to reservations in employment, education, and social security. This ruling opens this door for a previously "invisible" class of survivors.

International Standards - This shift aligns India with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which emphasizes the social and functional impact of impairments over their physical appearance.

5. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling marks a significant evolution in India's social justice landscape. By validating the trauma of internal injuries, the judiciary has reasserted that the law must look beyond the "scar" to the "survivor." To fully realize this vision, the government must now ensure strict regulation of acid sales and reform the disability certification process to be more sensitive to invisible and internal injuries.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/supreme-court-acid-attack-definition-rpwd-act-expansion-10675177/

3. Freedom of Speech and Digital Democracy in India (NT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Polity and Governance
Topic - Fundamental Rights
Sub-Topic - Issues relating to democracy and accountability

Introduction

The expansion of digital platforms and social media has transformed democratic participation in India. Citizens now express political opinions, criticism, satire, and activism through online platforms. However, growing concerns regarding censorship, content takedowns, platform regulation, and restrictions on dissent have intensified debates over the future of freedom of speech in the digital age.

1. Constitutional Basis of Free Speech in India

Article 19(1)(a)

1. The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression as a Fundamental Right.
2. It enables citizens to express opinions, participate in public debate, and hold governments accountable.

Reasonable Restrictions under Article 19(2)

1. Restrictions may be imposed in the interests of sovereignty, public order, security of the state, morality, and related concerns.
2. The challenge lies in balancing liberty with national and social interests.

2. Rise of Digital Public Sphere

Social Media as Democratic Space

1. Platforms such as social media have become major arenas for political discussion and citizen participation.

Expansion of Public Voice

1. Individuals, comedians, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens can now reach mass audiences directly.

Democratisation of Communication

1. Digital platforms reduce dependence on traditional gatekeepers of information.

3. Growing Concerns Regarding Restrictions

Content Takedowns and Account Blocking

1. Governments increasingly request removal of content considered objectionable or harmful.

Chilling Effect on Expression

1. Fear of legal action, harassment, or censorship may discourage citizens from expressing critical opinions.

Ambiguity in Regulation

1. Broad or unclear definitions relating to harmful content can lead to excessive restrictions.

4. Role of Satire and Political Criticism

Importance in Democracy

1. Satire and criticism are essential components of democratic discourse.
2. They help question authority and encourage accountability.

Vulnerability to Suppression

1. Political humour and criticism are increasingly vulnerable to censorship and online targeting.

5. Big Technology Platforms and Governance

Platform Power

1. Large digital platforms possess significant influence over public discourse.

Moderation Challenges

1. Platforms must balance free expression with prevention of hate speech, misinformation, and violence.

Risk of Arbitrary Decisions

1. Content moderation policies may lack transparency and accountability.

6. Global Context of Digital Speech Regulation

International Trends

1. Democracies across the world are debating regulation of online speech and platform accountability.

Rise of Information Control

1. Governments increasingly seek stronger oversight over digital communication ecosystems.

Concern Over Democratic Backsliding

1. Excessive control over online speech may weaken democratic institutions and civic freedoms.

7. Democratic Implications

Weakening of Dissent

1. Democracies require space for criticism, opposition, and public debate.

Self-Censorship

1. Citizens may avoid expressing opinions due to fear of consequences.

Decline in Public Trust

1. Perceived suppression of speech can reduce trust in institutions and governance systems.

8. Need for Balanced Regulation

Protecting Free Speech

1. Democratic systems must preserve the right to dissent and criticise authority.

Tackling Harmful Content

1. Governments and platforms also have responsibilities to address misinformation, hate speech, and incitement.

Transparency and Due Process

1. Content moderation and takedown decisions should follow transparent procedures and accountability standards.

9. Way Forward

Clear Legal Frameworks

1. Laws governing digital speech should be precise, proportionate, and constitutionally consistent.

Independent Oversight Mechanisms

1. Regulatory systems should include judicial and institutional safeguards against misuse.

Platform Accountability

1. Technology companies should ensure fairness and transparency in moderation practices.

Strengthening Democratic Culture

- Encourage tolerance for dissent, satire, and critical public discourse.

Conclusion

Freedom of speech remains central to democratic governance. In the digital era, protecting constitutional freedoms while addressing genuine harms requires a balanced framework rooted in transparency, accountability, and democratic values.

Source - https -//www.nytimes.com/2026/05/01/opinion/india-modi-internet-censorship.html

Question

Q. "The rise of digital platforms has expanded democratic participation but also intensified debates over freedom of speech and regulation." Discuss the challenges of protecting free expression in the digital age. (250 words)

Introduction

Digital platforms have transformed communication and political participation in India. Social media enables citizens to express opinions widely, but increasing regulation and content moderation have raised concerns regarding freedom of speech.

Challenges to Free Expression

1. Content takedowns and account restrictions may create a chilling effect on dissent.
2. Broad legal provisions can lead to excessive regulation of online speech.
3. Big technology platforms exercise significant control over public discourse.
4. Misinformation and hate speech complicate the balance between liberty and regulation.

Democratic Concerns

1. Democracies depend on open criticism and public debate.
2. Fear of censorship may encourage self-censorship among citizens and journalists.
3. Restrictions on satire and criticism can weaken democratic accountability.

Measures Required

1. Ensure laws governing digital speech remain clear, proportionate, and constitutionally valid.
2. Strengthen judicial and institutional safeguards against arbitrary censorship.
3. Promote transparency in platform moderation policies.
4. Encourage media literacy and responsible digital citizenship.

Conclusion

Protecting freedom of speech in the digital age requires balancing democratic liberties with responsibilities relating to public order and misinformation. Transparent regulation and strong constitutional safeguards are essential for preserving democratic discourse.

Source - https -//www.nytimes.com/2026/05/01/opinion/india-modi-internet-censorship.html

4. Op Sindoor - No Room for Complacency (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III –Internal Security
Topic - Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security
Sub-Topic - Security forces and intelligence agencies

Introduction

Operation Sindhoor reflects India's evolving approach towards counter-terrorism and internal security, combining precision operations, intelligence coordination, and technological surveillance. While the operation demonstrated India's security capabilities, it also highlighted the need for continuous vigilance, inter-agency coordination, and adaptation to emerging terror threats. The central message is that success in one operation cannot lead to complacency in national security management.

1. Significance of Operation Sindhoor

Demonstration of India's Counter-Terror Capability

1. The operation showcased India's ability to respond decisively to terror threats.
2. It reflected increasing integration between intelligence gathering and tactical operations.

Shift Towards Precision-Based Security Responses

1. Modern operations rely more on targeted intelligence and coordinated execution rather than broad conventional responses.

Symbolic and Strategic Importance

1. Such operations reinforce deterrence and signal state capacity to counter terrorism effectively.

2. Changing Nature of Terrorism

Evolution of Terror Networks

1. Terror groups are becoming decentralised and technologically sophisticated.
2. Recruitment, financing, communication, and radicalisation increasingly occur through digital platforms.

Hybrid Threat Environment

1. Terrorism now intersects with cyber threats, organised crime, propaganda networks, and cross-border financing.

Use of Emerging Technologies

1. Encrypted communication, drones, cryptocurrencies, and AI-assisted propaganda complicate security responses.

3. Importance of Intelligence Coordination

Real-Time Information Sharing

1. Effective counter-terrorism depends on timely intelligence exchange among agencies.

Multi-Agency Cooperation

1. Coordination among intelligence agencies, police forces, military units, and cyber agencies is essential.

Predictive Security Approach

1. Modern internal security requires identifying patterns and threats before attacks occur.

4. Technological Dimension of Internal Security

Surveillance and Monitoring Systems

1. Advanced surveillance tools improve detection and tracking of suspicious activities.

Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence

1. AI and big-data analysis help identify terror financing, recruitment patterns, and communication networks.

Cyber Security Integration

1. Terror networks increasingly exploit digital vulnerabilities for propaganda and coordination.

5. External Dimensions of Terrorism

Cross-Border Support Networks

1. Terror organisations may receive logistical, financial, or ideological support from external actors.

Role of State and Non-State Actors

1. Proxy warfare and covert support structures complicate regional security environments.

Geopolitical Context

1. Regional instability can strengthen extremist networks and facilitate cross-border infiltration.

6. Challenges Before India

Radicalisation

1. Online radicalisation increases vulnerability among youth populations.

Urban Security Risks

1. Dense urban environments create complex security challenges.

Coordination Gaps

1. Institutional fragmentation can delay response and intelligence integration.

Technological Adaptation by Terror Groups

1. Security agencies must constantly adapt to evolving methods used by extremist organisations.

7. Need for Comprehensive Internal Security Reform

Strengthening Intelligence Infrastructure

1. Improve interoperability among agencies and databases.

Capacity Building

1. Train personnel in cyber intelligence, digital forensics, and technological surveillance.

Community Participation

1. Local communities play an important role in identifying suspicious activities and preventing radicalisation.

Legal and Institutional Reforms

1. Update legal frameworks to address cyber-enabled and transnational terrorism.

8. Way Forward

Integrated Security Architecture

1. Develop seamless coordination among intelligence, military, police, and cyber institutions.

Technology-Driven Policing

1. Expand AI-based surveillance, predictive policing, and data analytics systems.

Counter-Radicalisation Strategies

1. Promote education, digital literacy, and social inclusion to prevent extremist influence.

International Cooperation

1. Strengthen intelligence-sharing partnerships with other countries to combat global terror networks.

Conclusion

Operation Sindhoor demonstrates that internal security in the modern era requires constant adaptation, technological preparedness, and institutional coordination. In a rapidly evolving threat environment, sustained vigilance and proactive intelligence systems are essential to ensure national security.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/op-sin door--no-room-for-complacency-op-sin door--no-room-for-complacency

Question

Q. "The evolving nature of terrorism requires India to move beyond conventional security approaches." Discuss the emerging dimensions of internal security threats and suggest measures to strengthen India's counter-terror architecture. (250 words)

Introduction

India's internal security environment has become increasingly complex due to the evolution of terrorism, cyber threats, and transnational extremist networks. Modern terror groups use advanced technologies, decentralised structures, and digital platforms.

Emerging Dimensions of Internal Security Threats

1. Terror networks increasingly use encrypted communication and online radicalisation.
2. Cyber tools, drones, and cryptocurrencies are being used for coordination and financing.
3. Cross-border support networks and hybrid warfare complicate security challenges.
4. Urbanisation and digital connectivity increase vulnerability to coordinated attacks.

Need for Strong Counter-Terror Architecture

1. Real-time intelligence sharing is necessary for early threat detection.
2. Inter-agency coordination improves operational efficiency.
3. Advanced surveillance and AI-based systems strengthen preventive security.
4. Community participation helps identify radicalisation and suspicious activities.

Measures Required

1. Modernise intelligence and policing infrastructure.
2. Strengthen cyber security and digital forensics capabilities.
3. Enhance border management and international intelligence cooperation.
4. Promote counter-radicalisation through education and social inclusion.

Conclusion

India's internal security framework must continuously evolve to address emerging threats. A technology-driven, intelligence-led, and coordinated approach is essential to ensure long-term national security and resilience.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/op-sin door--no-room-for-complacency-op-sin door--no-room-for-complacency

Editorial of the Day – 08.05.2026

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1. **Building hazards - On preventing and fighting fires (TH)** -01
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1. Building hazards - On preventing and fighting fires (TH)

GS Paper III - Disaster Management / Urbanization
Topic - Disaster and Disaster Management
Sub-Topic - Urban Fire Safety, Structural Hazards, and Building Compliance

1. Introduction

The Shahdara fire accident in East Delhi, which resulted in the deaths of nine individuals and severe injuries to 15 others, has exposed critical gaps in urban fire safety. The incident underscores a lethal disconnect between residential security measures and emergency evacuation requirements, highlighting deep-seated structural and administrative shortcomings in India's urban safety systems.

2. The Shahdara Fire Incident - Overview

Structure Profile - The tragedy occurred in a residential building featuring a "stilt plus four-floor" design containing eight housing units.
Human Cost - Beyond the nine fatalities, approximately 15 residents suffered significant injuries.
Core Failure - The incident revealed that many safety-related installations unintentionally transformed into life-threatening traps during the emergency.

3. Deadly Structural and Security Obstacles

Modern security modifications frequently neglect fire safety protocols, creating "death traps" -
Electronic Lock Failure - Digital and electronic door locks failed during the power disruptions or emergency conditions, preventing residents from escaping.
Metal Grill Obstructions - Grills installed on balconies and around buildings for security blocked evacuation routes; fire personnel were forced to spend critical time cutting through them to reach victims.
Terrace Access - The building's terrace—a vital refuge and evacuation point—remained difficult to access during the heat of the rescue operation.

4. Challenges in Firefighting Infrastructure

Recent accidents in Delhi (Shahdara, Palam, and Dwarka) highlight persistent operational hurdles -
Delayed Emergency Access - In a 2025 Dwarka incident, fire engines were blocked by a society gate board; similarly, narrow urban lanes often delay response times.
Equipment Malfunction - Reports from the Shahdara and Palam incidents cited malfunctioning hydraulic lifts and a lack of specific firefighting facilities required for mixed-use structures.
Infrastructure Gaps - Earlier accidents like the Palam fire emphasized that urban buildings often lack the basic internal firefighting systems mandated by law.

5. Electrical Failures - The Primary Catalyst

Electrical faults remain the most ignored yet prevalent cause of urban fires in India -
Summer Overloading - Excessive use of air-conditioners during peak summer months overloads residential electrical systems.
Wiring Inadequacy - Unsafe or aged wiring is often unable to handle high electrical loads, causing overheating and ignition.

Failure of Protective Gear - In many cases, circuit breakers fail to trip, allowing electrical surges to transition into full-scale fires.
Capacity Mismanagement - Many households operate appliances far beyond the safe load capacity of their existing electrical infrastructure.

6. Need for Preventive Measures and Policy Shift

Authorities and citizens must move from reactive firefighting to proactive prevention -
Shift in Focus - While there is a push for advanced technologies like drones and robots, basic preventive measures—such as regular wiring inspections—remain neglected.
Regular Audits - There is an urgent need for mandatory electrical and fire safety audits for residential buildings.
Building Compliance - Strengthening building regulations to ensure that security features (like grills and electronic locks) do not compromise evacuation routes.

7. Conclusion

The frequent recurrence of urban fire tragedies reveals a need for comprehensive reform in building regulations and electrical safety standards. Ensuring regular audits, enhancing the operational capacity of fire services, and fostering a culture of fire prevention are essential steps to safeguard urban lives and prevent future catastrophes.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/building-hazards-on-preventing-and-fighting-fires/article70952516.ece

Question

"Recent urban fire tragedies in India highlight a lethal disconnect between residential security modifications and emergency evacuation protocols. Analyse the structural and systemic factors that transform modern urban dwellings into fire traps and suggest a framework for enhancing fire resilience." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Shahdara fire tragedy in East Delhi, which claimed nine lives in May 2026, serves as a grim case study of urban vulnerability. It underscores how poor emergency evacuation planning, combined with neglected electrical safety, continues to endanger lives in densely populated residential structures.

2. Factors Transforming Buildings into "Fire Traps"

The analysis of recent tragedies reveals several structural and systemic failures -
Security vs. Safety Conflict - Residential modifications often prioritize security over fire safety. For example, metal grills on balconies and around buildings—intended to deter theft—obstruct vital evacuation routes and delay firefighting operations by requiring specialized cutting equipment.
Technological Failures - Modern installations like electronic door locks can become deadly obstacles during power failures or heat-induced malfunctions, trapping residents inside burning housing units.
Infrastructure Deficits - Mixed-use and stilt-plus-four residential structures often lack the internal firefighting systems, accessible terraces, and hydraulic-friendly layouts mandated by safety standards.
Electrical Overloading - During summers, the excessive use of air-conditioners frequently overloads aged or substandard wiring. This causes overheating, and in many cases, protective circuit breakers fail to trip, leading to catastrophic fires.

3. Challenges in Emergency Response

Access Barriers - Narrow lanes and obstructing society gate boards frequently prevent large fire engines from reaching the site during the "golden hour."
Operational Readiness - Malfunctioning equipment, such as hydraulic lifts, and a lack of specific firefighting facilities in high-density areas hamper rescue efficiency.

4. Framework for Enhancing Fire Resilience

A proactive shift from reactive firefighting to preventive resilience is required -

Mandatory Audits - Periodic electrical and fire safety audits should be compulsory for all multi-story residential buildings.
Building Compliance - Regulations must ensure that security features (like grills or digital locks) are "emergency-compliant"—for instance, requiring manual overrides or collapsible designs.
Upgrading Electrical Norms - Strengthening electrical safety standards and ensuring households adhere to safe load capacities through smart-meter monitoring.
Community Preparedness - Regular fire drills and training for residents on using basic fire safety mechanisms and evacuation routes.

Conclusion

Urban fire safety in India suffers from deep structural and administrative shortcomings. While advanced technologies like firefighting drones are beneficial, the priority must remain on basic preventive measures, strict building compliance, and regular safety audits. Only through a holistic integration of security and safety can urban living be made truly resilient to fire hazards.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/building-hazards-on-preventing-and-fighting-fires/article70952516.ece

2. In potential collapse of a key ocean current, consequences for world and India (IE)

GS Paper I - Geography (Physical Geography)
Topic - Important Geophysical phenomena; Environmental pollution and degradation
Sub-Topic - Ocean Currents (AMOC), Climate Change Tipping Points, Monsoon Dynamics, and Food Security

1. Introduction

Recent scientific warnings indicate that the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) could weaken by nearly 59% by 2100 due to anthropogenic climate change. This slowdown represents a critical "climatic tipping point" that threatens to disrupt global heat redistribution, accelerate sea-level rise, and fundamentally destabilize the Indian monsoon system.

2. Understanding the AMOC System

The AMOC is a vital component of the Earth's climate regulation mechanism -
Global Ocean Conveyor Belt - It functions as a massive system carrying warm surface water northward and cold deep water southward, maintaining the planet's energy balance.
Thermohaline Circulation - The system is driven by differences in temperature (thermo) and salinity (hyaline). Cold, saline water becomes denser and sinks in the North Atlantic, driving deep ocean currents.
Heat Redistribution - By transporting tropical heat to northern latitudes, the AMOC ensures Western Europe experiences mild winters despite its high latitude.
Temporal Scale - While it influences long-term stability, a single parcel of water can take approximately 1,000 years to complete one full cycle.

3. Climate Change and the "Tipping Point"

Global warming is pushing the AMOC toward an irreversible collapse -
Arctic Ice Melt - Rapid melting of Greenland and Arctic ice sheets increases the influx of freshwater into the North Atlantic.
Salinity Reduction - Freshwater lowers ocean salinity, making water lighter. This prevents it from sinking efficiently, thereby weakening the "engine" of the circulation.
Irreversibility - Scientists classify the AMOC as a "tipping element"; once a critical threshold is crossed, the system may collapse into a permanently weaker state.

4. Interconnection with El Niño

The disruption of the Atlantic affects the Pacific through interconnected systems -

El Niño Destabilization - A weaker AMOC may intensify and destabilize El Niño events.
Historical Context - Strong El Niño years, such as 2015–16 and 2023–24, have historically caused rainfall deficits and agricultural stress in India.
Compound Risks - The simultaneous weakening of the AMOC and strengthening of El Niño events can amplify extreme weather, making seasonal forecasting highly uncertain.

5. Implications for the Indian Monsoon

The AMOC collapse poses a direct threat to India's primary weather driver -
Tropical Rain Belt Shift - A slowing AMOC may shift tropical rainfall belts southward, weakening moisture-bearing winds from the Arabian Sea toward India.
Reduced Rainfall - India could face shorter wet seasons, prolonged dry spells, and increased drought frequency in rain-fed regions.
Extreme Variability - Monsoon behaviour may become more erratic, characterized by alternating cycles of destructive floods and severe cloudbursts

6. Socio-Economic Impacts on India

Agricultural Vulnerability - Major crops like rice, pulses, and cotton depend on the monsoon; reduced productivity threatens the incomes of millions of farmers.
Water Stress - Lower rainfall diminishes reservoir levels and groundwater recharge, intensifying urban and rural water crises.
Inflationary Pressures - A drop in agricultural output leads to higher food prices, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations.
Economic Stability - Despite diversification, India's GDP growth remains sensitive to monsoon performance and climate-induced disruptions in hydropower.

7. Global Consequences

Coastal Threats - Slowdown can increase sea levels along North America's eastern coast, worsening flooding and erosion.
Ecosystem Disruption - Changes in nutrient transport may severely impact marine biodiversity and global fisheries.
Climate Migration - Severe disruptions can trigger mass displacement, creating humanitarian and geopolitical challenges.

8. India's Response and Way Forward

Existing Policy Measures

NAPCC - India's National Action Plan on Climate Change focuses on sustainable agriculture and ecosystem protection.
Early Warning - Institutions like the IMD are upgrading weather forecasting to mitigate losses from extreme events.
Renewable Expansion - Rapidly increasing solar and wind capacity to meet Paris Agreement commitments.

Strategic Recommendations

Advanced Modelling - Invest in high-resolution oceanographic systems to understand long-term monsoon changes.
Resilient Agriculture - Promote drought-resistant crops and precision irrigation to reduce vulnerability.
Integrated Water Management - Prioritize the conservation of wetlands and groundwater for future resilience.
Global Diplomacy - Strengthen international collaboration to reduce emissions and prevent dangerous tipping points.

Conclusion

The AMOC is a stark reminder of the Earth's interconnectedness. Although a physical phenomenon cantered in the Atlantic, its disruption represents a systemic threat to India's food security,

economic growth, and disaster profile. Proactive adaptation and global climate cooperation are the only pathways to safeguard environmental stability.
Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260508/282157887868392

Question

"The potential collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is cited as a major 'tipping element' in global climate stability. Examine the factors driving this weakening and its specific implications for India's food and water security." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Recent oceanographic research warns that the AMOC, a critical heat redistribution system, could weaken by 59% by 2100. This slowdown is increasingly viewed as an irreversible "tipping point" that could destabilize global weather systems, with profound consequences for the Indian subcontinent.

2. Factors Driving AMOC Weakening

Arctic Ice Melt - Rising temperatures are accelerating the melting of Greenland and Arctic ice sheets, pouring massive volumes of freshwater into the North Atlantic.
Salinity Reduction - Freshwater dilution lowers ocean salinity, making water lighter and preventing the dense, cold water from sinking efficiently.
Thermohaline Disruption - Since AMOC is driven by temperature and salinity differences (thermohaline circulation), the loss of water density breaks the "sinking mechanism" that powers the global conveyor belt.

3. Implications for India's Water and Food Security

The weakening of the AMOC triggers a cascade of climate disruptions that directly impact India -
Monsoon Destabilization - A slowing AMOC may shift tropical rain belts southward, weakening the moisture-bearing winds from the Arabian Sea and resulting in shorter wet seasons or prolonged dry spells.
Agricultural Vulnerability - Crops like rice, pulses, and cotton are highly monsoon-dependent; erratic rainfall and droughts can significantly reduce productivity and threaten farmer incomes.
Water Stress - Reduced precipitation affects reservoir levels and groundwater recharge, exacerbating existing water crises in both rural and urban India.
Economic Pressure - Lower agricultural output triggers food inflation and impacts GDP growth, which remains sensitive to monsoon performance.

4. Conclusion

Examining the AMOC reveal that it is a systemic threat that transcends geographical boundaries. To safeguard its climate security, India must prioritize climate-resilient agriculture, integrated water management, and advanced oceanographic modelling to better predict and adapt to these long-term shifts.
Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260508/282157887868392

3. Helping MSMEs Cope with ESG Compliance (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - MSMEs and industrial growth
Sub-Topic - Environmental conservation and sustainable development

Introduction

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards are becoming increasingly important in global trade, finance, and supply chains. Large corporations and international buyers now expect suppliers to meet sustainability and governance requirements. While Indian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are critical to employment and manufacturing, many face difficulties in adapting to ESG compliance due to financial, technological, and institutional constraints.

1. What is ESG Compliance?

Environmental Dimension

1. Focuses on carbon emissions, energy efficiency, pollution control, waste management, and sustainable resource use.

Social Dimension

1. Includes labour welfare, workplace safety, gender inclusion, and community responsibility.

Governance Dimension

1. Relates to transparency, ethical business practices, accountability, and compliance systems.

2. Why ESG Matters for MSMEs

Global Trade Requirements

1. International buyers increasingly require ESG-certified suppliers.
2. ESG compliance is becoming necessary for participation in global value chains.

Access to Finance

1. Banks and investors are prioritising sustainable and low-risk businesses.
2. ESG-compliant firms may receive better financing opportunities.

Market Competitiveness

1. Sustainable production improves brand reputation and long-term resilience.

3. Importance of MSMEs in India

1. MSMEs contribute significantly to employment, exports, and manufacturing output.
2. They support regional development and inclusive economic growth.
3. Many MSMEs are integrated into domestic and global supply chains.

4. Challenges Faced by MSMEs in ESG Compliance

Financial Constraints

1. Small firms often lack resources for clean technologies and compliance systems.

Technological Limitations

1. Many MSMEs use outdated production methods with high energy intensity.

Limited Awareness and Capacity

1. Smaller enterprises may not fully understand ESG standards and reporting requirements.

Compliance Costs

1. Audits, certifications, and reporting mechanisms increase operational expenses.

Supply Chain Pressures

1. Large corporations increasingly transfer ESG obligations onto smaller suppliers.

5. Environmental Challenges Specific to MSMEs

1. High dependence on fossil fuels and inefficient machinery.
2. Poor waste management and resource inefficiency in many sectors.
3. Limited access to renewable energy and green technologies.

6. Role of Government and Institutions

Policy Support

1. Government schemes can support green technology adoption and sustainability transitions.

Financial Assistance

1. Blended finance, green credit, and concessional loans can reduce compliance burdens.

Cluster-Based Approaches

1. Common infrastructure for waste management, renewable energy, and auditing can reduce costs.

Capacity Building

1. Training and awareness programmes are necessary for ESG preparedness.

7. Opportunities from ESG Transition

Export Competitiveness

1. ESG compliance can improve access to global markets.

Innovation and Productivity

1. Cleaner technologies often improve efficiency and reduce waste.

Long-Term Sustainability

1. ESG-oriented MSMEs may become more resilient to future regulatory and market changes.

8. India's Strategic Importance

Global Supply Chain Realignment

1. India aims to position itself as a trusted manufacturing destination.
2. ESG compliance strengthens India's credibility in international trade networks.

Climate Commitments

1. MSME sustainability transitions support India's climate and net-zero goals.

9. Way Forward

Affordable Green Finance

1. Expand concessional credit and green financing mechanisms for MSMEs.

Shared Infrastructure Models

1. Promote industrial clusters with common sustainability infrastructure.

Simplified Compliance Frameworks

1. Develop MSME-friendly ESG reporting and certification systems.

Technology Support

1. Encourage energy-efficient machinery and renewable energy adoption.

Public-Private Collaboration

1. Governments, industry associations, and large corporations should jointly support MSME transitions.

Conclusion

ESG compliance is no longer optional in the evolving global economic system. Supporting MSMEs through finance, technology, institutional assistance, and simplified compliance frameworks is essential for ensuring sustainable industrial growth and maintaining India's competitiveness in global markets.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/helping-msmes-cope-with-esg-compliance/article70952082.ece

Question

Q. "Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards are becoming central to global trade and investment." Discuss the challenges faced by Indian MSMEs in adapting to ESG compliance and suggest measures to support their transition. (250 words)

Introduction

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards increasingly influence global trade, investment, and supply chains. Indian MSMEs, despite their economic importance, face significant challenges in meeting these standards.

Challenges Faced by MSMEs

1. Limited financial capacity restricts investment in green technologies.
2. Lack of awareness and technical expertise affects ESG preparedness.
3. Certification and reporting requirements increase compliance costs.
4. Dependence on outdated technologies leads to environmental inefficiencies.
5. Large corporations increasingly impose ESG obligations on smaller suppliers.

Importance of Supporting ESG Transition

1. ESG compliance improves export competitiveness and supply-chain integration.
2. Sustainable production increases long-term resilience and efficiency.

3. MSME transition supports India's climate commitments and green growth strategy.

Measures Required

1. Provide concessional green finance and blended financing support.
2. Promote cluster-based common infrastructure for sustainability compliance.
3. Simplify ESG reporting frameworks for MSMEs.
4. Expand training and capacity-building programmes.
5. Encourage renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies.

Conclusion

The ESG transition presents both challenges and opportunities for Indian MSMEs. A supportive ecosystem combining finance, technology, and institutional assistance is essential for sustainable and globally competitive MSME growth

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/helping-msmes-cope-with-esg-compliance/article70952082.ece

4. Somnath And Bharat's Unconquerable Spirit (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper I – Indian Heritage and Culture
Topic - Temple architecture and historical traditions
Sub-Topic - Cultural nationalism and nation-building

Introduction

The Somnath Temple occupies a special place in India's civilisational memory. Repeatedly attacked, destroyed, and rebuilt across centuries, the temple symbolises resilience, faith, cultural continuity, and national revival. The narrative around Somnath is often presented not merely as a religious story but as a reflection of Bharat's enduring civilisational spirit.

1. Historical Importance of Somnath Temple

One of the Sacred Jyotirlingas

1. Somnath is traditionally regarded as the first among the twelve Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva.

Ancient Maritime and Cultural Centre

1. The temple historically functioned as a major centre of pilgrimage, trade, and cultural exchange.

Symbol of Prosperity

1. Historical accounts describe Somnath as a wealthy and influential temple institution.

2. Repeated Destruction and Reconstruction

Historical Attacks

1. The temple faced repeated invasions and destruction across different historical periods.

Civilisational Resilience

1. Despite destruction, Somnath was repeatedly rebuilt by rulers and devotees.

Symbolic Meaning

1. Reconstruction came to represent resistance against cultural erasure and historical humiliation.

3. Somnath and Post-Independence India

National Reconstruction after Independence

1. The rebuilding of Somnath after independence carried symbolic significance for cultural renewal.

Role of National Leaders

1. Leaders such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel supported the reconstruction effort.
2. The project reflected efforts to reconnect with India's civilisational heritage after colonial rule.

Debate on Secularism and State

1. Reconstruction also generated debates regarding the relationship between religion, state, and secularism in independent India.

4. Cultural Nationalism and Identity

Temple as Civilisational Symbol

1. Somnath is often portrayed as a symbol of continuity of Indian civilisation.

Emotional and Cultural Significance

1. Pilgrimage sites contribute to collective cultural consciousness and identity formation.

Heritage as Nation-Building

1. Cultural heritage can strengthen national integration and historical awareness.

5. Role of Pilgrimage and Heritage Tourism

Economic Importance

1. Pilgrimage tourism generates employment and regional economic activity.

Preservation of Cultural Traditions

1. Religious and heritage sites preserve architecture, rituals, art, and historical memory.

Soft Power Dimension

1. India's civilisational heritage strengthens its global cultural influence.

6. Architectural and Cultural Significance

Temple Architecture

1. Somnath reflects important features of traditional Indian temple architecture.

Integration of Spirituality and Art

1. Temples historically functioned not only as religious centres but also as hubs of education, music, and community life.

7. Broader Lessons from Somnath

Resilience of Indian Civilisation

1. The temple's history reflects the ability of Indian society to recover from adversity.

Importance of Cultural Preservation

1. Protecting heritage is essential for maintaining historical continuity.

Unity Through Shared Heritage

1. Heritage sites can create a sense of collective belonging across regions and communities.

8. Challenges in Heritage Preservation

Commercialisation Risks

1. Excessive tourism may damage cultural authenticity and ecology.

Conservation Issues

1. Many heritage sites face neglect, environmental stress, and infrastructural pressures.

Need for Inclusive Narratives

1. Historical interpretation should remain balanced and inclusive.

9. Way Forward

Strengthening Heritage Conservation

1. Invest in restoration, sustainable tourism, and heritage management.

Promote Cultural Education

1. Encourage awareness regarding India's civilisational heritage among younger generations.

Sustainable Pilgrimage Tourism

1. Balance tourism development with ecological and cultural preservation.

Inclusive Cultural Discourse

1. Heritage should become a source of unity, dialogue, and shared national pride.

Conclusion

Somnath represents more than a temple; it symbolises the endurance of India's civilisational identity across centuries of disruption and renewal. Preserving such heritage sites is essential not only for cultural continuity but also for strengthening collective historical consciousness and national unity.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/somnath-and-bharat-s-unconquerable-spirit-126050701780_1.html

Question

Q. "Heritage sites are not merely historical monuments but symbols of civilisational continuity and national identity." Discuss with reference to Somnath Temple. (250 words)

Introduction

The Somnath Temple in Gujarat occupies a unique place in India's civilisational history. Repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, it symbolises resilience, cultural continuity, and national revival.

Historical and Cultural Significance

1. Somnath is one of the twelve sacred Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva.
2. Historically, it was an important centre of pilgrimage, trade, and cultural activity.
3. The temple reflects India's rich architectural and spiritual traditions.

Symbol of Civilisational Resilience

1. Despite repeated destruction during invasions, the temple was rebuilt multiple times.
2. Reconstruction represented resistance against cultural erasure and preservation of identity.
3. Post-independence rebuilding under leaders such as Sardar Patel gave Somnath symbolic national significance.

Role in Nation-Building

1. Heritage sites strengthen historical consciousness and cultural pride.
2. Pilgrimage centres contribute to social integration and local economic development.
3. Cultural heritage enhances India's soft power globally.

Challenges and Measures

1. Heritage sites face risks from over-commercialisation and environmental stress.
2. Sustainable conservation and inclusive cultural interpretation are necessary.

Conclusion

Somnath reflects the continuity and resilience of Indian civilisation across centuries. Preserving such heritage is essential for strengthening cultural identity, historical awareness, and national unity.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/somnath-and-bharat-s-unconquerable-spirit-126050701780_1.html

Editorial of the Day – 09.05.2026

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1. The elephant in India's data room (TH)

GS Paper II - Governance / e-Governance
Topic - Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.
Sub-Topic - * Data Interoperability and Standardisation.

1. Introduction

During the tenure of the 17th Lok Sabha, queries regarding youth employment highlighted a systemic crisis - the lack of standardized, high-quality data. India's data ecosystem is currently characterized by "fragmented silos" where different ministries collect vast amounts of information that cannot "talk" to each other. This lack of interoperability hinders effective policymaking and results in significant fiscal wastage in welfare delivery.

2. Critical Issues in the Data Ecosystem

The "fragmentation" of India's data infrastructure is driven by several structural flaws -
Standardisation Deficit - Different government departments use varying standards for the same indicators (e.g., varying definitions of "employment" or "household").
Inconsistency - Data points across different time periods, regions, and beneficiary groups are often non-aligned, making longitudinal analysis difficult.
Integration Barriers - While ministries collect massive data volumes, the lack of common digital protocols makes cross-database integration nearly impossible.
Unreliability - Fragmented databases lead to conflicting estimates (e.g., in healthcare or labor statistics), reducing the overall usability of the information for planners.

3. Consequences of Poor Data Governance

The "cost of bad data" manifests in several ways -
Fiscal Leakages - Duplicate or "ghost" beneficiary records led to the misallocation of public funds in welfare schemes.
Conflicting Estimates - Multiple counting of individuals across different sectoral databases creates a skewed picture of ground realities.
Anecdotal Policymaking - When official data is viewed as unreliable, policymakers may bypass evidence-based routes in Favor of anecdotal or politically driven decisions.
Global Standing - India's rankings in international indices (like the HDI or Global Innovation Index) often suffer due to outdated, missing, or non-standardized statistical submissions.

4. Evidence of Impact - The "Clean-up" Savings

Data verification and standardisation have already shown immense fiscal potential -
PM-KISAN - Removing ineligible beneficiaries could save approximately ₹90 billion.
LPG Connections (PAHAL) - Deleting bogus connections has the potential to save ₹210 billion over a two-year period.
PDS (Public Distribution System) - Eliminating fake ration cards significantly reduces the annual subsidy burden on the exchequer.

5. Proposed Reforms and Institutional Measures

To modernize the ecosystem, the following reforms are essential -

IDMO (India Data Management Office) - This proposed body should be empowered to enforce uniform data standards across all Central Ministries and State Governments.

Global Alignment - National statistical definitions should be harmonized with international frameworks like the UN System of National Accounts.

Centralised Repository - The portal data.gov.in should be upgraded from a mere hosting site to a centralized, standardized repository for real-time district-level datasets.

Standardised Indicators - All ministries must adopt a common "metadata" standard to ensure that a data point in the Ministry of Labour is comparable to one in the Ministry of Education.

6. Way Forward

Institutionalising Benchmarks - NITI Aayog's Data Governance Quality Index (DGQI) should be made an annual, mandatory benchmark for all departments.

Incentive Structures - Performance reviews and budgetary allocations for ministries should be linked to the quality and transparency of their data management.

Evidence-Based Governance - Strengthening the data framework is the only way to ensure that India's policy vision translates into efficient ground-level execution.

Conclusion

India's journey toward becoming a $5 trillion economy requires more than just capital; it requires information capital. Strengthening institutions like the IDMO and ensuring data interoperability will reduce leakages, enhance welfare delivery, and restore the credibility of India's statistical system. Reliable data is not just a technical requirement—it is the foundation of transparent and accountable governance.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-elephant-in-indias-data-room/article70956756.ece

Question

"Data standardisation is not merely a technical requirement but a prerequisite for fiscal prudence and inclusive governance. Elucidate this statement in the context of India's current fragmented data ecosystem and its impact on welfare schemes." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In India's governance framework, data is often described as the "new oil," yet the absence of a unified "refinery" (standardisation) has led to significant inefficiencies. The current data ecosystem is a collection of fragmented silos where ministries use non-interoperable definitions and formats, creating an "elephant in the room" that hinders evidence-based policymaking and welfare delivery.

2. Data Standardisation as a Tool for Fiscal Prudence

Standardisation directly impacts the government's ability to manage its finances effectively -

Eliminating Leakages - Non-standardised data allows for the existence of "ghost beneficiaries." Standardising and deduplicating databases in schemes like PM-KISAN and PAHAL (LPG) have demonstrated potential savings of nearly ₹90 billion and ₹210 billion respectively.

Resource Optimization - When data across the PDS (Public Distribution System) and MGNREGA are interoperable, the government can target the "poorest of the poor" more accurately, ensuring that every rupee spent yields maximum social return.

Reducing Duplication - Standardised indicators prevent different ministries from collecting the same data multiple times, reducing administrative costs and respondent fatigue.

3. Role in Inclusive Governance

Inclusive governance requires reaching the last mile, which is only possible through reliable data -

Evidence-Based Targeting - Standardised definitions of "vulnerability" or "employment" allow for a more nuanced understanding of socio-economic gaps, moving policy away from anecdotal decisions toward data-driven interventions.
Interoperability - The proposed India Data Management Office (IDMO) aims to ensure that data from the Ministry of Health can "talk" to data from the Ministry of Education. This holistic view is essential for multidimensional poverty reduction.
Global Benchmarking - Aligning national statistics with global frameworks (like the UN System of National Accounts) improves India's standing in international indices, attracting global investment and development partnerships.

4. Institutional Measures for Reform

To move from a fragmented to a unified data ecosystem, India is adopting several measures -
Institutionalisation of Quality - NITI Aayog's Data Governance Quality Index (DGQI) is becoming a benchmark for evaluating ministry-level data management.
Centralised Repositories - Enhancing data.gov.in to serve as a real-time, district-level data hub ensures transparency and public accountability.

Conclusion

Data standardisation acts as the "unseen pillar" that supports the weight of India's welfare ambitions. By bridging the gap between fragmented silos, India can ensure that its policy vision is backed by actionable intelligence. Institutionalising a robust data framework through the IDMO is not just a technical upgrade; it is a fundamental shift toward a more transparent, efficient, and inclusive democracy.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-elephant-in-indias-data-room/article70956756.ece

2. On Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary, recalling his clash with Mahatma Gandhi over the 'cult' of the charkha (IE)

GS Paper I - Indian Heritage and Culture; Modern Indian History
Topic - The Freedom Struggle — its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.
Sub-Topic - Ideological debates between Gandhi and Tagore.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, India observes the 165th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore (Gurudev). Beyond his literary genius, the occasion serves as a platform to revisit the profound Gandhi–Tagore debates of the 1920s. These dialogues, characterized by deep mutual respect despite sharp ideological friction, offered two distinct blueprints for India's future - one rooted in moral mass mobilization (Gandhi) and the other in intellectual freedom and universal humanism (Tagore).

2. Rabindranath Tagore - Life and Global Impact

Background - Born on May 7, 1861, in Calcutta, he was a central figure of the Bengal Renaissance, excelling as a poet, novelist, composer, and social reformer.
Nobel Laureate - In 1913, he became the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in Literature for his collection *Gitanjali*, bridging Eastern philosophy with Western audiences.
Cultural Architect - He is the only person to have composed the national anthems of two nations - India (Jana Gana Mana) and Bangladesh (Amar Sonar Bangla).
Institutional Legacy - Founded Visva-Bharati University in 1921 at Santiniketan, embodying his vision of a "world university" where East meets West.

3. The Intellectual Relationship - Gandhi and Tagore

Titles of Respect - Gandhi bestowed the title "Gurudev" upon Tagore, while Tagore called Gandhi "Mahatma", acknowledging his moral stature.

Shared Goals, Different Paths - Both sought India's dignity and freedom from colonial rule but differed on the "nature" of that freedom.
Moral Protest - Following the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919), Tagore renounced his Knighthood, a powerful act of moral resistance that resonated globally.

4. The Great Charkha Debate

The 1920s saw a rigorous exchange of letters regarding the symbolic role of the spinning wheel (Charkha) -
Gandhi's Perspective - Viewed the Charkha as a tool of Swadeshi, economic self-reliance, and a moral "sacrament" that would discipline the masses and unite the rich and poor.
Tagore's Critique - Tagore feared that making spinning a "compulsory ritual" would lead to blind conformity and suppress human creativity.
Uniformity vs. Diversity - He argued that a nation's progress cannot be reduced to a single activity, warning that excessive focus on the Charkha might discourage the scientific and intellectual advancement necessary for modern survival.

5. Tagore's Educational and Nationalistic Philosophy

Holistic Learning - He opposed the "factory-like" colonial education system, advocating for learning through nature, creativity, and imagination.
Critique of Nationalism - Tagore was a critic of "aggressive nationalism," which he believed could become a source of intolerance. He prioritized Universal Humanism over narrow political identities.
Freedom of Mind - His poetry, specifically "Where the mind is without fear," defines his ideal of a nation where intellectual liberty is the cornerstone of sovereignty.

6. Contemporary Relevance for India

Education Reform - Tagore's experiential learning principles are reflected in India's National Education Policy (NEP), which emphasizes multidisciplinary and creative growth.
Democratic Pluralism - In an era of polarization, his focus on inclusive nationalism and cultural dialogue remains a safeguard for constitutional values.
Development Models - The debate informs modern discussions on balancing traditional rural self-reliance (Gandhian) with scientific, global-facing modernity (Tagore an).

7. Way Forward

Integrated Pedagogy - Move beyond rote learning by integrating ethics and critical thinking into school curricula, as envisioned by Tagore.
Scientific Rootedness - Policy should combine Indian cultural values with global technological progress.
Promoting Pluralism - Anchoring India's growth in the humanist principles of tolerance and diversity to ensure social harmony.

Conclusion

The dialogue between Gandhi and Tagore was not a clash of egos but a synthesis of visions. Gandhi provided the discipline and mobilization needed to break colonial chains, while Tagore provided the intellectual depth to ensure that the newly free "mind" remained "without fear." Together, they continue to define the moral and intellectual landscape of modern India.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/gandhi-tagore-charkha-debate-explained-10679419/

Question

"While Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were united in their quest for India's self-respect, they differed profoundly on the means to achieve 'Swaraj'. Analyse their conflicting perspectives on nationalism, education, and the symbolic role of the Charkha." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore represented the "moral" and "intellectual" poles of the Indian National Movement. Their relationship, marked by the mutual titles of 'Mahatma' and 'Gurudev', was a unique "dialogue of different." While both sought an end to colonial rule, their visions for a free India diverged on the intersection of tradition, modernity, and individual liberty.

2. Perspectives on Nationalism

Gandhi's Mass Nationalism - Gandhi believed in mass mobilization through symbols like *Swadeshi*. For him, nationalism was a moral struggle against the soullessness of Western civilization, requiring collective discipline and a unified political front.

Tagore's Universal Humanism - Tagore was deeply wary of "aggressive nationalism." He feared that narrow political identities would lead to "blind conformity" and suppress the "freedom of the mind." He prioritized Universal Humanism, arguing that India should be a place where the world meets in "one single nest."

3. The Charkha Debate - Symbolism vs. Creativity

The Charkha (spinning wheel) became the flashpoint of their ideological friction -

The Moral Sacrament - Gandhi viewed the Charkha as a symbol of self-reliance, the dignity of labor, and a bridge between the elite and the rural poor. He made spinning a "moral duty" for every Indian.

The "Mechanical" Ritual - Tagore opposed making the Charkha a compulsory political ritual. He argued that reducing the diversity of human creativity to a single mechanical activity would encourage intellectual stagnation. He believed that true freedom required scientific progress and the liberty to think beyond a single symbol.

4. Educational Philosophies

Nai Talim - Gandhi's educational vision focused on vocational training and character building to create self-sufficient village communities.

Visva-Bharati - Tagore's vision, as seen in Santiniketan, emphasized aesthetic development, learning through nature, and global intellectual exchange. He sought to produce "global citizens" who were culturally rooted but intellectually open to Western science and philosophy.

5. Synthesis of Visions

Despite these debates, their ideas were often complementary -

Political vs. Cultural Confidence - Gandhi provided the pragmatic tools for political resistance, while Tagore provided the cultural confidence and the "poetry of freedom" that sustained the movement's soul.

Rural Reconstruction - Both were pioneers in rural development—Gandhi through his Ashrams and Tagore through Sriniketan—recognizing that India's heart lay in its villages.

Conclusion

The Gandhi-Tagore debate was not a clash of opposites but a corrective dialogue. Gandhi ensured that India gained its political freedom through discipline and unity, while Tagore ensured that this freedom did not descend into narrow-mindedness. Their shared legacy offers a balanced blueprint for modern India - a nation that is economically self-reliant (Amenabar) yet intellectually "without fear" and open to the world.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/gandhi-tagore-charkha-debate-explained-10679419/

3. If World Cuts Arms Spend; More Funds for Essentials (DC)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic - Global peace and security
Sub-Topic - International organisations and geopolitics

Introduction

Global military expenditure has risen sharply due to geopolitical conflicts, strategic rivalries, and security concerns. At the same time, large sections of the world continue to face poverty, hunger, health crises, educational deficits, and climate vulnerabilities. The article argues that excessive arms spending diverts precious resources away from human development and essential welfare needs. It raises a larger debate regarding the balance between national security and human security.

1. Rising Global Military Expenditure

Increasing Defence Budgets

1. Countries across the world are significantly increasing military expenditure because of geopolitical tensions and strategic competition.

Major Drivers of Arms Spending

1. Conflicts such as the Russia–Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia have accelerated global defence spending.
2. Strategic rivalry among major powers has intensified the global arms race.

Expansion of Defence Industries

1. Defence production and arms trade have become major economic and geopolitical sectors.

2. Opportunity Cost of Excessive Arms Spending

Diversion of Public Resources

1. Large defence allocations reduce fiscal space for welfare expenditure.

Impact on Social Sectors

1. Resources that could be invested in health, education, nutrition, housing, and sanitation are often redirected toward military procurement.

Human Development Concerns

1. Developing countries especially face trade-offs between defence needs and social development priorities.

3. Human Security vs Traditional Security

Traditional Security Approach

1. Conventional security focuses mainly on military capability and territorial defence.

Human Security Perspective

1. Human security emphasises food security, healthcare, employment, education, environmental sustainability, and social protection.

Broader Understanding of Security

1. Poverty, inequality, pandemics, and climate change can pose threats equal to or greater than military threats.

4. Global Inequality and Ethical Questions

Uneven Distribution of Resources

1. Massive military expenditure coexists with hunger and extreme poverty in many regions.

Ethical Debate

1. The article questions whether global priorities are adequately aligned with human welfare.

Developmental Imbalance

1. Excessive focus on military competition may deepen inequalities and underdevelopment.

5. Defence Spending and Economic Arguments

Positive Arguments for Defence Spending

1. Defence industries generate employment, technological innovation, and industrial development.
2. National security remains essential in an uncertain geopolitical environment.

Risks of Over-Militarisation

1. Unsustainable defence expenditure can worsen fiscal deficits and debt burdens.
2. Arms races may increase instability rather than reduce it.

6. Relevance for Developing Countries like India

Security Challenges

1. India faces complex security threats, including border tensions, terrorism, and maritime challenges.

Need for Strategic Balance

1. While defence preparedness is necessary, developmental expenditure cannot be neglected.

Inclusive National Security

1. Long-term national strength depends not only on military power but also on education, healthcare, technological capability, and economic resilience.

7. International Institutions and Peacebuilding

Role of Multilateralism

1. Stronger diplomatic engagement can reduce conflict risks and military escalation.

Need for Arms Control

1. Global disarmament and arms-control frameworks can reduce excessive military competition.

Importance of Conflict Resolution

1. Peaceful dispute settlement can free resources for sustainable development.

8. Link with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Financing Development

1. Reduced military expenditure could support SDGs related to poverty reduction, healthcare, education, and climate action.

Welfare-Centred Development

1. Public investment in essential services improves social stability and long-term growth.

9. Way Forward

Balanced National Priorities

1. Countries must maintain adequate defence preparedness while protecting welfare expenditure.

Promote Human-Centric Security

1. National security frameworks should integrate social and economic resilience.

Strengthen Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation

1. Dialogue and confidence-building measures can reduce tensions and defence burdens.

Greater Global Cooperation

1. International institutions should encourage peacebuilding, arms control, and development financing.

Conclusion

National security is important, but long-term peace and stability ultimately depend on human development and social welfare. A balanced approach that combines defence preparedness with investment in essential sectors is necessary for sustainable and inclusive global progress.

Source - https -//www.deccanchronicle.com/amp/opinion/columnists/reflections-if-world-cuts-arms-spend-more-funds-for-essentials-sunanda-k-datta-ray-1955525

Question

Q. "Excessive military expenditure undermines human development priorities." Examine the relationship between global arms spending and developmental challenges. (250 words)

Introduction

Global military expenditure has increased significantly due to geopolitical tensions and strategic rivalries. However, rising defence spending often diverts resources away from essential sectors such as health, education, and poverty alleviation.

Impact of Excessive Arms Spending

1. High defence expenditure reduces fiscal space for social-sector investments.
2. Developing countries face difficult trade-offs between security needs and welfare priorities.
3. Excessive militarisation can increase public debt and fiscal stress.
4. Large military budgets coexist with persistent poverty, hunger, and inequality in many parts of the world.

Human Security Perspective

1. Security should include healthcare, food security, education, employment, and environmental sustainability.
2. Climate change, pandemics, and inequality increasingly threaten global stability.
3. Investment in human development strengthens long-term national resilience.

Need for Strategic Balance

1. National defence remains important due to terrorism, border disputes, and geopolitical instability.
2. Countries must maintain adequate military preparedness without undermining developmental goals.
3. Diplomacy, arms control, and multilateral cooperation can reduce conflict risks and defence burdens.

Conclusion

Sustainable security cannot be achieved through military strength alone. Long-term peace and stability require balancing defence preparedness with strong investments in human development and social welfare

Source - https -//www.deccanchronicle.com/amp/opinion/columnists/reflections-if-world-cuts-arms-spend-more-funds-for-essentials-sunanda-k-datta-ray-1955525

4. The Detritus of Democracy (Ts)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Polity
Topic - Electoral reforms and democratic governance
Sub-Topic - Sustainable urban governance

Introduction

Election campaigns are an essential part of democratic politics. However, modern campaigning increasingly generates enormous quantities of plastic waste, banners, flags, posters, and disposable materials. The article highlights how electoral activities, especially in urban centres, contribute significantly to environmental degradation. It raises an important question - can a democracy claim to be sustainable if its political processes themselves create ecological damage?

1. Electoral Campaigns and Environmental Pollution

Rise of Disposable Campaign Materials

1. Modern election campaigns rely heavily on posters, PVC banners, plastic flags, flex boards, pamphlets, and synthetic decorations.

Non-Biodegradable Waste

1. Many campaign materials are made from plastic and polyvinyl chloride (PVC), which are difficult to recycle.

Post-Election Waste Accumulation

1. After elections, large quantities of campaign waste remain on roads, drains, public spaces, and water bodies.

2. Environmental Consequences

Urban Waste Burden

1. Election-related waste adds pressure on already stressed municipal waste-management systems.

Drainage and Flooding Risks

1. Plastic banners and campaign materials clog drainage systems, increasing urban flooding risks.

Soil and Water Pollution

1. Toxic chemicals and synthetic materials contaminate soil and water bodies.

Air Pollution

1. Burning discarded campaign materials releases hazardous emissions.

3. Contradiction Between Democracy and Sustainability

Democratic Processes Creating Ecological Harm

1. Elections are intended to strengthen public welfare, yet campaign practices may damage environmental health.

Gap Between Political Promises and Practices

1. Political parties often advocate sustainability while continuing environmentally harmful campaign methods.

Symbolic Politics vs Real Accountability

1. Environmental responsibility is often reduced to slogans rather than operational reform.

4. Governance and Regulatory Challenges

Weak Enforcement of Waste Rules

1. Existing waste-management regulations are poorly enforced during elections.

Lack of Accountability

1. Political parties and candidates rarely bear responsibility for post-election waste cleanup.

Municipal Capacity Constraints

1. Urban local bodies struggle to manage sudden spikes in waste generation.

5. Public Health Implications

Vector-Borne Diseases

1. Waste accumulation and clogged drains create breeding grounds for mosquitoes and diseases.

Toxic Exposure

1. Burning plastics releases carcinogenic pollutants harmful to respiratory health.

Impact on Marginalised Communities

1. Poorer urban populations are often most affected by environmental degradation and poor sanitation.

6. Electoral Sustainability - Need for Green Campaigning

Digital Campaigning

1. Greater use of digital outreach can reduce physical waste generation.

Eco-Friendly Materials

1. Biodegradable and recyclable campaign materials should replace plastics and PVC banners.

Circular Waste Systems

1. Collection, segregation, and recycling systems should be integrated into election management.

7. Role of Election Commission and Local Governments

Stronger Guidelines

1. Election authorities can establish mandatory environmental norms for campaigning.

Green Compliance Monitoring

1. Candidates and parties should be evaluated on environmental compliance.

Penalties for Violations

1. Strict penalties can discourage indiscriminate waste generation.

8. Role of Citizens and Civil Society

Public Awareness

1. Voters should demand environmentally responsible campaigning.

Community Monitoring

1. Civil society groups can monitor violations and promote sustainable election practices.

Behavioural Change

1. Political culture must gradually shift from visual excess to issue-based campaigning.

9. Global and Urban Governance Perspective

Sustainable Cities and SDGs

1. Reducing election-related waste supports SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Climate Responsibility

1. Environmentally sustainable political systems strengthen democratic legitimacy in the era of climate change.

Conclusion

Democracy should not come at the cost of environmental degradation. Sustainable electoral practices are necessary to align democratic participation with ecological responsibility. Green campaigning, stronger regulation, and public accountability are essential for building an environmentally conscious democracy.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-detritus-of-democracy-1503591604.html

Question

Q. "Electoral processes in India increasingly generate environmental costs that challenge the idea of sustainable democracy." Discuss the environmental implications of election campaigns and suggest measures for greener electoral practices. (250 words)

Introduction

Election campaigns are central to democratic participation, but modern campaigning increasingly generates large quantities of plastic and non-biodegradable waste. This raises concerns regarding the environmental sustainability of electoral processes.

Environmental Implications of Election Campaigns

1. Extensive use of PVC banners, plastic flags, and flex boards increases non-biodegradable waste.
2. Campaign waste clogs drainage systems and contributes to urban flooding.
3. Burning discarded materials releases toxic pollutants and worsens air quality.
4. Poor waste management creates public-health risks and environmental degradation.
5. Municipal bodies face additional financial and logistical burdens during elections.

Governance Challenges

1. Existing waste-management rules are weakly enforced during elections.
2. Political parties often evade responsibility for post-election cleanup.
3. Environmental sustainability receives limited priority in electoral regulations.

Measures for Greener Electoral Practices

1. Promote digital campaigning and reduce dependence on physical materials.
2. Encourage biodegradable and recyclable campaign materials.
3. Impose strict environmental guidelines and penalties for violations.
4. Strengthen waste segregation and recycling systems during elections.
5. Increase public awareness regarding sustainable political participation.

Conclusion

A sustainable democracy must integrate environmental responsibility into electoral practices. Green campaigning and stronger institutional accountability are essential for ensuring that democratic participation does not undermine ecological sustainability.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-detritus-of-democracy-1503591604.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 11.05.2026

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1. Cost to access - On health check-up for workers (TH)

GS Paper II - Social Justice

Topic - Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Labour.

Sub-Topic - Occupational Health and Safety (OSH).

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Union Labour Ministry launched a landmark scheme providing free annual health check-ups for workers aged 40 years and above. By leveraging the financial strength of the ESI Fund, the initiative seeks to transition India's labour welfare model from reactive treatment to proactive, early detection of non-communicable and occupational diseases.

2. Framework of the Initiative

Target Group - Workers aged 40+ years, with a specific mandate for those in hazardous occupations (e.g., chemical handling, heavy machinery).

Executing Agency - The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), utilizing its network of hospitals and dispensaries.

Funding - Financed through the surplus ESI Fund, supplemented by infrastructure sharing with PMJAY-empanelled hospitals.

Scope of Treatment - If diagnosis reveals illness, workers are entitled to free follow-up treatment at ESIC facilities.

3. Existing Legal Landscape

The scheme builds upon several decades of labour legislation -

Factories Act, 1948 - Provides basic health safeguards for factory-specific environments.

ESI Act, 1948 - The foundational act for medical and social security benefits for insured persons.

OSH Code, 2020 - The modern legal framework that consolidated and expanded workplace safety and health provisions across sectors.

4. Implementation Gaps and Challenges

Despite the positive intent, the scheme faces several "bottlenecks of access" -

The e-Shram Paradox - While there are approximately 94 crore workers in India, only 31 crores are registered on the e-Shram portal. The incomplete integration between e-Shram and ESIC systems leaves millions in a "coverage shadow."

Informal Sector Invisibility - Domestic workers, street vendors, and home-based garment workers often lack formal employers, making it difficult to verify eligibility and access institutional benefits.

Infrastructural Strain - Overcrowded ESIC centres and a specific shortage of female medical staff pose significant barriers to access, particularly for women workers.

The "Cost of Access" - For a daily-wage labourer, a health check-up is not "free" if it results in wage loss due to time spent at the clinic.

5. Critical Blind Spots in Occupational Health

Experts have identified significant omissions in the current medical screening protocol -

Heat-Related Illnesses - Construction and agricultural workers face severe heat stress, yet these risks remain largely unrecognized in the standard screening for hypertension/diabetes.
Infectious Risks - Waste-pickers and sanitation workers are at high risk for Hepatitis and Leptospirosis, but the scheme does not mandate the necessary vaccinations for these specific groups.
Workplace-Based Care - The current model requires workers to travel to centres, rather than bringing healthcare to the workplace.

6. Way Forward

To transform this initiative from a "check-up scheme" to a "health security system," the following reforms are needed -
Mobile Occupational Health Units (MOHUs) - Bringing diagnostic services directly to construction sites and industrial clusters to minimize wage loss.
Wage Compensation - Providing a "health allowance" or direct benefit transfer (DBT) to compensate for the time spent on mandatory annual check-ups.
Expanding Vaccination - Making immunization mandatory and free for sanitation workers and those handling bio-hazards.
Universal e-Shram Integration - Fast-tracking the link between e-Shram and ESIC to ensure that informal workers can "self-enrol" for health benefits.

Conclusion

The 2026 health check-up initiative is a necessary step toward addressing India's weak occupational health system. However, its success depends on moving beyond the formal workforce. Without addressing the "cost to access"—specifically wage loss and physical distance—the scheme risks becoming a benefit for the already-insured while leaving the most vulnerable 60 crore informal workers behind.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cost-to-access-on-health-check-up-for-workers/article70962631.ece

Question

"The transition from a curative to a preventive healthcare model for India's labor force remains hindered by the 'cost of access.' Examine this statement in the light of the Union Labour Ministry's recent initiative to provide free annual health check-ups for workers." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Union Labour Ministry introduced a scheme providing free annual medical examinations for workers aged 40 years and above through the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). While this marks a significant shift toward preventive occupational healthcare, its success is fundamentally tied to addressing the "cost of access"—the hidden economic and structural barriers that prevent a worker from actually utilizing "free" services.

2. Examining the "Cost of Access"

The "cost" for a labourer extends beyond the medical fee, encompassing several systemic hurdles -
Opportunity Cost of Wages - For India's vast informal and daily-wage workforce, a day spent at a medical center result in a loss of daily earnings. Without wage compensation, "free" check-ups become an unaffordable luxury.
The Documentation Barrier - Effective access requires registration on the e-Shram portal. However, currently, only 31 crores out of 94 crore workers are registered. The lack of integration between e-Shram and the ESIC database creates a "digital wall" for the remaining 60+ crore workers.
Infrastructure and Gender Gaps - Overcrowded ESIC centres and a shortage of female medical personnel act as deterrents, particularly for women in the garment and domestic work sectors, who may face cultural and logistical discomfort.

Geographical Distance - Most ESIC hospitals are located in industrial clusters. For agricultural labourers or construction workers in remote sites, the cost of travel and time often outweighs the perceived benefits of a routine check-up.

3. Blind Spots in Occupational Recognition

A preventive model must account for the specific nature of the work -

Climate Risks - Current screenings focus on NCDs like diabetes and hypertension but often neglect heat-stress and dehydration-related illnesses, which are primary risks for India's construction and farm labourers.

Infectious Hazards - While the scheme targets hazardous chemical industries, it lacks mandatory vaccination protocols (e.g., for Hepatitis or Leptospirosis) for high-risk sanitation workers and waste-pickers.

4. Measures for Effective Delivery

To bridge the gap between "policy intent" and "worker impact," the following are required -

Mobile Occupational Health Units (MOHUs) - Decentralizing care by bringing diagnostic labs to the workplace or construction sites.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for Health - Providing a small stipend or "health day" allowance to compensate for the wage loss incurred during mandatory check-ups.

Integrated Welfare Hubs - Merging e-Shram with ESIC and PMJAY data to allow "walk-in" eligibility for any worker with a basic UAN (Universal Account Number).

Conclusion

The 2026 health check-up initiative is a vital step toward safeguarding India's "demographic dividend." However, unless the government addresses the socio-economic cost of seeking care, the scheme will largely benefit the formally insured minority. True inclusive governance requires a model where healthcare is not just "free" but also accessible, remunerative, and workplace-aligned.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cost-to-access-on-health-check-up-for-workers/article70962631.ece

2. Fit it, fire it - How an attachable system can help air missiles fly longer, strike better (IE)

GS Paper III - Science and Technology; Internal Security

Topic - Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Sub-Topic - Precision-Guided Munitions (PGMs), Defence R&D (DRDO), and Modernization of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully conducted the first flight trial of the indigenous Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) system. Tested from an IAF fighter off the Odisha coast, TARA is a specialized glide kit that transforms conventional "dumb" bombs into sophisticated precision-guided munitions (PGMs), marking a significant leap in India's stand-off strike capabilities.

2. Understanding the TARA System

TARA is not a new missile but a modular enhancement for existing stockpiles -

Modular Glide Kit - It is a bolt-on kit consisting of foldable wings and a guidance package that can be attached to standard gravity bombs (ranging from 250 kg to 500 kg).

Glide-Based Mechanism - Instead of expensive rocket motors, the system uses aerodynamic glide technology. This reduces the weapon's weight and cost while extending its range.

Precision Navigation - It utilizes a combination of an Inertial Navigation System (INS) and satellite-based positioning. This dual-layer ensures accuracy even if satellite signals are jammed or disrupted.

Deployment - Upon release from the carrier aircraft, the kit's foldable wings automatically deploy, allowing the bomb to "glide" toward its target with high precision.

3. Strategic Significance of Precision-Guided Munitions (PGMs)

The induction of TARA elevates the IAF's operational doctrine -

Stand-Off Capability - TARA allows pilots to release weapons from a safe distance, well outside the range of enemy surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and radar coverage, ensuring high aircraft survivability.

Force Multiplier - By converting thousands of existing unguided bombs into "smart" weapons at a fraction of the cost of new missiles, India can rapidly expand its precision-strike inventory.

Collateral Damage Limitation - Advanced guidance ensures that the weapon hits a specific coordinate, minimizing unintended damage—a necessity in modern, network-centric warfare.

Global Benchmarking - This technology aligns India with advanced militaries like those of the US, Russia, and China, which have effectively used glide-bomb technology in recent conflicts.

4. Impact on 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and Defence Ecosystem

TARA is a product of indigenous synergy -

Indigenization - Developed by Hyderabad-based Research Centre Imarat (RCI) along with other DRDO labs, it reduces long-term reliance on foreign PGM kits (like the Israeli SPICE or American JDAM).

Public-Private Partnership - Production has already commenced through Development-cum-Production Partners (DcPPs), involving Indian private industry from the manufacturing stage to speed up induction.

Import Substitution - Domestic production conserves foreign exchange and secures the supply chain, which is critical during prolonged conflicts or geopolitical sanctions.

Export Potential - As a low-cost, high-efficiency system, TARA has significant potential in the global defense market, supporting India's goal of becoming a defense export hub.

5. Technological Features and Integration

INS & Satellite Sync - The INS determines position without external references (anti-jamming), while satellite data provides pinpoint accuracy.

Cost-Efficiency - Its relatively low cost allows for large-scale deployment compared to high-end cruise missiles.

Platform Neutrality - Designed for integration across various IAF fighter platforms, enhancing interoperability across different squadrons.

6. Challenges and Future Roadmap

Despite the successful trial, several steps remain -

Validation Trials - Extensive user trials under varied combat and weather conditions are required before full induction.

Electronic Warfare (EW) Resilience - As adversaries improve jamming technologies, India must continuously upgrade TARA's anti-jamming and secure navigation features.

Supply Chain Scaling - Ensuring the domestic industry can produce these kits at the scale required by the IAF for a high-intensity conflict.

7. Conclusion

The TARA glide weapon system is a cornerstone of India's modern defense strategy. It successfully combines technological innovation with economic prudence, transforming legacy munitions into modern strategic assets. By fostering indigenous R&D and private sector participation, India is not just building a weapon system but a resilient defense industrial ecosystem capable of maintaining strategic deterrence in an evolving security landscape.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/tara-system-missiles-fly-longer-10681356/

Question

"The conversion of conventional gravity bombs into precision-guided munitions represents a cost-effective paradigm shift in modern air warfare. Elucidate this statement in the light of the recent

development of the Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) system by India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In modern aerial combat, the "dumb" gravity bomb is increasingly obsolete due to its lack of accuracy and the high risk it poses to the carrier aircraft. The successful flight trial of the indigenous Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) system in May 2026 marks India's entry into the elite group of nations capable of transforming legacy unguided munitions into high-precision, long-range "smart" weapons.

2. The Paradigm Shift - From Gravity to Precision

TARA facilitates a shift in warfare through several key mechanisms -

Enhancing Stand-Off Capability - Conventional bombs require aircraft to fly directly over targets, exposing them to enemy Air Defence (AD) systems. TARA's glide kit allows release from a safe distance, enabling stand-off strikes that significantly improve pilot and aircraft survivability.

Economic Prudence - Developing new precision missiles is capital-intensive. TARA offers a "force multiplier" effect by retrofitting existing stockpiles of 250 kg and 500 kg bombs with modular wings and guidance kits, achieving precision at a fraction of the cost.

Operational Accuracy - By integrating Inertial Navigation Systems (INS) and satellite positioning, TARA converts a ballistic fall into a guided glide. This ensures high "Circular Error Probable" (CEP) accuracy, minimizing collateral damage and ensuring the destruction of strategic targets with fewer sorties.

3. Strategic Importance of Indigenization

The development of TARA by DRDO and the Research Centre Imarat (RCI) Elucidates India's growing strategic autonomy -

Reducing Import Dependence - Historically, India relied on expensive foreign kits like the Israeli SPICE or American JDAM. TARA provides a sovereign alternative, securing the supply chain during geopolitical tensions.

Public-Private Synergy - The Development-cum-Production Partner (DcPP) model ensures that private industry is integrated into the production cycle from the start, accelerating the induction of technology into the Indian Air Force.

Technological Resilience - TARA's hybrid navigation system ensures that the weapon remains effective even in an Electronic Warfare (EW) environment where satellite signals (GPS/NavIC) might be jammed.

4. Challenges to Operationalization

To fully realize this shift, India must address -

Platform Integration - Ensuring seamless software and hardware compatibility across diverse fighter fleets (Sukhoi, Rafale, Tejas).

Industrial Scaling - Transitioning from successful trials to mass production to meet the large-scale requirements of the IAF.

Conclusion

The TARA system is more than just a weapon; it is a symbol of India's maturing defense industrial base. By breathing new life into conventional munitions, India is not only enhancing its combat edge but also demonstrating that technological innovation, when combined with fiscal pragmatism, is the most effective path toward a self-reliant and secure nation.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/tara-system-missiles-fly-longer-10681356/

3. A Bloated Cabinet Is a Really Bad Idea (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Welfare Schemes
Topic - Structure and functioning of the executive
Sub-Topic - Good governance and administrative reforms

Introduction

In parliamentary democracies, the Council of Ministers plays a crucial role in governance and policy implementation. However, excessively large cabinets can create administrative inefficiency, overlapping responsibilities, political patronage, and governance complications. The article argues that cabinet expansion beyond functional necessity weakens governance quality and turns ministerial appointments into instruments of political management rather than administrative efficiency.

1. Constitutional Background

Size of the Council of Ministers

1. The Constitution limits the size of the Council of Ministers at the Union and State levels.
2. The 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 restricted the number of ministers to prevent excessively large ministries.

Purpose of the Restriction

1. To reduce political patronage and improve administrative efficiency.
2. To control public expenditure associated with oversized ministries.

2. Why Cabinets Become Bloated

Coalition Politics

1. Coalition governments often distribute ministerial posts to maintain political support.

Internal Party Management

1. Ministerial positions are used to balance regional, caste, factional, and political interests.

Political Reward System

1. Cabinet berths are frequently treated as rewards for loyalty and electoral performance.

3. Administrative Problems of Large Cabinets

Fragmentation of Governance

1. Excessive ministries divide policy domains into smaller and overlapping jurisdictions.

Coordination Difficulties

1. Inter-ministerial coordination becomes slower and more complicated.

Duplication of Functions

1. Multiple ministries may perform similar or overlapping roles, reducing efficiency.

Bureaucratic Complexity

1. Administrative processes become more cumbersome with increased layers of decision-making.

4. Impact on Governance Quality

Reduced Accountability

1. Diffused responsibilities make it difficult to identify accountability for policy failures.

Focus on Politics over Administration

1. Ministerial appointments may prioritise political management instead of expertise.

Weak Policy Coherence

1. Fragmented portfolios can create inconsistent policy implementation.

5. Financial and Institutional Costs

Increased Public Expenditure

1. Larger cabinets increase expenditure on offices, staff, infrastructure, and security.

Administrative Burden

1. Additional ministries require bureaucratic expansion and institutional restructuring.

6. Cabinet Size and Ministerial Competence

Importance of Specialisation

1. Effective governance requires capable ministers with domain understanding.

Limits of Political Appointments

1. Excessive cabinet expansion may reduce emphasis on competence and expertise.

Need for Administrative Capacity

1. Ministers require institutional support and policy understanding to function effectively.

7. Comparative Governance Perspective

Smaller Cabinets and Efficiency

1. Many countries prefer compact cabinets to improve coordination and accountability.

Cabinet Rationalisation

1. Rational grouping of portfolios improves policy coherence and administrative clarity.

8. Governance vs Political Accommodation

Tension in Parliamentary Democracy

1. Governments must balance political stability with administrative efficiency.

Risks of Patronage Politics

1. Excessive accommodation through ministerial positions can weaken institutional credibility.

Democratic Accountability

1. Governance should prioritise public interest rather than internal political calculations.

9. Way Forward

Rationalisation of Ministries

1. Merge overlapping departments and improve institutional clarity.

Merit-Based Ministerial Appointments

1. Greater emphasis should be placed on competence and administrative capability.

Strengthen Cabinet Coordination

1. Improve coordination mechanisms between ministries and departments.

Governance-Oriented Political Culture

1. Ministerial offices should be viewed primarily as instruments of governance, not political rewards.

Conclusion

A cabinet should be structured around administrative necessity and governance efficiency rather than political accommodation alone. Smaller, coordinated, and competent ministries are more likely to deliver effective governance, policy coherence, and institutional accountability.

Question

Q. "Excessively large cabinets weaken governance efficiency and institutional accountability." Examine the administrative and political implications of bloated cabinets in parliamentary democracies. (250 words)

Introduction

The Council of Ministers is central to policy formulation and administration in parliamentary democracies. However, excessively large cabinets often create governance inefficiencies and administrative complications.

Reasons for Cabinet Expansion

1. Coalition politics encourages distribution of ministerial posts among alliance partners.
2. Governments use cabinet positions to balance regional and political interests.
3. Ministerial appointments are sometimes treated as political rewards.

Administrative Implications of Bloated Cabinets

1. Excessive ministries create overlapping jurisdictions and duplication of functions.
2. Inter-ministerial coordination becomes more difficult and delays decision-making.

3. Diffused responsibilities weaken accountability and policy coherence.
4. Administrative expenditure increases due to additional offices and bureaucratic structures.

Political Implications

1. Cabinet expansion may strengthen patronage politics.
2. Political management can overshadow competence and governance priorities.
3. Public trust may weaken if ministries are viewed as instruments of accommodation rather than governance.

Measures Required

1. Rationalise ministries and merge overlapping portfolios.
2. Emphasise competence and expertise in ministerial appointments.
3. Strengthen institutional coordination and accountability mechanisms.

Conclusion

Efficient governance requires compact, coordinated, and competent cabinets. Administrative effectiveness and public accountability should guide cabinet formation rather than excessive political accommodation.

4. Freebie Hurdle to Real Change (FE)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Welfare Schemes
Topic - Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
Sub-Topic - Inclusive development and poverty alleviation

Introduction

The debate over "freebies" has become central to Indian electoral politics. Political parties increasingly promise cash transfers, subsidies, free electricity, consumer goods, and welfare benefits to attract voters. While welfare measures can support vulnerable populations and reduce inequality, concerns arise when competitive populism weakens fiscal discipline and diverts attention from structural developmental reforms. The article examines the tension between welfare politics and long-term development-oriented governance.

1. What are Freebies?

Definition

1. Freebies refer to goods, services, subsidies, or cash benefits distributed by governments, often as part of electoral promises.

Common Examples

1. Free electricity, loan waivers, transport subsidies, consumer goods, and direct cash transfers.

Difference Between Welfare and Freebies

1. Welfare schemes aim at social protection and capability enhancement.
2. Freebies are often criticised when they prioritise short-term political gains over sustainable development.

2. Why Freebies Have Become Politically Important

Electoral Competition

1. Political parties use welfare promises to mobilise voter support.

Socio-Economic Inequality

1. Poverty, unemployment, and inflation increase public demand for state support.

Expansion of Welfare Politics

1. Voters increasingly expect direct benefits from governments.

3. Positive Aspects of Welfare Transfers

Poverty Reduction

1. Cash transfers and subsidies can provide immediate relief to vulnerable populations.

Social Protection

1. Welfare measures improve food security, healthcare access, and household resilience.

Empowerment Effects

1. Some schemes, especially direct benefit transfers to women, can improve financial autonomy and social security.

Stimulating Consumption

1. Welfare transfers may increase local demand and support economic activity.

4. Concerns Regarding Competitive Freebie Politics

Fiscal Burden

1. Excessive welfare commitments can increase fiscal deficits and debt burdens.

Reduction in Capital Expenditure

1. Governments may reduce investment in infrastructure, education, and productive sectors to finance giveaways.

Short-Term Political Incentives

1. Electoral populism may overshadow structural reforms needed for long-term growth.

Dependency Risks

1. Poorly designed transfers may reduce incentives for productivity and employment generation.

5. Structural Development vs Consumption-Oriented Welfare

Importance of Productive Investments

1. Sustainable growth requires investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, manufacturing, and employment generation.

Human Capital Development

1. Long-term development depends on improving skills, productivity, and institutional capacity.

Risk of Developmental Imbalance

1. Excessive focus on consumption subsidies may weaken future growth potential.

6. Fiscal Responsibility and Governance

Need for Fiscal Prudence

1. Governments must balance welfare obligations with macroeconomic stability.

Transparent Budgeting

1. Welfare commitments should be fiscally sustainable and transparently financed.

Accountability in Public Spending

1. Expenditure should be evaluated based on long-term developmental outcomes.

7. Welfare State vs Populism

Legitimate Welfare State Functions

1. Democracies are expected to provide social security and protect vulnerable citizens.

Populist Distortion

1. Welfare becomes problematic when electoral gains dominate policy priorities.

Need for Targeted Welfare

1. Efficient targeting improves outcomes and reduces fiscal waste.

8. Relevance for India's Development Trajectory

Demographic and Social Pressures

1. Large vulnerable populations require state support in health, food, and employment.

Aspirations for High Growth

1. India also needs sustained investment in productive sectors to become a developed economy.

Balancing Equity and Efficiency

1. Public policy must combine social justice with economic productivity.

9. Way Forward

Shift Toward Capability-Based Welfare

1. Prioritise education, healthcare, skilling, and employment generation.

Improve Targeting and Efficiency

1. Use digital governance and DBT systems to reduce leakages and improve outcomes.

Strengthen Fiscal Rules

1. Welfare commitments should align with long-term fiscal sustainability.

Focus on Productive Public Investment

1. Infrastructure and human-capital investments should remain central to development policy.

Conclusion

Welfare support is necessary in an unequal society, but excessive competitive populism can weaken long-term development. India's challenge is not choosing between welfare and growth, but designing fiscally sustainable policies that combine social protection with structural transformation.

Source - https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/freebie-hurdle-to-real-change/4237106/

Question

Q. "The growing politics of freebies reflects the tension between welfare commitments and long-term developmental priorities." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

The increasing use of freebies and welfare promises in electoral politics has intensified debates regarding fiscal sustainability, governance quality, and long-term development priorities in India.

Positive Role of Welfare Measures

1. Welfare schemes provide social protection to vulnerable populations.
2. Cash transfers and subsidies can reduce poverty and improve consumption security.
3. Direct benefit transfers may strengthen women's financial empowerment and household welfare.

Concerns Regarding Freebie Politics

1. Excessive welfare commitments increase fiscal deficits and debt burdens.
2. Competitive populism may reduce capital expenditure on infrastructure and human development.
3. Short-term electoral gains can overshadow structural economic reforms.
4. Poorly targeted subsidies may create inefficiencies and dependency.

Need for Balanced Development

1. Sustainable growth requires investment in education, healthcare, skills, and infrastructure.
2. Welfare policies should focus on capability enhancement rather than temporary consumption support.
3. Fiscal discipline and transparent budgeting are essential for macroeconomic stability.

Conclusion

Welfare and development should not be viewed as opposing goals. India requires a balanced approach that combines social protection with productive investments to ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Source - https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/freebie-hurdle-to-real-change/4237106/

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 12.05.2026

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1. A New Phase in the India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership (TH)

GS Paper II - International Relations

Topic - Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub-Topic - India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership; Act East Policy; Indo-Pacific Security.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese President to Lâm's state visit to India (May 5–7, 2026) marked a milestone in diplomatic history as both nations formally upgraded their ties to an Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This elevation reflects a move from limited sectoral engagement to a broad-spectrum alliance encompassing defence, economic resilience, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific

The partnership is increasingly anchored by shared geopolitical concerns and regional visions -

Maritime Order - Both nations advocate for a rules-based maritime order and share concerns regarding growing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Policy Alignment - India's Act East Policy finds a natural complement in Vietnam's strategic balancing approach.

ASEAN Centrality - Vietnam is a pivotal pillar in India's engagement with ASEAN, supporting the principle of ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific architecture.

Strategic Autonomy - Collaboration is driven by a mutual desire for strategic autonomy and regional stability amid intensifying great-power competition.

3. Defence - The Backbone of the Partnership

Defence has evolved from capacity-building to a deterrent-focused pillar -

Hardware Transfer - Following the 2023 transfer of the missile corvette INS Kirpan, ties have deepened significantly.

BrahMos Exports - Advanced discussions on exporting BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles indicate a shift toward high-end deterrence capabilities.

Security Cooperation - Strategic cooperation includes maritime security, joint training, and financial assistance to bolster Vietnam's naval strength.

Trust Building - Regular high-level Défense dialogues have solidified mutual trust since the 2016 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

4. Economic and Technological Expansion

The relationship is diversifying into critical future-oriented sectors -

Trade Growth - Bilateral trade has surpassed $16 billion, with a formal target set at $25 billion by 2030.

Supply Chain Resilience - Both nations are collaborating to reduce "China-centric" dependencies by building resilient supply chains.

Critical Sectors - Cooperation now extends into rare earth minerals, digital payment systems, and energy.

Manufacturing Hubs - Leveraging Vietnam's role as an ASEAN manufacturing hub aligns with India's economic diversification strategies.

5. Regional Significance and Bilateralism

Power Balancing - India and Vietnam contribute to the regional balance of power by engaging with other partners like Japan, Australia, and the United States.

International Law - Joint efforts promote peace and adherence to international law in vital maritime corridors.

Mini lateral Cooperation - The ties reflect a broader trend of growing Mini lateral groupings in Asia aimed at maintaining regional peace.

6. Challenges and the Path Ahead

Despite the momentum, several hurdles remain for the partnership -

Implementation Gaps - Converting high-level political agreements into practical, on-ground outcomes in connectivity and trade.

Defence Barriers - Geopolitical and financial complexities surrounding the export of sensitive technologies like the BrahMos system.

Private Sector Role - There is a need to increase private sector participation and improve legal/logistics frameworks to support economic ties.

Emerging Tech - Future success will depend on how effectively both nations collaborate on critical minerals and emerging technologies.

Conclusion

The India-Vietnam relationship has matured into a vital strategic partnership essential for Indo-Pacific stability. By strengthening collaboration in maritime security, trade, and technology, both nations are positioning themselves as central actors in the evolving regional architecture. The long-term success of this "Enhanced" partnership will rely on the effective institutionalization of these new agreements.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-new-phase-in-the-india-vietnam-strategic-partnership/article70966755.ece

Question

"The transition of the India-Vietnam relationship into an 'Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' signifies a shift from mere diplomatic engagement to a robust security-centric alliance in the Indo-Pacific. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The state visit of Vietnamese President Tô Lâm to India in May 2026 culminated in the formal upgrade of bilateral ties to an Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This elevation reflects a profound transformation in diplomatic priorities, where shared geopolitical anxieties and a mutual vision for a rules-based Indo-Pacific have replaced traditional, low-intensity engagement.

2. Shift Toward a Security-Centric Alliance

The "Enhanced" nature of the partnership is fundamentally anchored in defense and strategic coordination -

Defense as a Core Pillar - Defense cooperation has transitioned from basic training and capacity building to providing high-end deterrence. This is evidenced by the 2023 transfer of the missile corvette INS Kirpan and ongoing discussions regarding the export of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to Vietnam.

Maritime Security Convergence - Both nations share deep concerns over maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea. Their alignment supports a rules-based order, emphasizing ASEAN centrality and India's Act East Policy as counter-balances to regional hegemony.

Strategic Autonomy - By strengthening ties, both India and Vietnam aim to maintain strategic autonomy, avoiding over-dependence on any single great power while contributing to the regional balance of power.

3. Economic and Technological Dimensions

A robust security alliance is unsustainable without economic integration, which is also being "enhanced" -

Resilient Supply Chains - Both nations are actively collaborating to build supply chains that are less "China-centric," focusing on rare earth minerals and emerging technologies.
Strategic Trade - Bilateral trade has crossed $16 billion, with a 2030 target of $25 billion, shifting focus toward strategic sectors like energy and digital finance.

4. Implementation Challenges

Despite the high level of political will, the partnership faces hurdles -
Geopolitical Sensitivities - High-end defense exports like the BrahMos system involve navigating complex financial and regional geopolitical landscapes.
Practical Outcomes - There is a persistent need to convert high-level diplomatic agreements into tangible infrastructure, logistics, and connectivity projects.

Conclusion

The upgrade to an Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is a clear signal that India and Vietnam view each other as indispensable security partners in the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture. While the relationship is maturing rapidly, its long-term success will depend on how effectively both nations institutionalize defense manufacturing and economic diversification to provide a credible alternative to existing regional power dynamics.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/business/renewable-energy-curtailment-critical-issue-mnre-secy-10684584/

2. Renewable Energy Curtailment Critical Issue; India Requires Super Grid Like China - MNRE Secy (IE)

GS Paper III - Economy / Infrastructure / Environment
Topic - Infrastructure - Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.
Sub-Topic - Renewable Energy Transition, Grid Management, and Energy Storage Systems.

1. Introduction

India's clean energy transition has reached a critical juncture where generation capacity is outpacing grid capability. On May 12, 2026, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) identified Renewable Energy Curtailment as a primary structural challenge. With nearly 23 GWh of solar power being curtailed daily in April 2026—enough to power one-fourth of Delhi—the focus has shifted from merely adding capacity to ensuring grid resilience and transmission efficiency.

2. Understanding Renewable Energy Curtailment

Definition - The intentional reduction of electricity generation from available renewable sources despite favourable weather conditions.
Primary Drivers -
Grid Saturation - Inability of the electricity grid to absorb excess supply during peak daytime solar generation.
Transmission Bottlenecks - Inadequate evacuation infrastructure prevents the transport of power from generation hubs to demand centres.
Economic Impact - Frequent curtailment discourages private investment and threatens the financial viability of green projects.

3. Structural and Infrastructure Challenges

Legacy Design - India's grid was originally built for stable, conventional thermal power, making it difficult to handle the intermittent nature of solar and wind.
Supply-Demand Mismatch - Solar peaks occur during the day, while India's peak demand often occurs in the evening.
Geographical Concentration - High generation is limited to states like Rajasthan and Gujarat, putting immense pressure on regional transmission lines.
DISCOM Health - The weak financial position of State Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) hampers procurement and payment for renewable power.

4. Government Initiatives - Green Energy Corridor (GEC)

The GEC scheme is the cornerstone of India's strategy to integrate renewables -
Objective - Strengthening transmission networks through dedicated lines and substations for power evacuation.
Scope - Supports both interstate and intrastate networks to transfer power from RE-rich states to consumption hubs.
Expansion - MNRE is planning larger outlays for GEC to include storage systems and improve overall grid reliability.

5. Technological Solutions for Grid Stability

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) - Stores excess daytime power for supply during peak evening hours, minimising wastage.

1. *Policy Support* - Domestic manufacturing is encouraged via the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.

Grid-Forming Inverters - These allow RE systems to mimic conventional plants, improving voltage and frequency stability.
Synchronous Condensers - Provide reactive power and inertia as thermal plants are phased out.
Smart Grids - Use digital monitoring and advanced forecasting to manage real-time electricity flows and predict generation patterns.

6. Strategic Road Ahead - Diversification and Global Models

Geographical Diversification - Expanding beyond Rajasthan and Gujarat through Agri-photovoltaics and Floating Solar on reservoirs to reduce transmission congestion.
The China "Super Grid" Model - India may eventually require ultra-high-voltage transmission lines similar to China's model to transfer power efficiently over long distances.
Policy Coordination - Enhanced synchronisation between the MNRE, Ministry of Power, CEA, and CTU is vital for smooth energy evacuation.

7. Conclusion

India's target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 cannot be achieved by generation alone. Addressing renewable energy curtailment requires a parallel revolution in grid modernisation. By investing in BESS, strengthening the Green Energy Corridor, and adopting smart grid technologies, India can build a flexible and resilient power system essential for long-term energy security and climate goals.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/business/renewable-energy-curtailment-critical-issue-mnre-secy-10684584/

Question

"Renewable energy curtailment is emerging as a significant structural bottleneck in India's journey toward its 2030 clean energy goals. Discuss the causes of this phenomenon and the multi-dimensional strategies required to build a resilient national grid." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India has set an ambitious target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030. However, the recent identification of significant renewable energy curtailment—where nearly 23 GWh of solar power was backed down daily in April 2026—highlights that generation capacity has outpaced the electricity grid's ability to absorb and transmit it.

2. Causes of Renewable Energy Curtailment

Infrastructure Mismatch - India's grid was primarily designed for stable thermal power; the intermittent nature of solar and wind creates operational stress that legacy systems are ill-equipped to handle.
Temporal Imbalance - Solar generation peaks during the day, creating a surplus that often fails to align with the evening peak demand.
Transmission Congestion - Many high-capacity RE projects is concentrated in specific states like Rajasthan and Gujarat. Inadequate evacuation infrastructure leads to regional transmission bottlenecks.
Financial Health of DISCOMs - The weak financial position of distribution companies often leads them to "back down" renewable power to avoid high procurement costs or technical imbalances.

3. Multi-dimensional Strategies for a Resilient Grid

A holistic approach is required to ensure energy security and reduce wastage -
Infrastructure Strengthening - Accelerating the Green Energy Corridor (GEC) scheme to create dedicated interstate and intrastate transmission lines for RE evacuation.
Energy Storage Solutions - Prioritizing Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to store excess daytime generation for peak-hour usage, supported by the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for domestic manufacturing.
Technological Interventions - Deploying Grid-forming inverters and Synchronous condensers to provide the inertia and frequency stability traditionally offered by thermal plants.
Geographical Diversification - Moving beyond concentrated hubs by promoting Agri-photovoltaics and Floating solar projects to distribute generation closer to demand centers.
Smart Grid Adoption - Implementing digital monitoring and advanced forecasting tools to better predict generation patterns and manage real-time power flows.

4. Conclusion

The success of India's clean energy transition depends on a parallel revolution in its transmission and storage architecture. By shifting focus from mere capacity addition to grid modernization and flexibility, India can mitigate curtailment, protect investor confidence, and achieve its long-term net-zero commitments.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/business/renewable-energy-curtailment-critical-issue-mnre-secy-10684584/

3. Asean's Elusive Search for Financial Safety (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic - Regional groupings and international institutions
Sub-Topic - Financial stability and currency arrangements

Introduction

The ASEAN region has long sought mechanisms to protect itself from external financial shocks and currency crises. The article discusses ASEAN's efforts to create regional financial safety arrangements, especially through initiatives such as the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM). However, despite institutional development, questions remain regarding the effectiveness, adequacy, and autonomy of such regional financial mechanisms in times of crisis.

1. Background - Why ASEAN Needs Financial Safety Nets

Experience of the Asian Financial Crisis (1997)

1. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis exposed the vulnerability of Southeast Asian economies to sudden capital outflows and currency instability.

Dependence on External Institutions

1. Many countries relied heavily on IMF assistance during crises, leading to concerns regarding external conditionalities and loss of policy autonomy.

Need for Regional Self-Protection

1. ASEAN countries recognised the importance of building regional financial cooperation mechanisms.

2. What is the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI/CMIM)?

Origin

1. The Chiang Mai Initiative was launched in 2000 among ASEAN+3 countries (ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea).

Objective

1. To create a regional financial safety net through currency swap arrangements.

Multilateralization

1. The mechanism later evolved into the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM).

3. Purpose of Regional Financial Safety Nets

Protection Against Currency Crises

1. Regional arrangements aim to provide liquidity support during financial instability.

Reducing Dependence on IMF

1. ASEAN countries sought greater financial autonomy and faster regional responses.

Regional Economic Stability

1. Financial cooperation strengthens investor confidence and macroeconomic resilience.

4. Structural Challenges Facing CMIM

Limited Financial Capacity

1. Questions remain regarding whether available funds are sufficient during major crises.

Dependence on IMF Linkage

1. A significant portion of CMIM assistance remains linked to IMF programmes.

Political and Strategic Rivalries

1. Strategic competition among China, Japan, and other regional actors affects institutional cohesion.

Weak Institutionalisation

1. CMIM lacks the enforcement power and operational depth of institutions like the IMF.

5. ASEAN's Broader Financial Vulnerabilities

Exposure to Global Capital Flows

1. ASEAN economies are highly integrated into global trade and finance.

Currency Volatility Risks

1. Sudden capital outflows can destabilise exchange rates and financial markets.

External Economic Dependence

1. Export-oriented economies remain vulnerable to global slowdowns and geopolitical tensions.

6. Geopolitical Dimensions

ASEAN+3 Cooperation

1. Financial cooperation reflects broader efforts at Asian regionalism.

China–Japan Competition

1. Leadership competition influences regional financial governance dynamics.

Indo-Pacific Economic Context

1. Financial resilience has become increasingly important amid geopolitical uncertainty and supply-chain disruptions.

7. Importance of Regional Financial Cooperation

Enhancing Collective Resilience

1. Regional mechanisms can provide faster and context-sensitive responses to crises.

Complementing Global Institutions

1. Regional arrangements need not replace the IMF but can supplement global financial governance.

Strengthening Economic Integration

1. Financial cooperation supports regional trade and investment flows.

8. Lessons for Emerging Economies Including India

Need for Financial Buffers

1. Countries require strong forex reserves and prudent macroeconomic management.

Regional Cooperation Matters

1. Financial stability increasingly depends on regional institutional coordination.

Importance of Crisis Preparedness

1. Developing economies must strengthen financial surveillance and contingency planning.

9. Way Forward for ASEAN Financial Architecture

Strengthening CMIM Capacity

1. Increase funding and improve rapid-disbursal mechanisms.

Reduce Excessive IMF Dependence

1. ASEAN should gradually improve institutional autonomy and credibility.

Improve Regional Surveillance

1. Better monitoring of financial vulnerabilities can strengthen preventive action.

Deepen Financial Integration

1. Greater monetary and financial cooperation can improve long-term regional stability.

Conclusion

ASEAN's search for financial safety reflects the broader challenge of building regional resilience in an uncertain global economy. While initiatives such as CMIM represent important progress, stronger institutional capacity, deeper cooperation, and greater financial autonomy are necessary for an effective regional financial safety net.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/aseans-elusive-search-for-financial-safety/article70965393.ece

Question

Q. "Regional financial safety mechanisms have become increasingly important in an era of global financial volatility." Discuss with reference to ASEAN's financial cooperation initiatives. (250 words)

Introduction

Global financial volatility and sudden capital movements have increased the importance of regional financial safety mechanisms. ASEAN countries, especially after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, have attempted to strengthen regional financial cooperation through initiatives such as the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM).

Importance of ASEAN Financial Cooperation

1. CMIM was created to provide liquidity support during financial crises.
2. Regional arrangements reduce excessive dependence on IMF assistance.
3. Financial cooperation strengthens investor confidence and macroeconomic stability.
4. ASEAN+3 cooperation promotes deeper regional economic integration.

Challenges Facing CMIM

1. Available financial resources may be insufficient during large-scale crises.
2. Significant portions of assistance remain linked to IMF conditionalities.
3. Strategic rivalry among regional powers affects institutional cohesion.
4. CMIM lacks the operational strength and institutional depth of the IMF.

Broader Relevance

1. Regional financial safety nets complement global financial institutions.
2. Financial resilience is increasingly important amid geopolitical uncertainty and capital-flow volatility.
3. Emerging economies require strong reserves, regional cooperation, and crisis-management mechanisms.

Conclusion

ASEAN's financial cooperation initiatives represent important efforts toward regional resilience. However, stronger institutional capacity, deeper coordination, and greater financial autonomy are necessary for an effective and credible regional financial safety framework.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/aseans-elusive-search-for-financial-safety/article70965393.ece

4. The Global Failure to Protect Women (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper I – Society and Women Issues
Topic - Role of women and women's organisations
Sub-Topic - International conventions and treaties

Introduction

Violence against women remains one of the most widespread human-rights violations across the world. Despite constitutional protections, international conventions, and national laws, women continue to face domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking, child marriage, workplace discrimination, and gender-based violence. The article argues that weak enforcement mechanisms and the absence of a binding global accountability framework continue to undermine women's safety, dignity, and empowerment.

1. Nature and Scale of Violence Against Women (VAW)

Forms of Violence

1. Women face physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and digital violence.

Domestic and Public Spaces

1. Violence occurs both within households and in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces.

Structural Nature of Gender Violence

1. Violence against women is rooted in patriarchal norms, unequal power relations, and gender discrimination.

2. Global Dimensions of the Problem

Persistence Across Countries

1. Violence against women exists across developed and developing countries alike.

Weak Legal Protection

1. Many countries still lack comprehensive laws against marital rape, workplace harassment, and domestic abuse.

Enforcement Deficit

1. Even where laws exist, implementation remains weak due to institutional failures and social stigma.

3. Economic and Developmental Consequences

Impact on Women's Participation

1. Violence reduces women's access to education, employment, and public participation.

Economic Costs

1. Gender violence lowers labour productivity and increases healthcare and social costs.

Developmental Losses

1. Exclusion and insecurity prevent societies from fully utilising women's capabilities and human capital.

4. Public Health and Psychological Impact

Physical Health Consequences

1. Violence results in injury, disability, reproductive health problems, and mortality.

Mental Health Impact

1. Survivors often face trauma, depression, anxiety, and long-term psychological distress.

Intergenerational Effects

1. Violence affects children, families, and broader social stability.

5. International Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is the primary international treaty addressing women's rights and gender discrimination.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. SDG 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Limitations of Global Frameworks

1. Many international agreements lack strong enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

6. Indian Context

Constitutional Protections

1. The Constitution guarantees equality, dignity, and protection against discrimination.

Legal Measures

1. India has enacted laws relating to domestic violence, workplace harassment, dowry, trafficking, and child marriage.

Continuing Challenges

1. Low reporting rates, social stigma, judicial delays, and weak enforcement remain serious concerns.

7. Violence and Governance

Institutional Accountability

1. Police, judiciary, healthcare systems, and social institutions play critical roles in protection and justice delivery.

Importance of Survivor-Centred Approaches

1. Legal systems must ensure dignity, rehabilitation, and support for survivors.

Data and Monitoring Gaps

1. Underreporting often hides the true scale of violence.

8. Need for Social and Cultural Transformation

Patriarchal Norms

1. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes perpetuate violence and discrimination.

Education and Awareness

1. Gender-sensitive education is essential for behavioural change.

Men and Community Participation

1. Preventing violence requires broader societal engagement beyond legal reform alone.

9. Way Forward

Stronger Enforcement Mechanisms

1. Improve police responsiveness, judicial efficiency, and survivor protection systems.

Comprehensive Legal Reform

1. Close legal gaps relating to marital rape, cyber abuse, and workplace safety.

Economic Empowerment of Women

1. Financial independence improves women's bargaining power and resilience.

Global Accountability Frameworks

1. International institutions should strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Multi-Sectoral Approach

1. Governments, civil society, schools, media, and communities must work together.

Conclusion

Violence against women is not only a human-rights issue but also a major social, economic, and developmental challenge. Sustainable progress requires stronger legal enforcement, institutional accountability, cultural transformation, and genuine commitment to gender equality at both national and global levels.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/the-global-failure-to-protect-women

Question

Q. "Violence against women is both a human-rights issue and a developmental challenge." Discuss the causes, consequences, and measures required to address gender-based violence globally and in India. (250 words)

Introduction

Violence against women remains one of the most widespread human-rights violations globally. Despite legal and institutional reforms, gender-based violence continues to undermine women's safety, dignity, and socio-economic participation.

Causes of Violence Against Women

1. Patriarchal social norms and gender inequality sustain discriminatory attitudes.
2. Economic dependence and unequal power relations increase vulnerability.
3. Weak law enforcement and judicial delays reduce accountability.
4. Social stigma and underreporting discourage victims from seeking justice.

Consequences

1. Violence affects women's physical and mental health.
2. It reduces access to education, employment, and public participation.
3. Gender violence imposes economic and social costs on societies.
4. Intergenerational impacts weaken social cohesion and human development.

Measures Required

1. Strengthen implementation of laws and institutional accountability.
2. Improve police responsiveness, legal aid, and survivor support systems.
3. Promote gender-sensitive education and behavioural change.
4. Expand women's economic empowerment and financial independence.
5. Strengthen international cooperation and monitoring under frameworks such as CEDAW.

Conclusion

Eliminating violence against women requires more than legal reform alone. Sustainable change depends on combining effective institutions, social transformation, and gender-equitable development policies.

Editorial of the Day – 13.05.2026

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1. Data and justice - On courts in India and AI tools (TH)

GS Paper II - Governance / Polity
Topic - e-Governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary.
Sub-Topic - Judicial Reforms, Artificial Intelligence in Law, and Access to Justice.

1. Introduction

On May 13, 2026, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant unveiled a significant digital transformation phase for the Indian judiciary. By launching the 'One Case, One Data' (OCOD) platform and the 'Su-Sahayak' AI chatbot, the Supreme Court aims to dismantle the "siloed" nature of judicial records, promoting a unified, transparent, and efficient justice delivery system.

2. 'One Case, One Data' (OCOD) - A Unified Digital Identity

The OCOD platform is designed to act as the "Single Source of Truth" for every legal matter in the country
Unified Digital Trail - It creates a single digital identity for a case, linking court records, appeals, and litigant actions across the hierarchy—from District Courts to the Supreme Court.
Operational Efficiency - * Reduces the need for manual verification of case history.
1. Streamlines the movement of records between lower and higher courts.
Data-Driven Governance - * Identifies procedural bottlenecks and specific points of delay in the case lifecycle.
2. Generates accurate judicial statistics for better policy planning.
Overcoming Fragmentation - Addresses the challenge of diverse software systems and uneven record quality across different states and judicial tiers.

3. 'Su-Sahayak' AI Chatbot - Digital Legal Assistance

Building on previous AI milestones like SUVAS (translation) and SUPACE (legal research), 'Su-Sahayak' serves as a public-facing interface -
Ease of Access - Integrated into the Supreme Court website to help users find case status, cause lists, judgments, and orders.
User Support - Provides immediate answers to FAQs and facilitates access to various e-services without manual navigation.
Defined Boundaries - The judiciary emphasizes that AI is restricted to administrative assistance and will not participate in substantive judicial reasoning or decision-making.

4. Challenges and Systemic Risks

The centralisation of judicial data brings forth significant concerns -
Data Security - A centralised database increases the risk of large-scale data breaches, surveillance, and unauthorised data misuse.
Interoperability - Ensuring that diverse legacy systems in various High Courts can seamlessly "talk" to the OCOD platform.

Record Integrity - The transition relies heavily on the quality and authenticity of older, digitised legacy records.
Privacy Protection - Protecting sensitive personal information of litigants in a highly transparent and linked system.

5. The Digital Divide and Inclusivity Concerns

There is a risk that "Digital Justice" may become "Exclusive Justice" if not managed carefully -
Infrastructure Barriers - Small-town lawyers and district-level practitioners may struggle with the costs of high-end scanners, cloud storage, and specialized software.
Emergence of Middlemen - A "tech-gap" could give rise to digital middlemen, adding extra unregulated costs for poor litigants.
Interface Limitations - 'Su-Sahayak' is primarily text-based, which may exclude non-tech-savvy individuals or those uncomfortable with typing complex legal queries.
Algorithmic Bias - The risk that AI models may inadvertently harbor biases against marginalized or historically disadvantaged groups.

6. Way Forward

Ethical AI Governance - Implementing strict frameworks to prevent algorithmic bias and ensure data accountability.
Inclusive Design - Developing voice-based interfaces for chatbots and providing shared digital infrastructure at district courts for small lawyers.
Cybersecurity Framework - Robust end-to-end encryption and a dedicated judicial data protection policy.
Capacity Building - Large-scale training programs for court staff and advocates to ensure smooth adoption of the OCOD system.

Conclusion

The OCOD and 'Su-Sahayak' initiatives represent a paradigm shift from a paper-heavy, fragmented judiciary to a data-driven, agile institution. While these tools offer the promise of clearing backlogs and improving transparency, the ultimate success of these reforms will be measured by their ability to remain inclusive. Justice must not only be digital but must be accessible to the last person in the queue, ensuring that technology bridges the gap rather than widening the digital divide.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/data-and-justice-on-courts-in-india-and-ai-tools/article70970293.ece

Question

"The digitalization of the Indian judiciary, through initiatives like 'One Case, One Data' (OCOD) and 'Su-Sahayak', promises a paradigm shift in administrative efficiency. However, it risks exacerbating the existing 'digital divide' in the legal profession. Critically analyze." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Supreme Court of India took a monumental step toward judicial modernization by launching the 'One Case, One Data' (OCOD) initiative and the 'Su-Sahayak' AI-powered chatbot. These reforms aim to replace the fragmented "siloed" system of court records with a unified, vertical digital integration across all tiers—from Taluka courts to the Apex Court.

2. Promises of Efficiency - The Positive Paradigm

The initiatives offer several transformative benefits -
Vertical Data Integration - OCOD creates a single digital identity for a case, acting like an "Aadhaar for litigation." This prevents the recreation of records as cases move from lower to higher courts, ensuring a seamless digital trail.
Streamlining Administration - By automating data retrieval and cross-verification, the system reduces the manual paperwork and clerical errors that contribute to India's massive case pendency (currently exceeding 5 crore cases).

Democratizing Information - The 'Su-Sahayak' AI chatbot provides litigants and small-scale lawyers with instant access to case status, cause lists, and judgments, fulfilling the constitutional mandate of Article 39A (Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid).

3. The Risk of a "Digital Divide" - Critical Concerns

Despite the potential, several challenges threaten the inclusivity of these reforms -

Infrastructural Barriers - Rural and District-level lawyers may face the financial burden of adopting high-end digital tools (scanners, stable high-speed internet, cloud storage) required to participate in the OCOD ecosystem.

Emergence of "Digital Middlemen" - A lack of digital literacy among litigants and grassroots practitioners may lead to the rise of unregulated intermediaries, increasing the hidden cost of litigation.

Privacy and Surveillance - A centralized "Single Source of Truth" database for cases raises significant concerns regarding data privacy and the potential for surveillance, especially in the absence of a dedicated judicial data protection framework.

Algorithmic Bias - AI systems like 'Su-Sahayak', if trained on historical datasets, risk reinforcing systemic biases against marginalized communities who have historically faced disproportionate legal challenges.

4. Way Forward

To ensure that technology bridges the gap rather than widening it, the following measures are essential

Inclusive Tech Design - Transitioning from text-based to voice-assisted and multilingual AI interfaces to cater to low-literacy users.

Subsidized Digital Infrastructure - Providing shared digital workstations and training hubs in every District Bar Association to support local lawyers.

Human-in-the-Loop AI - Ensuring AI is used only for administrative support and research, keeping substantive judicial reasoning strictly in human hands to avoid "black box" justice.

Conclusion

The OCOD and 'Su-Sahayak' initiatives are vital for a "future-ready" judiciary. However, the measure of their success lies not just in the speed of case disposal, but in their inclusivity. For digital justice to be true justice, the technological "bridge" must be wide enough to accommodate the most marginalized litigant and the smallest town practitioner.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/data-and-justice-on-courts-in-india-and-ai-tools/article70970293.ece

2. Activist moves Supreme Court green panel over alleged illegal construction in Kaziranga wildlife corridors (IE)

GS Paper III - Environment & Ecology; Biodiversity

Topic - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment.

Sub-Topic - Wildlife Corridors, Kaziranga National Park, Judicial Activism in Conservation, and Human-Wildlife Conflict.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, environmental activists filed a formal complaint with the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) regarding alleged illegal constructions in the Haldhibari and Panbari wildlife corridors. These corridors serve as the lifeblood for wildlife migrating between Kaziranga National Park and the Karbi Anglong Hills, particularly during the devastating annual Brahmaputra floods. The issue brings to the fore the challenge of enforcing the Supreme Court's 2019 ban on new constructions in these eco-sensitive zones.

2. Kaziranga National Park - A Global Conservation Landmark

Geographic Context - Situated in Assam along the Brahmaputra floodplains, it is a mosaic of tall elephant grass, marshlands, and dense tropical moist broadleaf forests.

UNESCO Recognition - Declared a World Heritage Site in 1985 for its unique biodiversity and successful conservation history.
Flagship Species - Hosts the world's largest population of the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros.
1. One of the highest densities of Royal Bengal Tigers (notified Tiger Reserve).
2. Home to "The Big Five" - Rhino, Tiger, Elephant, Asiatic Wild Buffalo, and Swamp Deer.

Ecological Role of Floods - Annual flooding is essential to maintain the park's wetland ecosystem, but it necessitates safe passage for animals to higher ground.

3. The Vital Role of Wildlife Corridors

Definition - Natural strips of habitat that connect fragmented protected areas, ensuring genetic exchange and species survival.
The Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong Link - During monsoons, animals move south toward the elevated Karbi Anglong Hills to escape drowning.
The Nine Key Corridors - Officially delineated in 2022, these include Amguri, Panbari, Haldhibari, Bagori, Harmati, Kanchanjuri, Hatidandi, Deosur, and Chirang.
Fragmentation Risks - Infrastructure like National Highway-37 (NH-37), tea garden expansions, and illegal resorts act as barriers, leading to -
1. High road mortality (accidents).
2. Increased Human-Wildlife Conflict.
3. Habitat isolation and genetic bottlenecks.

4. Legal and Institutional Framework for Protection

Supreme Court Mandate (2019) - Prohibited all new construction and mining activities in the nine identified corridors to preserve the integrity of the migratory path.
Central Empowered Committee (CEC) - A statutory body that assists the Supreme Court in monitoring compliance with environmental orders. It was born out of the landmark T.N. Godavarman case.
Constitutional Safeguards -
1. Article 48A - Directive Principle for the State to protect and improve the environment.
2. Article 51A(g) **-** Fundamental Duty of citizens to protect wildlife and have compassion for living creatures.

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) - Buffer areas around the park intended to act as "shock absorbers" against unregulated industrialization.

5. Emerging Threats and Challenges

Infrastructure Pressure - The widening of NH-37 and the lack of enough eco-bridges or underpasses.
Commercial Encroachment - Illegal hotels and shops catering to tourism often mushroom in the very pathways animals use at night.
Climate Change - Intensified rainfall patterns lead to more frequent and unpredictable flooding, making the reliability of these corridors a matter of life and death for the park's fauna.
Anthropogenic Stress - Rapid urbanization near the boundaries of Karbi Anglong limits the "refuge" space available to animals once they cross the corridors.

6. Conservation Strategies in India

Project Tiger & Project Elephant - Specialized missions that prioritize habitat connectivity.
National Wildlife Action Plan (2017–2031) - Shifts the focus from "Protected Area" management to "Landscape-based" conservation.
Landscape Integration - Recognizing that wildlife does not understand human-drawn boundaries and requires integrated management across forest and non-forest land.

7. Way Forward

Rigorous Enforcement - CEC must ensure that illegal structures are demolished and no further "creeping urbanization" occurs in the nine corridors.

Smart Infrastructure - Implementing "Green Infrastructure" such as elevated corridors or flyovers on NH-37 to allow unimpeded animal movement.
Community Stewardship - Integrating the local fringe-village residents into the "homestay" and "nature guide" economy to reduce their reliance on land-encroaching activities.
Science-Based Zoning - Using satellite tracking and GIS mapping to adjust corridor boundaries based on actual animal movement patterns.

Conclusion

The sanctity of Kaziranga's wildlife corridors is non-negotiable for the survival of India's most iconic megafauna. The intervention of the CEC underscores that conservation cannot be sacrificed for short-term commercial gains. True progress lies in an integrated landscape approach where infrastructure "builds around" nature rather than over it.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/kaziranga-wildlife-corridor-illegal-construction-complaint-10685281/

Question

"Wildlife corridors act as the 'biological arteries' of a landscape, essential for the resilience of fragmented ecosystems. Elucidate this statement with specific reference to the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape and the role of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) in its protection." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Wildlife corridors are natural pathways that connect fragmented habitats, allowing for the movement of species, genetic exchange, and climate-induced migration. In the context of Kaziranga National Park, these corridors are not merely elective pathways but functional necessities due to the park's unique flood-prone geography.

2. Biological Arteries - The Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong Link

The landscape exemplifies the "arterial" role of corridors in several ways -
Seasonal Survival - Kaziranga is situated on the floodplains of the Brahmaputra. During the annual monsoon, nearly 90% of the park is submerged. Corridors like Haldhibari and Panbari allow megafauna (Rhinos, Elephants, Tigers) to migrate to the elevated refuge of the Karbi Anglong Hills.
Genetic Connectivity - By linking the floodplains with the highlands, these corridors prevent "island syndrome," ensuring that animal populations do not become genetically isolated, which is crucial for the long-term survival of the one-horned rhinoceros.
Mitigating Conflict - Defined corridors steer wildlife away from human settlements. Fragmentation of these paths by infrastructure like NH-37 forces animals into villages, escalating human-wildlife conflict and increasing road mortality.

3. Role of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC)

The CEC, as a Supreme Court-mandated body, serves as a guardian of these ecological arteries -
Monitoring Compliance - The CEC assists the judiciary in ensuring that the 2019 Supreme Court order—which prohibited new construction in nine identified corridors—is implemented on the ground.
Investigative Oversight - Acting as a specialized ombudsman, the CEC reviews complaints from activists regarding illegal resorts or infrastructure projects that threaten to sever these migratory links.
Balancing Development and Ecology - Through the T.N. Godavarman framework, the CEC provides technical expertise to the Court, helping it decide where infrastructure must yield to ecological imperatives.

4. Challenges to Preservation

Despite legal protections, the "arteries" face blockage from -
Creeping Urbanization - Unregulated tourism and commercial structures often mushroom in eco-sensitive zones.

Infrastructure Pressure - The widening of highways and the lack of scientific "Green Infrastructure" (like underpasses) create physical barriers to movement.

Conclusion

The Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong corridors are central to the integrity of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Elucidating their role reveals that conservation cannot be restricted to the boundaries of a National Park; it must extend to the "landscape level." The proactive role of the CEC and the judiciary ensures that these biological arteries remain open, safeguarding India's biodiversity against the pressures of unregulated development and climate change.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/india/kaziranga-wildlife-corridor-illegal-construction-complaint-10685281/

3. Decoding Banks' Return to Health (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Indian banking system and financial sector reforms
Sub-Topic - Inclusive growth and economic stability

Introduction

India's banking sector has undergone major transformation over the last decade. Public Sector Banks (PSBs), which were once burdened with high Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), weak profitability, and capital stress, have shown signs of recovery through reforms, recapitalisation, digitalisation, and improved regulatory oversight. However, the article argues that the apparent recovery must be examined carefully because rapid credit expansion and debt-driven consumption can create fresh vulnerabilities if not supported by sustainable income growth and productive investment.

1. Evolution of India's Banking Sector

Earlier Banking Challenges

1. Indian banks, especially PSBs, faced severe stress due to rising NPAs, poor governance, and weak credit appraisal.

Impact of the Twin Balance Sheet Problem

1. Corporate debt distress and stressed bank balance sheets reduced lending capacity and economic growth.

Need for Financial Sector Reforms

1. Banking reforms became necessary to restore credit flow and financial stability.

2. Reasons Behind the Recovery of Banks

Reduction in NPAs

1. Banks have improved asset quality through recoveries, insolvency processes, and stricter provisioning norms.

Recapitalisation Measures

1. Government recapitalisation strengthened PSB balance sheets.

Improved Regulation and Supervision

1. RBI oversight and prudential norms improved risk management practices.

Digital Financial Transformation

1. Expansion of digital payments and fintech ecosystems increased banking efficiency and outreach.

3. Role of Financial Inclusion

Expansion of Banking Access

1. Schemes such as Jan Dhan Yojana expanded formal banking access.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

1. UPI, Aadhaar, and digital payment systems deepened financial inclusion.

Wider Credit Penetration

1. Formal financial systems increasingly reached rural and underserved populations.

4. Credit Growth and Emerging Concerns

Rapid Expansion of Retail Credit

1. Consumer loans, housing loans, and personal credit have grown significantly.

Debt-Driven Consumption

1. Economic growth increasingly depends on credit-financed consumption.

Risks of Overleveraging

1. Excessive dependence on retail credit can create financial vulnerabilities.

5. Housing and Retail Credit Risks

Housing Loan Expansion

1. Housing finance has become a major component of retail lending.

Perception of Safety

1. Housing loans are often viewed as low-risk because they are asset-backed.

Potential Stress Risks

1. Income shocks, unemployment, or economic slowdowns can affect repayment capacity.

6. Structural Issues in Banking

Uneven Credit Allocation

1. Productive sectors such as manufacturing may receive less attention compared to retail lending.

Risk of Asset Bubbles

1. Excessive credit concentration can inflate real-estate or consumption bubbles.

Credit Quality Concerns

1. Rapid loan growth sometimes weakens lending standards.

7. Banking Sector and Economic Growth

Positive Role of Banks

1. Banks remain central to investment, consumption, and economic activity.

Need for Productive Credit

1. Long-term growth depends more on productive investment than consumption-driven borrowing alone.

Financial Stability Imperative

1. Sustainable banking growth requires balancing profitability with prudential discipline.

8. Role of Regulation and RBI

Prudential Norms

1. RBI plays a critical role in maintaining financial stability through capital adequacy and provisioning requirements.

Monitoring Retail Credit

1. Regulators increasingly monitor rapid growth in unsecured and retail lending.

Macroprudential Stability

1. Financial regulation aims to prevent systemic risks and credit bubbles.

9. Way Forward

Strengthen Credit Appraisal

1. Banks should maintain lending discipline and avoid excessive risk-taking.

Promote Productive Investment

1. Greater credit flow toward manufacturing, MSMEs, and infrastructure is necessary.

Enhance Financial Literacy

1. Borrowers must understand risks associated with excessive debt.

Maintain Balanced Credit Growth

1. Sustainable growth requires alignment between income growth and borrowing levels.

Conclusion

India's banking sector has made significant progress in restoring stability and profitability. However, long-term financial health depends on maintaining prudent lending standards, supporting productive investment, and avoiding excessive dependence on debt-driven consumption growth.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/decoding-banks-return-to-health/article70970996.ece# -~ -text=It%20is%20marked%20by%20consolidation,for%20distribution%20of%20financial%20services.

Question

Q. "The recovery of India's banking sector has improved financial stability, but rapid retail credit expansion may create new vulnerabilities." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

India's banking sector has witnessed significant improvement in recent years due to lower NPAs, recapitalisation, digitalisation, and regulatory reforms. However, rapid expansion of retail and consumption-driven credit has raised fresh concerns regarding financial stability.

Factors Behind Banking Recovery

1. Reduction in NPAs improved asset quality.
2. Government recapitalisation strengthened Public Sector Banks.
3. RBI regulations improved prudential discipline and provisioning.
4. Digital public infrastructure expanded financial inclusion and banking efficiency.

Emerging Concerns

1. Retail loans, including housing and personal loans, are growing rapidly.
2. Debt-driven consumption may not remain sustainable during income shocks or economic slowdowns.
3. Excessive retail credit concentration can create asset bubbles and repayment risks.
4. Rapid credit expansion may weaken lending standards and increase future NPAs.

Need for Balanced Banking Growth

1. Credit growth should support productive sectors such as manufacturing, MSMEs, and infrastructure.
2. Banks must maintain strong credit appraisal and risk-management systems.
3. RBI should continue monitoring systemic risks and unsecured lending growth.

Conclusion

India's banking recovery represents an important achievement for financial stability. However, sustainable banking growth requires balancing profitability and credit expansion with prudent regulation and productive investment-led economic growth.
Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/decoding-banks-return-to-health/article70970996.ece# -~ -text=It%20is%20marked%20by%20consolidation,for%20distribution%20of%20financial%20services.

4. India's 2047 Clock Is Ticking - Let Us Acquire War Shock Resilience (Mt)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations
Topic - Effects of external shocks on the Indian economy
Sub-Topic - India's foreign policy and global geopolitical developments

Simple Introduction

India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047. However, the modern global economy is increasingly vulnerable to wars, geopolitical tensions, supply-chain disruptions, and energy shocks. The Russia–Ukraine conflict and tensions in West Asia have demonstrated how global crises can rapidly affect oil prices, inflation, shipping routes, food security, and economic stability. The article argues that India must build "war shock resilience" through strategic reserves, energy diversification, resilient infrastructure, and long-term preparedness.

1. Meaning of War Shock Resilience

Definition

1. War shock resilience refers to the ability of a country to withstand and recover from disruptions caused by wars, geopolitical conflicts, and global crises.

Components of Resilience

1. It includes energy security, supply-chain stability, food security, financial stability, and strategic preparedness.

2. Why War Shock Preparedness is Necessary for India

Import Dependence

1. India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil, gas, fertilisers, and critical minerals.

Vulnerability to Global Conflicts

1. Disruptions in major trade routes or energy-producing regions directly affect India's economy.

Aspirations of Viksit Bharat 2047

1. Sustained high growth requires stable energy supplies and macroeconomic resilience.

3. Lessons from Recent Global Conflicts

Russia–Ukraine War

1. The conflict caused sharp increases in oil, gas, fertiliser, and food prices globally.

West Asian Tensions

1. Tensions around strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz exposed vulnerabilities in energy supply chains.

Supply-Chain Disruptions

1. Wars disrupted shipping routes, logistics, and global trade networks.

4. India's Energy Vulnerability

Heavy Dependence on Imported Crude Oil

1. India imports a major share of its crude oil requirements.

Exposure to Price Volatility

1. International oil-price fluctuations affect inflation, fiscal stability, and current-account balance.

Strategic Weakness

1. Limited strategic reserves reduce the ability to absorb prolonged external shocks.

5. Importance of Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs)

Meaning of SPRs

1. Strategic Petroleum Reserves are emergency crude oil stockpiles maintained for crisis situations.

Benefits of Larger Reserves

1. They help stabilise domestic supply during wars or supply disruptions.

Comparison with Other Countries

1. Several developed economies maintain much larger emergency reserves compared to India.

6. Need for Fuel Diversification

Reducing Dependence on Crude Oil

1. Diversification reduces vulnerability to global oil shocks.

Expansion of Renewable Energy

1. Solar, wind, green hydrogen, and biofuels improve long-term energy security.

Electric Mobility Transition

1. EV adoption can reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

7. Maritime and Logistics Security

Importance of Sea Lanes

1. India's trade and energy imports rely heavily on maritime routes.

Strategic Chokepoints

1. Disruptions in areas such as the Strait of Hormuz or Red Sea can affect Indian trade.

Infrastructure Resilience

1. Ports, storage systems, and logistics networks must be strengthened.

8. Economic Implications of External Shocks

Inflationary Pressures

1. Rising fuel prices increase transport and production costs.

Fiscal Stress

1. Governments may need to increase subsidies during crises.

Current Account Deficit (CAD) Risks

1. Higher import bills widen trade deficits and external vulnerabilities.

9. Need for Institutional and Policy Preparedness

Long-Term Strategic Planning

1. Economic resilience requires integrated planning across energy, trade, defence, and infrastructure sectors.

Building Domestic Manufacturing Capacity

1. Reducing dependence on external suppliers strengthens resilience.

Strengthening Data and Forecasting Systems

1. Early warning systems improve crisis preparedness.

10. Way Forward

Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves

1. India should gradually increase emergency crude oil storage capacity.

Accelerate Renewable Energy Transition

1. Renewable energy and green hydrogen investments should be prioritised.

Diversify Import Sources

1. Multiple sourcing strategies reduce geopolitical dependence.

Strengthen Domestic Production

1. Domestic manufacturing and refining capacities must expand.

Build Comprehensive National Resilience Framework

1. Economic, energy, maritime, and supply-chain resilience should be integrated into national planning.

Conclusion

India's development ambitions require more than economic growth alone. In an era of geopolitical instability and supply-chain disruptions, long-term national security depends on building resilient energy systems, strategic reserves, diversified supply chains, and institutional preparedness against global shocks.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/oil-shock-trade-turmoil-india-viksit-bharat-2047-resilience-gulf-war-economy-energy-reserves-oil-imports-11778509093837.html

Question

Q. "Energy security and strategic resilience have become central to India's developmental ambitions in an increasingly uncertain global order." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

Recent geopolitical conflicts have highlighted the vulnerability of global supply chains and energy markets. As a major energy-importing economy, India faces significant risks from external disruptions, making strategic resilience essential for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Challenges Faced by India

1. Heavy dependence on imported crude oil increases vulnerability to external shocks.
2. Geopolitical tensions disrupt trade routes and maritime supply chains.

3. Rising fuel prices contribute to inflation and fiscal stress.
4. Limited strategic reserves reduce the capacity to absorb prolonged disruptions.

Importance of Strategic Resilience

1. Strategic Petroleum Reserves help ensure energy availability during crises.
2. Diversified energy sources reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports.
3. Renewable energy expansion strengthens long-term energy security.
4. Domestic manufacturing and resilient logistics networks improve economic stability.

Measures Required

1. Expand strategic fuel reserves and storage infrastructure.
2. Accelerate renewable energy and green hydrogen investments.
3. Diversify import partners and trade routes.
4. Strengthen maritime security and logistics resilience.
5. Integrate energy security into long-term national development planning.

Conclusion

In an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment, India's rise as a developed economy will depend not only on economic growth but also on its ability to withstand external shocks through strategic preparedness and resilient energy systems.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/oil-shock-trade-turmoil-india-viksit-bharat-2047-resilience-gulf-war-economy-energy-reserves-oil-imports-11778509093837.html

Editorial of the Day – 14.05.2026

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1. Elusive peace - On the Russia-Ukraine war (TH)

GS Paper II - International Relations
Topic - Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
Sub-Topic - Collective Defence, NATO Expansion, and India's Strategic Autonomy.

1. Introduction

Established on April 4, 1949, in the aftermath of World War II, NATO is a trans-Atlantic intergovernmental military and political alliance. Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, the organization was originally conceived to provide collective security against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Today, it remains a central pillar of global security, adapting its mandate to include cyber defense, counter-terrorism, and crisis management.

2. Formation and Background

The Washington Treaty - NATO was founded via the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty) with 12 founding members.
Founding Context - It emerged from the need for a united security front in Europe and North America to prevent the resurgence of nationalism and deter external aggression.
Cold War Era - It served as the primary Western military bloc, maintaining a "tripwire" force to ensure regional stability.

3. Main Objectives and Core Principles

The alliance operates on the principle that political and military means must be used to protect the freedom and security of its members.
Collective Defence - The bedrock of NATO is Article 5, which stipulates that an armed attack against one member is considered an attack against all.
1. *Historical Use* - Article 5 has been invoked only once—following the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

Political Consultation - It provides a forum where members can consult on security issues and take collaborative action.
Modern Challenges - Its scope has expanded to address hybrid warfare, maritime security, and the protection of critical infrastructure from cyber-attacks.

4. Membership and Expansion

Current Strength - NATO now consists of 32 member countries.
Recent Accessions - In response to heightened security concerns in Eastern Europe, Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) abandoned their long-standing neutrality to join the alliance.
Open Door Policy - Under Article 10, any European country in a position to further the principles of the Treaty can be invited to join, provided there is unanimous consensus among existing members.

5. Organizational and Military Structure

North Atlantic Council (NAC) - The principal political decision-making body.
Secretary General - The top international civil servant who leads the alliance's political process.

Integrated Military Command - Allows for the seamless coordination of national forces during joint exercises or active operations.
Consensus-Based Decisions - All decisions are reached by consensus, reflecting the collective will of all 32 sovereign states.

6. NATO and Russia - The Strategic Friction

The relationship with Russia is the most significant external factor affecting NATO's current posture -
Expansion Concerns - Russia views NATO's eastward expansion into former Soviet spheres of influence as an existential threat.
The Ukraine Context - The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led NATO to significantly enhance its "Enhanced Forward Presence" in Eastern Europe (Poland and the Baltic states).
Deterrence Posture - The alliance has transitioned back to a "Cold War-style" focus on high-end conventional deterrence.

7. India's Perspective on NATO

India maintains a nuanced and independent relationship with the alliance -
Non-Membership - India is not a member of NATO and generally avoids formal military alliances to preserve its Strategic Autonomy.
Individual Partnerships - India maintains strong bilateral defense ties with many NATO members (e.g., USA, France, and the UK).
Limited Engagement - Interaction is restricted to functional areas like maritime security, exchange of perspectives on regional security, and counter-terrorism.
Strategic Caution - India remains wary of any NATO involvement that might complicate its sensitive relationship with Russia or pull it into trans-Atlantic conflicts.

8. Importance and Challenges

Security Guarantee - Provides a credible nuclear and conventional "umbrella" for European members.
Global Influence - NATO's operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden demonstrate its ability to project power globally.
Internal Challenges - Balancing the differing security priorities of 32 nations and ensuring that all members meet the 2% GDP defense spending target remains a persistent challenge.

Conclusion

NATO remains the world's most successful military alliance, surviving long after its original Cold War adversary collapsed. In an increasingly multipolar world, its relevance has been rejuvenated by the return of state-on-state conflict in Europe. For India, NATO's activities are a critical variable in the global security equation, necessitating a policy of engagement without entanglement.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/elusive-peace-on-the-russia-ukraine-war/article70970353.ece

Question

"The expansion of NATO in the 21st century marks a transition from a Cold War relic to a central arbiter of contemporary European security. Examine the significance of Article 5 in this transition and its implications for India's policy of 'Strategic Autonomy'." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Formed in 1949 to deter Soviet expansionism, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has recently experienced a "strategic rebirth." With the accession of Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024), the alliance has grown to 32 members, signalling a shift from post-Cold War stagnation to a proactive posture necessitated by the return of state-on-state conflict in Europe.

2. The Significance of Article 5 in the Modern Era

Article 5, the collective defense clause, remains the gravitational center of the alliance -

The Deterrence Effect - It ensures that any localized aggression in Eastern Europe carries the risk of a full-scale trans-Atlantic response. This "nuclear and conventional umbrella" is the primary driver behind the recent applications of historically neutral nations.
Expansion of Scope - Originally designed for conventional territorial attacks, Article 5 is being reinterpreted to cover hybrid threats, including large-scale cyber-attacks and interference in critical infrastructure, making NATO relevant to 21st-century warfare.
Political Cohesion - While invoked only once (post-9/11), the mere existence of Article 5 enforces a mandatory consultation process through the North Atlantic Council (NAC), ensuring that security decisions are reached by consensus.

3. Implications for India's Strategic Autonomy

NATO's resurgence presents a complex diplomatic landscape for India -
Pressure on Neutrality - As NATO consolidates its stance against Russia, India's "middle path" and its deep defense ties with Moscow face increasing pressure from Western partners to align with the trans-Atlantic security architecture.
Functional Cooperation - India maintains a policy of "engagement without entanglement." While it cooperates with individual NATO members like the US and France on maritime security and counter-terrorism, it steadfastly avoids formal military alliances to prevent being drawn into European conflicts.
The Indo-Pacific Variable - NATO's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific to counter China aligns with some of India's security interests. However, India remains cautious that a formal NATO "link" might provoke regional sensitivities and compromise its independent decision-making.

4. Challenges to the Alliance

Despite its expansion, NATO faces internal and external stressors -
Burden Sharing - The persistent debate over European members meeting the 2% GDP defense spending target.
Russia's "Red Lines" - The perception of NATO's "eastward encirclement" remains a primary driver of volatility in regional strategic stability.

Conclusion

Examing NATO's current trajectory reveals an organization that has successfully adapted its 1949 mandate to address the geopolitical realities of 2026. For India, the challenge lies in navigating this revitalized alliance by leveraging bilateral defense synergies while guarding its Strategic Autonomy. In a multipolar world, India's priority remains a rules-based order that respects regional sensitivities without necessitating a return to rigid bloc-based security.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/elusive-peace-on-the-russia-ukraine-war/article70970353.ece

2. NEET-UG cancelled - Why this is a first, what happened in past paper leak cases (IE)

GS Paper II - Governance / Social Justice (Education)
Topic - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
Sub-Topic - Examination Reforms, National Testing Agency (NTA) Accountability, and Digital Governance.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the NEET-UG examination following evidence of organized paper leaks. Affecting approximately 23 lakh aspirants, the crisis has renewed the debate on the structural differences between NEET (offline) and JEE (online), the credibility of the NTA, and the necessity of transitioning toward a more secure, computer-based testing (CBT) environment.

2. NEET vs. JEE - A Comparative Analysis

The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) has maintained higher credibility than NEET due to fundamental operational differences -

Mode of Conduct - NEET remains an offline pen-and-paper exam, whereas JEE is a Computer-Based Test (CBT).

Logistical Scale - NEET caters to ~23 lakh candidates annually, nearly double the ~14 lakh who appear for JEE.

Administrative Oversight - JEE Main is conducted by the NTA, but JEE Advanced is managed by the elite IIT system, which maintains a specialized, high-security infrastructure.

Socio-Economic Pressure - The scarcity of affordable government medical seats creates an intense "high-stakes" environment, incentivizing organized crime and paper-leak syndicates.

3. Vulnerabilities of the Offline (Pen-and-Paper) Model

The offline nature of NEET creates multiple "failure points" in its security chain -

Physical Logistics - Question papers must be printed, stored in vaults, and transported across thousands of centers. Each physical touchpoint is a potential leakage site.

Human Interfaces - Involvement of printing press staff, logistics personnel, local administrators, and invigilators increases the probability of a security breach.

Simultaneous Security - Monitoring thousands of offline centers nationwide for over 2 million students is an administrative nightmare compared to a centralized digital server.

4. The Computer-Based Test (CBT) Advantage

Transitioning to digital exams offers robust safeguards -

Encrypted Delivery - Question papers are generated digitally at the center, eliminating the risks associated with physical transportation.

Randomization - Large question banks and AI-driven randomization make it nearly impossible to predict or access the specific paper beforehand.

Digital Auditing - CBT systems allow for real-time surveillance, biometric logs, and digital footprints, making it easier to detect and trace suspicious activities.

5. Barriers to Implementing CBT for NEET

Despite the benefits, several challenges hinder a complete digital transition for NEET -

Infrastructure Deficit - India lacks the massive digital infrastructure required to host 2.3 million students in a single shift.

The Normalization Dispute - To conduct CBT over multiple shifts, "normalization" of scores is required. This often leads to litigation regarding the fairness of varying difficulty levels.

Digital Divide - Students from rural and economically weaker sections may face a disadvantage compared to urban peers familiar with digital interfaces.

6. Institutional and Social Implications

National Testing Agency (NTA) - Established in 2017 to professionalize testing, the NTA now faces an "accountability crisis." Repeated failures have weakened public trust in its capacity.

Psychological and Financial Strain - Cancellations cause immense stress for students and delay the academic calendar. Honest students from poor backgrounds suffer the most as they rely solely on merit-based selection.

Erosion of Meritocracy - Persistent leaks suggest that "access to wealth" can bypass "access to merit," threatening the core values of the Indian education system.

7. Way Forward - Strategic Reforms

Technological Integration - Adopting blockchain for paper storage, biometric verification, and end-to-end encrypted servers.

Phased Digitalization - Expanding CBT centers in a phased manner to eventually accommodate the full NEET candidate base.
Legal Deterrence - Implementing a stringent central law specifically targeting organized paper-leak syndicates with heavy penalties and fast-track trials.
Independent Oversight - Creating a permanent, independent audit body to monitor the NTA's operational protocols and conduct regular "stress tests" of the examination system.

Conclusion

The 2026 NEET crisis is a wake-up call for the "Elephant in the Data Room"—the vulnerability of offline national exams. While the scale of NEET is daunting, the future of India's meritocracy depends on a secure digital-first approach. Only by combining institutional accountability with technological resilience can the government restore the sanctity of competitive examinations and protect the aspirations of millions of Indian students.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/neet-ug-cancelled-paper-leak-nta-explained-10685410/

Question

"The frequent cancellation of high-stakes examinations like NEET-UG reflects a 'crisis of institutional credibility' rather than just a 'logistical failure'. Critically analyze the impact of such systemic lapses on the socio-economic aspirations of vulnerable sections and suggest reforms to restore the sanctity of India's merit-based selection system." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The 2026 cancellation of the NEET-UG examination following evidence of organized paper leaks has exposed deep-seated vulnerabilities in the National Testing Agency's (NTA) governance. This is no longer merely a logistical hurdle but an institutional crisis that threatens the foundational promise of equality of opportunity (Article 16) and meritocracy in India.

2. Impact on Socio-Economic Aspirations

Systemic lapses in examination integrity create a skewed playing field -
Erosion of Equity - While affluent students may have "safety nets" (private seats or multiple attempts), students from economically weaker sections (EWS) depend solely on merit-based government seats. Paper leaks ensure that "access to wealth" overrides "access to merit."
Psychological and Financial Burden - Frequent cancellations inflict severe mental trauma on nearly 23 lakh aspirants. Furthermore, the cost of re-traveling to centers and extended coaching stays places a disproportionate financial burden on rural families.
Institutional Trust Deficit - When the "gatekeeper of merit" (NTA) fails repeatedly, it leads to a breakdown of public trust in the state's ability to conduct fair selections, potentially leading to social unrest and increased litigation.

3. Strategic Reforms - The Path to Sanctity

Restoring faith in the system requires a multi-pronged approach -
Technological Overhaul - Transitioning from the vulnerable offline pen-and-paper **mode** to an end-to-end encrypted Computer-Based Test (CBT). Implementing blockchain for paper storage and AI-based proctoring can significantly reduce human intervention.
Institutional Accountability - Making the NTA an independent, statutory body with a permanent audit cell. There must be "Zero Tolerance" policies where senior officials are held administratively responsible for security breaches.
Legal Deterrence - Enacting a stringent Central Law—the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act—to ensure fast-track trials and life imprisonment for members of organized paper-leak syndicates.
Decentralized Coordination - While maintaining a national standard, the logistics could be decentralized to premier regional institutions (like IITs or AIIMS) to ensure tighter localized security.

Conclusion

The sanctity of competitive examinations is the bedrock of social mobility in India. A "Critically Analytical" view suggests that while technology is a tool for reform, the solution lies in administrative probity. Only by shielding the NTA from external pressures and enforcing rigorous accountability can the government protect the dreams of millions of aspirants and uphold the constitutional value of justice.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/neet-ug-cancelled-paper-leak-nta-explained-10685410/

3. Global Size Via Bank Consolidation (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy
Topic - Banking sector reforms
Sub-Topic - Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)

Introduction

India's banking sector has undergone major restructuring through consolidation, recapitalisation, and regulatory reforms. Large banks are increasingly viewed as necessary for financing infrastructure, competing globally, and supporting economic growth. However, the article argues that bank consolidation alone cannot guarantee financial stability or efficiency. Policymakers must also address governance weaknesses, NBFC vulnerabilities, technological risks, and credit-quality concerns to create a resilient banking system.

1. Meaning of Bank Consolidation

Definition

1. Bank consolidation refers to the merger or amalgamation of smaller banks into larger banking entities.

Objectives of Consolidation

1. Improve operational efficiency and capital strength.
2. Create globally competitive banks.
3. Enhance lending capacity for large infrastructure projects.

2. Need for Large Banks in India

Financing Development Needs

1. Large infrastructure and industrial projects require strong balance sheets and large-scale financing capacity.

Global Competitiveness

1. India seeks globally competitive banks capable of supporting international trade and investment.

Economies of Scale

1. Larger banks can reduce operational costs through technology integration and branch rationalisation.

3. Public Sector Bank (PSB) Consolidation in India

Recent Consolidation Process

1. Several PSBs were merged to create fewer but larger banking entities.

Expected Benefits

1. Improved efficiency, better capital utilisation, and enhanced lending capacity were key goals.

Structural Transformation

1. Consolidation changed the banking landscape from fragmented PSBs to larger integrated institutions.

4. Concerns Regarding Consolidation

Bigger Size Does Not Guarantee Stability

1. Large banks may still face governance failures and bad-loan problems.

Risk of Concentrated Exposure

1. Bigger banks may become "too big to fail," increasing systemic risks.

Operational Integration Challenges

1. Mergers can create technological, cultural, and administrative integration difficulties.

5. Asset-Liability Mismatch (ALM) Issues

Meaning of ALM Risk

1. Asset-Liability Mismatch occurs when the maturity profiles of assets and liabilities differ significantly.

Banking Sector Implications

1. Poor ALM management can create liquidity stress and financial instability.

Importance of Risk Management

1. Strong monitoring systems are necessary to reduce liquidity vulnerabilities.

6. Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and Credit Risks

Reduction in Gross NPAs

1. Indian banks have reduced NPAs through write-offs, recoveries, and insolvency reforms.

Concerns About Write-Offs

1. Reduction in NPAs partly reflects technical write-offs rather than full recovery of stressed assets.

Credit Quality Monitoring

1. Sustainable banking health depends on improving lending standards and recovery mechanisms.

7. NBFC Sector Vulnerabilities

Importance of NBFCs

1. NBFCs play a major role in credit delivery, especially for underserved sectors.

Structural Weaknesses

1. Many NBFCs depend heavily on market borrowings rather than deposits.

Contagion Risks

1. Financial stress in large NBFCs can affect the broader banking and financial system.

8. RBI's Regulatory Role

Scale-Based Regulation (SBR)

1. RBI has introduced differentiated regulatory frameworks for NBFCs based on their size and risk profile.

Prudential Oversight

1. Enhanced supervision aims to strengthen financial stability.

Risk-Based Regulation

1. Regulators increasingly focus on systemic risks and interconnectedness within the financial sector.

9. Technological Changes and Banking Risks

Expansion of Digital Banking

1. Artificial Intelligence, digital payments, and fintech are transforming banking operations.

Cybersecurity Concerns

1. Increased digitalisation raises risks of cyber fraud and operational disruptions.

Need for Technological Preparedness

1. Banks must strengthen cybersecurity and digital governance systems.

10. Regional and Small Banks Matter Too

Role of Small Banks and RRBs

1. Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and smaller institutions remain important for financial inclusion.

Localised Banking Advantages

1. Smaller banks often possess stronger local understanding and customer relationships.

Balanced Banking Ecosystem

1. Both large and small banks are necessary for inclusive economic development.

11. Way Forward

Strengthen Governance Standards

1. Improve transparency, accountability, and professional management in banks.

Improve Risk Management

1. Stronger ALM frameworks and credit appraisal systems are essential.

Address NBFC Vulnerabilities

1. Enhance supervision and reduce excessive leverage within NBFCs.

Build Technological Resilience

1. Invest in cybersecurity and digital infrastructure protection.

Promote Balanced Financial Architecture

1. Large banks should coexist with strong regional and specialised financial institutions.

Conclusion

Bank consolidation can strengthen India's financial system by creating larger and more efficient institutions. However, sustainable banking stability requires strong governance, prudent regulation, technological resilience, and balanced financial-sector development rather than size alone.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/global-size-via-bank-consolidation/article70975196.ece

Question

Q. "Bank consolidation may improve scale and efficiency, but it cannot by itself guarantee financial stability." Examine in the context of India's banking reforms. (250 words)

Introduction

India has pursued bank consolidation to create stronger financial institutions capable of supporting economic growth and global competitiveness. However, financial stability depends not only on size but also on governance, regulation, and risk management.

Benefits of Bank Consolidation

1. Larger banks possess greater lending capacity for infrastructure and industrial projects.
2. Economies of scale improve operational efficiency and technological integration.
3. Consolidation can strengthen capital adequacy and competitiveness.

Continuing Challenges

1. Large banks may still suffer from governance failures and bad loans.
2. Asset-Liability Mismatch (ALM) risks can create liquidity stress.
3. Reduction in NPAs has partly relied on technical write-offs.
4. NBFC vulnerabilities can create systemic financial contagion.
5. Digital banking expansion increases cybersecurity and operational risks.

Measures Required

1. Strengthen prudential regulation and supervisory oversight.
2. Improve credit appraisal and risk-management systems.
3. Enhance governance standards and accountability in banks.
4. Address NBFC vulnerabilities through effective regulation.
5. Build technological and cybersecurity resilience.

Conclusion

Bank consolidation is an important reform measure, but financial stability ultimately depends on strong institutions, prudent regulation, technological preparedness, and sound governance practices across the entire financial ecosystem.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/global-size-via-bank-consolidation/article70975196.ece

4. After Freebies, The Fiscal Reality (Bs)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Welfare Schemes
Topic - Fiscal policy and fiscal federalism
Sub-Topic - Welfare schemes and subsidies

Introduction

In recent years, competitive electoral politics in India has increasingly revolved around welfare promises and "freebies" such as free electricity, cash transfers, subsidised transport, and welfare allowances. While such measures may provide immediate relief and political appeal, the article argues that many Indian states face severe fiscal constraints and rising debt burdens. Therefore, unchecked expansion of populist expenditure may weaken long-term fiscal sustainability and developmental capacity.

1. Meaning of Freebies and Welfare Promises

Definition of Freebies

1. Freebies refer to goods, services, subsidies, or cash transfers provided either free of cost or at highly subsidised rates.

Political Context

1. Welfare promises increasingly influence electoral competition among political parties.

Difference Between Welfare and Populism

1. Productive welfare enhances human development, whereas fiscally unsustainable giveaways may weaken long-term economic stability.

2. Reasons Behind the Rise of Freebie Politics

Electoral Competition

1. Political parties use welfare promises to attract broad voter support.

Social and Economic Distress

1. Poverty, unemployment, inflation, and inequality increase demand for state support.

Expanding Welfare Expectations

1. Citizens increasingly expect governments to provide direct economic assistance.

3. Fiscal Challenges Faced by States

Limited Fiscal Space

1. Many state governments already face high debt and revenue constraints.

Rising Revenue Expenditure

1. Freebie schemes increase recurring expenditure obligations.

Weak Revenue Mobilisation

1. States often struggle to generate sufficient tax and non-tax revenues.

4. Debt Burden and Fiscal Sustainability

Growing State Debt

1. Excessive welfare expenditure may increase borrowing requirements.

Interest Payment Pressures

1. High debt raises interest burdens, reducing developmental expenditure capacity.

Long-Term Fiscal Risks

1. Persistent fiscal deficits may weaken macroeconomic stability.

5. Impact on Developmental Expenditure

Crowding Out of Capital Expenditure

1. Excessive subsidy expenditure may reduce investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

Reduced Productive Spending

1. States may prioritise politically attractive schemes over long-term developmental projects.

Impact on Future Growth

1. Weak capital expenditure can reduce future economic productivity and employment generation.

6. Fiscal Federalism and State Finances

Role of Finance Commission

1. Transfers from the Union government significantly influence state finances.

Dependence on Central Transfers

1. Some states rely heavily on central devolution and grants.

Uneven Fiscal Capacity

1. Fiscal health varies widely across states.

7. Welfare Versus Fiscal Prudence Debate

Arguments Supporting Welfare Measures

1. Welfare schemes can reduce poverty and support vulnerable groups.
2. Cash transfers and subsidies may improve social security and consumption demand.

Concerns Regarding Freebies

1. Unsustainable promises may create long-term fiscal stress.
2. Politically motivated spending may not always improve productive capacity.

8. Economic Consequences of Excessive Freebies

Inflationary Pressures

1. Excessive revenue expenditure can contribute to fiscal imbalances.

Reduced Investor Confidence

1. Weak fiscal discipline may affect state borrowing costs and investment climate.

Intergenerational Burden

1. Future generations may bear the costs of rising public debt.

9. Need for Better Welfare Design

Targeted Welfare

1. Welfare support should focus on vulnerable and economically weaker sections.

Productive Social Investment

1. Education, healthcare, nutrition, and skill development create long-term benefits.

Outcome-Oriented Governance

1. Welfare programmes should improve human capital and productivity.

10. Way Forward

Maintain Fiscal Discipline

1. States should adhere to fiscal responsibility frameworks and debt limits.

Prioritise Capital Expenditure

1. Infrastructure and productive investment must receive greater attention.

Improve Revenue Mobilisation

1. Strengthening tax administration and economic growth can improve fiscal capacity.

Rationalise Subsidies

1. Welfare schemes should be targeted, transparent, and financially sustainable.

Balance Welfare and Growth

1. Governments must combine social protection with long-term developmental priorities.

Conclusion

Welfare measures remain important for social justice and inclusive growth. However, excessive dependence on fiscally unsustainable freebies can weaken developmental capacity, increase debt burdens, and undermine long-term economic stability. Sustainable governance requires balancing welfare commitments with fiscal prudence and productive investment.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/after-promise-of-freebies-new-state-governments-must-face-fiscal-reality-126051301784_1.html

Question

Q. "While welfare measures are necessary for inclusive development, fiscally unsustainable freebies may undermine long-term economic stability." Discuss in the context of Indian states. (250 words)

Introduction

Competitive electoral politics in India has led to the increasing use of welfare promises and freebies by political parties. While such measures may provide short-term relief to citizens, concerns regarding fiscal sustainability and developmental priorities have intensified.

Importance of Welfare Measures

1. Welfare schemes support vulnerable and economically weaker sections.
2. Subsidies and cash transfers can reduce poverty and improve social security.
3. Welfare spending may stimulate consumption and improve living standards.

Concerns Regarding Excessive Freebies

1. Rising revenue expenditure increases fiscal deficits and public debt.
2. Excessive borrowing raises future interest payment burdens.
3. Freebies may crowd out productive capital expenditure on infrastructure and human development.
4. Politically motivated spending may weaken long-term fiscal discipline.

Measures Required

1. Welfare schemes should be targeted and outcome-oriented.
2. States must strengthen revenue mobilisation and fiscal management.
3. Greater focus should be placed on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and employment generation.
4. Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) principles should be followed.

Conclusion

A balance between social welfare and fiscal prudence is essential for sustainable development. Welfare policies should empower citizens and strengthen human capital without undermining long-term fiscal stability and economic growth.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/after-promise-of-freebies-new-state-governments-must-face-fiscal-reality-126051301784_1.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 15.05.2026

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1. Cooling Doctrine - On India's Response to Extreme Heat (TH)

GS Paper III - Environment & Disaster Management

Topic - Disaster and disaster management; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation.

Sub-Topic - Heatwave Management, 16th Finance Commission Recommendations, Heat Action Plans (HAPs), and Climate Adaptation.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, intensifying summer temperatures across the subcontinent highlighted a critical policy shift - the 16th Finance Commission recommended officially classifying heatwaves as a "National Disaster". This classification aims to unlock dedicated central funding. As climate change increases the frequency, duration, and intensity of these events, India's strategy must evolve from short-term emergency relief toward a long-term, structurally integrated national cooling framework.

2. Current Heatwave Response Framework & Limitations

Administrative Actions - The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) oversees the deployment of regional Heat Action Plans (HAPs).

Short-Term Relief Bias - Existing interventions focus heavily on temporary, low-cost surface measures -

1. Setting up public water kiosks.
2. Issuing meteorological advisories and health warnings.
3. Providing shaded public spaces and bus stops.

The "Cut-and-Paste" Policy Lacuna - Many localized HAPs lack micro-climatic data, frequently copying templates from other regions without adapting to local topographies or urban heat island variations.

Failure of Long-Term Adaptation - While current plans lower immediate mortality risks, they fail to reduce systemic human exposure to extreme, prolonged thermal stress.

3. Vulnerabilities in Workplace and Indoor Environments

The Exposure Gap - Current policies focus on outdoor ambient temperatures but neglect severe indoor heat exposure.

High-Risk Sectors - Millions of workers in factories, non-air-conditioned warehouses, commercial kitchens, and courier/delivery services work under hazardous thermal conditions.

Productivity and Health Degradation - Chronic heat exposure causes systemic health complications and significantly lowers labor productivity, affecting rural and semi-urban livelihoods.

4. Systemic Friction with Western Cooling Models

Copying cooling blueprints from the Global North creates structural mismatches in India due to distinct socio-economic conditions -

Climatic Variance - Indian heatwaves are characterized by high relative humidity and prolonged duration, making dry-climate Western cooling models ineffective.

The Affordability Barrier - Western models assume high consumer capacity for expensive mechanical cooling (Air Conditioning), which remains economically unviable for most Indian households due to high operational energy costs.

Grid Vulnerability - Massive adoption of standard, high-energy-consuming AC units risks overwhelming India's electricity grid, causing peak-load failures during severe summer months.

5. The Proposed National Cooling Doctrine

Experts are calling for a centralized National Cooling Doctrine to replace fragmented local responses -
Public Health Entitlement - Establishing access to safe indoor thermal environments as a basic public health right.
Mandatory Workplace Standards - Enacting legal, upper-limit thermal thresholds for indoor industrial and commercial workspaces.
Transparent Enforcement - Deploying independent inspection frameworks to ensure businesses comply with workplace cooling and ventilation norms.
Vulnerability Prioritization - Focusing cooling infrastructure resources on dense, low-income urban settlements and high-exposure labor sectors.

6. Technology and Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

To scale sustainable cooling, India must integrate structural engineering with energy-efficient technology -
Passive Cooling Technologies - Promoting building designs that minimize heat gain without consuming electricity.

1. Reflective Roofing - Large-scale application of cool roofs and high-albedo coatings to lower indoor temperatures by up to 3°C to 5°C.
2. Passive Ventilation - Utilizing traditional architectural methods alongside modern insulative materials.

District Cooling Systems - Developing centralized cooling networks for dense urban spaces, which can be up to 40% more efficient than decentralized AC units.
Humid-Climate Innovation - Innovating affordable, low-energy, and high-efficiency cooling appliances designed specifically for tropical, humid environments.

7. Way Forward

Institutional Integration - Aligning the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission with State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) to operationalize heatwave relief.
Upgrading Infrastructure Codes - Integrating mandatory passive cooling guidelines into local building bye-laws and the National Building Code.
Decentralized Green Infrastructure - Increasing urban green cover, preserving wetlands, and developing urban forests to mitigate the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect.
Coordinated Policy Execution - Synchronizing actions across the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Power, NDMA, and state labor departments to implement the cooling framework.

Conclusion

India's escalating heatwave crisis can no longer be managed as a temporary summer inconvenience. Classifying heatwaves as a national disaster provides the financial resources needed for reform, but the ultimate solution lies in establishing a comprehensive National Cooling Doctrine. By combining passive cooling infrastructure, strict indoor labor protections, and localized engineering innovations, India can safeguard public health and sustain its economic productivity in an era of accelerating climate realities.
Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cooling-doctrine-on-indias-response-to-extreme-heat/article70977941.ece

Question

"The recommendation of the 16th Finance Commission to classify heatwaves as a national disaster marks a crucial shift in India's climate policy. Analyze the operational limitations of the existing Heat Action Plans (HAPs) and explain how a comprehensive 'National Cooling Doctrine' can enhance long-term structural resilience." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

By recommending that heatwaves be officially classified as a "National Disaster", the 16th Finance Commission has acknowledged that extreme thermal stress is no longer a temporary summer inconvenience but a structural threat to public health and economic productivity. As climate change accelerates, India's disaster response must transition from superficial emergency relief to deep structural adaptation.

2. Operational Limitations of Existing Heat Action Plans (HAPs)

An analysis of the current regional HAPs reveals several systemic gaps -

Short-Term Relief Bias - Existing measures prioritize immediate, superficial interventions—such as setting up public water kiosks, distributing advisories, and shading bus stops—which reduce immediate mortality but fail to lower long-term exposure.

The "Cut-and-Paste" Policy Approach - Many localized plans lack granular micro-climatic data, frequently copying strategies from other regions without accounting for local topographies or the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect.

The Indoor Heat Blind Spot - Current frameworks focus heavily on ambient outdoor temperatures, completely neglecting dangerous indoor heat accumulation in workplaces like factories, non-insulated warehouses, commercial kitchens, and low-income urban housing.

3. The Structural Role of a National Cooling Doctrine

A centralized National Cooling Doctrine can correct these deficiencies by introducing mandatory, technology-driven structural changes -

Rights-Based Framework - It redefines access to safe indoor thermal environments as a basic public health entitlement rather than an economic luxury.

Workplace Thermal Regulation - It establishes legally enforceable upper-limit thermal thresholds for indoor industrial and commercial workspaces, backed by transparent enforcement and independent inspection mechanisms.

Promotion of Passive Cooling Technology - It mandates structural, low-energy architectural changes in building bye-laws, such as the large-scale use of reflective roofing materials (cool roofs), which can reduce indoor temperatures by up to 3°C to 5°C without consuming electricity.

Urban Infrastructure Overhaul - It promotes localized, efficient engineering models like District Cooling Systems for high-density areas, which operate up to 40% more efficiently than decentralized air conditioning systems, thereby protecting the integrity of the electricity grid.

Conclusion

Classifying heatwaves as a national disaster provides the financial resources needed for reform, but the ultimate solution lies in changing how India builds and works. Analysing the crisis shows that true climate resilience cannot be achieved through short-term disaster relief. Only by implementing a comprehensive National Cooling Doctrine that balances passive cooling infrastructure with strict labor protections can India safeguard its population and sustain its economic productivity.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cooling-doctrine-on-indias-response-to-extreme-heat/article70977941.ece

2. 3 Reasons Why the Modi Government Banned Sugar Exports (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy / Agriculture / Food Security

Topic - Major crops - cropping patterns in various parts of the country; Supply chain management; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Inflation.

Sub-Topic - Sugar Economy, El Niño Impact on Agriculture, Geopolitical Supply Chain Disruptions, and the Food vs. Fuel Dilemma.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) shifted sugar exports from the "restricted" to the "prohibited" category until September 30, 2026. This preventive intervention closes international outward shipments (except for limited, pre-existing quota shipments to the US and EU). The policy response is triggered by a combination of a projected El Niño-induced weak monsoon, global supply chain disruptions in raw fertilizer components via West Asia, and the domestic imperative to anchor food inflation.

2. Structure and Dynamics of India's Sugar Economy

Global Position - India stands as one of the world's largest producers and domestic consumers of sugar.
Socio-Economic Footprint - The sector serves as an economic lifeline for nearly 5 crore farmers and associated agricultural labourers, concentrated heavily in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka.
Resource Intensity - Sugarcane is an input-heavy and highly water-intensive crop requiring prolonged growing periods, making its lifecycle highly vulnerable to climate shifts and input cost shocks.
Cyclical Timeline - The Indian sugar season runs strictly from October to September, during which mills process cane into sugar, ethanol, molasses, and other co-products.

3. Intersecting Catalysts Driving the Export Prohibition

A. Climate Risks - El Niño and Monsoon Vulnerabilities

The Pacific Phenomenon - El Niño triggers abnormal warming of surface waters in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean, directly weakening the Indian southwest monsoon circulation.
2026 Projections - Climate models indicate an emerging weak-to-moderate El Niño in 2026, with a high probability of intensification later in the year.
Agricultural Stress - Sub-normal rainfall severely threatens crop yields and reservoir levels. This is critical for Maharashtra's high-yield regions, which depend extensively on stable irrigation.

B. Geopolitical Crises - West Asian Friction and Fertilizer Disruption

Choke-point Vulnerability - Escalating tensions involving Iran and the broader Gulf region threaten transit through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital maritime lane for global energy and fertilizer trade.
Input Shocks - India imports a significant volume of fertilizer raw materials from West Asia. Supply chain blockades directly escalate domestic input costs, threatening future sugarcane yields that require heavy fertilization.
Macroeconomic Strain - Rising imported crude prices exacerbate baseline domestic inflationary pressures.

C. Domestic Buffer Strain - The Nine-Year Stock Low

Supply Balance - Estimated production for the 2025–26 season stands at 279 lakh tonnes (lt). Paired with opening stocks, total availability is 329 lt, which technically covers domestic demand.
Precautionary Action - Despite having previously exported 20 lt earlier in the sugar year, the government enacted the ban because closing stocks are projected to drop to 42.5 lt—the lowest buffer in nearly nine years.
Data Asymmetry - Concerns over the physical accuracy of monthly stock reports declared by individual sugar mills prompted the state to opt for a conservative baseline.

4. Macroeconomic and Policy Implications

A. Controlling Food Inflation

Headline Inflation Link - Food inflation heavily influences household expenditure and expectations. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) tracks these trends closely, as high food prices complicate monetary policy and interest rate management.
Cascading Prices - Sugar spikes directly inflate downstream processed foods, beverages, and confectionery products.

The Protectionist Trend - This decision aligns with a broader domestic policy pattern that prioritizes domestic price stabilization over global export integration, seen in previous bans on wheat, rice, and onions.

B. The Food vs. Fuel Dilemma - Sugar Diversion for Ethanol

Energy Decoupling - Under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme, sugarcane juice and molasses are diverted as primary feedstocks to meet national blending targets, lowering crude oil import reliance.

Policy Trade-off - A drop in raw cane yields forces a difficult policy choice - prioritizing food security (sugar availability) or energy security (ethanol production). The export ban acts as a buffer, preserving internal cane volumes to support both sectors.

5. Systemic Vulnerabilities and Climate Change

Extreme Weather Sensitivity - According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), tropical agriculture faces structural yield declines due to erratic weather patterns.

Recovery Rate Declines - Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall profiles lower both overall cane tonnage per hectare and the ultimate sugar recovery rate during mill crushing.

6. Strategic Way Forward

Climate-Smart Agronomy - Transitioning sugarcane cultivation toward drip irrigation and climate-resilient, drought-resistant crop varieties to decouple production from monsoon variability.

Supply Chain Diversification - Reducing absolute import dependence on West Asian fertilizer components by expanding alternative import channels and building strategic domestic fertilizer reserves.

Digital Inventory Mapping - Replacing manual stock reporting with real-time digital and blockchain-tracked monitoring systems across all mills to eliminate speculative market hoarding.

Adaptive Policy Frameworks - Developing a dynamic, formula-driven policy mechanism that automatically balances sugar export quotas, domestic buffers, and ethanol diversion based on real-time reservoir and yield data.

Conclusion

The 2026 sugar export ban highlights the deep connections between climate instability, global geopolitics, and domestic food security. While current internal supplies are sufficient, the government's intervention acts as a necessary hedge against systemic shocks. Protecting India's agricultural economy over the long term requires moving past short-term export bans toward climate-resilient farming, secure supply chains, and transparent inventory tracking.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-sugar-export-ban-el-nino-stocks-10689599/**

Question

The complete prohibition on sugar exports until September 2026 highlights a defensive, consumer-centric shift in India's agricultural trade policy. Evaluate the efficacy of using export bans to manage food inflation against its long-term impacts on farm economy and energy transition goals." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) prohibited sugar exports until September 2026. This precautionary measure was driven by fears of an El Niño-weakened monsoon, regional volatility in West Asian fertilizer shipping lanes, and a projected nine-year low in closing buffer stocks (42.5lt). While such trade interventions stabilize domestic retail markets, their broader economic trade-offs require a critical evaluation.

2. Efficacy in Managing Food Inflation (The Merits)

Price Stabilization - Sugar is a politically and economically sensitive commodity that directly impacts headline inflation. Prohibiting exports insulates domestic consumers from global price spikes.

Securing Domestic Buffers - The ban prevents speculative hoarding and artificial scarcity by forcing mills to retain stocks for domestic consumption, shielding the market from potential El Niño crop failures.
Predictable Monetary Policy - By anchoring food inflation, the ban allows the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) greater flexibility in managing macroeconomic growth without being forced into defensive interest rate hikes.

3. Long-term Structural Liabilities (The Demerits)

A. De-linking from Global Supply Chains

Loss of Market Reliability - Repeated, abrupt export bans (previously seen in wheat, rice, and onions) damage India's reputation as a reliable global trading partner.
Financial Strain on Sugar Mills - Restricting access to high-paying international markets hurts the revenue of sugar mills. This undermines their liquidity and delays payments to sugarcane farmers, leading to an accumulation of cane arrears.

B. Disruption of Energy Goals (The Food vs. Fuel Conflict)

Threat to Ethanol Blending Targets - India's Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme relies heavily on sugarcane juice and molasses. Lower sugarcane yields combined with export caps force a difficult policy choice - divert cane to keep domestic sugar cheap or use it to meet green fuel targets.
Macroeconomic Backlash - Restricting ethanol production increases dependency on expensive imported crude oil, weakening the long-term goal of energy self-reliance.

4. Way Forward

To move away from blunt export bans, India needs a more balanced policy framework -
Dynamic Export Controls - Implementing a flexible, formula-driven system where export quotas adjust automatically based on real-time reservoir data and domestic buffer levels.
Climate-Resilient Agronomy - Transitioning water-heavy sugarcane fields to drip irrigation to insulate crop yields from El Niño shocks.
Supply Chain De-risking - Creating strategic domestic fertilizer reserves to shield farmers from geopolitical disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

Conclusion

Evaluating the 2026 sugar export ban reveals that while it succeeds as a short-term tool to control food inflation, it functions as a temporary fix for deeper issues. Over-relying on trade prohibitions creates financial stress in the rural economy and slows down the clean energy transition. For long-term stability, India must transition from restrictive trade controls to structural agricultural resilience, ensuring food security without compromising its energy goals or international trade standing.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-sugar-export-ban-el-nino-stocks-10689599/

3. Keonjhar Incident - An Institutional Failure (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Social Justice
Topic - Welfare delivery mechanisms
Sub-Topic - Banking regulation and accountability

Introduction

The Keonjhar incident from Odisha, involving the death of a vulnerable tribal citizen while attempting to access banking services, exposed serious weaknesses in India's governance and financial inclusion architecture. The tragedy highlighted institutional apathy, weak last-mile banking infrastructure, lack of accountability, and inadequate responsiveness of regulatory bodies. The article argues that the incident was not merely an isolated event, but a reflection of broader systemic failures in governance and public service delivery.

1. Nature of the Incident

Human Tragedy and Institutional Failure

1. The incident symbolised the hardships faced by vulnerable citizens in accessing essential financial services.

Failure of Public Institutions

1. Multiple institutions, including banks and regulators, appeared insensitive and unresponsive.

Breakdown of Welfare Delivery

1. Citizens entitled to financial services and welfare support faced avoidable suffering.

2. Financial Inclusion - Achievements and Gaps

Expansion of Banking Access

1. India has significantly expanded formal banking access through Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar linkage, and digital payments.

Persistence of Exclusion

1. Physical access to banking services remains inadequate in remote and tribal regions.

Inclusion Beyond Account Opening

1. True financial inclusion requires accessibility, affordability, trust, and institutional responsiveness.

3. Challenges in Rural and Tribal Banking

Limited Banking Infrastructure

1. Rural areas often face shortages of bank branches, ATMs, and trained personnel.

Geographic and Social Barriers

1. Vulnerable communities face difficulties due to distance, illiteracy, and administrative complexity.

Dependence on Human Intermediaries

1. Citizens frequently rely on middlemen or local officials to access banking services.

4. Institutional Apathy and Governance Deficit

Lack of Administrative Responsiveness

1. Delayed action and absence of emergency support reflect weak governance culture.

Weak Accountability Mechanisms

1. Institutions often fail to take responsibility after service delivery failures.

Procedural Over Human-Centred Governance

1. Excessive procedural rigidity sometimes overrides humanitarian considerations.

5. Role of RBI and Banking Regulators

Regulatory Responsibility

1. RBI plays a central role in ensuring safe, accessible, and inclusive banking systems.

Need for Stronger Oversight

1. Regulators must ensure that financial inclusion initiatives work effectively at the grassroots level.

Importance of Public Confidence

1. Banking systems depend heavily on institutional trust and credibility.

6. Banking Ombudsman and Grievance Redressal

Purpose of Ombudsman Mechanism

1. Banking ombudsman systems exist to address customer grievances and institutional failures.

Concerns Raised by the Incident

1. Delayed or inadequate responses weaken public trust in grievance redressal institutions.

Need for Citizen-Centric Systems

1. Complaint mechanisms must become more accessible and proactive.

7. Financial Inclusion and Social Justice

Inclusion as a Democratic Responsibility

1. Access to banking services is closely linked to dignity, welfare access, and economic participation.

Vulnerability of Marginalised Groups

1. Tribal communities, elderly citizens, women, and poor households remain disproportionately affected.

Welfare Delivery Linkages

1. Banking access is essential for Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) and social protection schemes.

8. Digital Financial Inclusion - Opportunities and Risks

Expansion of Digital Banking

1. Aadhaar-enabled payment systems and digital banking have improved outreach.

Digital Divide Concerns

1. Poor connectivity, low literacy, and technological barriers still limit access in rural regions.

Need for Assisted Banking Services

1. Human support systems remain essential for vulnerable populations.

9. Broader Governance Lessons

Citizen-Centric Governance

1. Institutions must prioritise empathy, accessibility, and responsiveness.

Importance of Local Administrative Capacity

1. Grassroots institutions should respond rapidly during emergencies.

Ethical Governance

1. Public institutions must function with accountability and social sensitivity.

10. Way Forward

Strengthen Rural Banking Infrastructure

1. Expand branches, banking correspondents, and mobile banking units in underserved areas.

Improve Grievance Redressal

1. Ombudsman and complaint systems should become faster and more transparent.

Enhance Regulatory Accountability

1. RBI and banking institutions should monitor service delivery quality more closely.

Promote Financial Literacy

1. Vulnerable populations should receive support in accessing formal banking systems.

Build Humane Governance Systems

1. Administrative systems should prioritise dignity and citizen welfare over procedural rigidity.

Conclusion

The Keonjhar incident revealed that financial inclusion cannot be measured merely by the number of bank accounts opened. True inclusion requires accessible institutions, responsive governance, effective grievance redressal, and humane public administration that protects the dignity of every citizen.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/keonjhar-incident-an-institutional-failure/article70979603.ece# -~ -text=This%20incident%20also%20exposes%20the,repeatedly%20emphasised%20such%20an%20outreach

Question

Q. "Financial inclusion is not merely about access to bank accounts but about ensuring dignified and equitable access to financial services." Discuss in the context of governance challenges in India. (250 words)

Introduction

India has made major progress in expanding financial inclusion through Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and digital payment systems. However, recent incidents involving vulnerable citizens reveal continuing governance and institutional gaps in access to banking services.

Challenges in Financial Inclusion

1. Rural and tribal regions continue to face inadequate banking infrastructure.

2. Digital illiteracy and poor connectivity limit access to financial services.
3. Institutional apathy and procedural rigidity often affect vulnerable citizens disproportionately.
4. Weak grievance redressal mechanisms reduce trust in banking institutions.

Importance of Inclusive Banking Governance

1. Banking access is essential for welfare delivery and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs).
2. Financial inclusion promotes social justice and economic empowerment.
3. Citizen-centric governance improves trust in public institutions.

Measures Required

1. Strengthen rural banking infrastructure and last-mile connectivity.
2. Improve responsiveness of RBI, banks, and ombudsman systems.
3. Promote financial literacy and assisted digital banking services.
4. Ensure accountability and humane administrative practices in public institutions.

Conclusion

Financial inclusion must move beyond numerical targets toward meaningful access, institutional responsiveness, and dignified service delivery. Inclusive governance requires empathy, accountability, and strong public institutions that prioritise citizen welfare.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/keonjhar-incident-an-institutional-failure/article70979603.ece# -~ -text=This%20incident%20also%20exposes%20the,repeatedly%20emphasised%20such%20an%20outreach

4. India's 2047 Aspirations Require Large Foreign Capital Flows and Deep Reforms (BS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Economic Policy
Topic - Economic growth and development
Sub-Topic - Investment models and infrastructure financing

Introduction

India aims to become a developed economy, or "Viksit Bharat," by 2047. Achieving this ambition requires sustained high economic growth over several decades. However, domestic savings alone may not be sufficient to finance the massive investment requirements needed for infrastructure, manufacturing, urbanisation, energy transition, and technological advancement. The article argues that India must attract large foreign capital inflows while simultaneously undertaking deep institutional and governance reforms to create a stable, predictable, and investor-friendly environment.

1. India's Development Ambition and Investment Needs

Goal of Viksit Bharat 2047

1. India seeks to transition from a middle-income economy to a developed economy by 2047.

Requirement of Sustained High Growth

1. Achieving developed-country status requires sustained high GDP growth over a long period.

Importance of Capital Formation

1. Economic growth depends heavily on investment in productive sectors and infrastructure.

2. Role of Investment in Economic Growth

Investment–Growth Relationship

1. Higher investment increases productive capacity, employment, and output.

Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR)

1. ICOR measures the efficiency with which capital generates output.
2. Lower ICOR implies more efficient investment utilisation.

Need for Large Capital Formation

1. Rapid economic transformation requires substantial investment relative to GDP.

3. Limits of Domestic Savings

Domestic Savings Constraint

1. India's domestic savings may not be sufficient to finance all developmental needs.

Consumption–Investment Trade-off

1. Excessive reliance on domestic savings may constrain household consumption.

Capital Gap

1. The gap between required investment and available domestic savings necessitates foreign capital inflows.

4. Importance of Foreign Capital Flows

Sources of Foreign Capital

1. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), portfolio investment, sovereign funds, and global institutional capital contribute to investment financing.

Benefits of Foreign Capital

1. Foreign investment provides capital, technology, managerial expertise, and global market integration.

Infrastructure Financing

1. Large-scale infrastructure projects require long-term external financing support.

5. Recent Concerns Regarding Capital Outflows

Investor Uncertainty

1. Policy unpredictability and global uncertainty may reduce investor confidence.

Impact on Economic Growth

1. Reduced capital inflows can affect investment, employment, and growth prospects.

Global Competition for Capital

1. Countries increasingly compete to attract global investment flows.

6. Structural Reforms Needed to Attract Capital

Policy Predictability

1. Investors prefer stable and transparent regulatory systems.

Ease of Doing Business

1. Simplified compliance and reduced bureaucratic hurdles improve investment attractiveness.

Tax and Regulatory Certainty

1. Sudden policy changes increase investment risk perceptions.

7. Institutional Reforms and Governance

Rule of Law and Contract Enforcement

1. Strong legal systems improve investor confidence.

Administrative Efficiency

1. Efficient governance reduces transaction costs and delays.

Regulatory Credibility

1. Independent and predictable institutions are essential for long-term investment.

8. Capital Account and Financial Sector Reforms

Capital Controls Debate

1. Excessive restrictions on capital flows may discourage investment.

Need for Financial Sector Depth

1. Strong banking and capital markets are essential for absorbing and allocating investment efficiently.

Macroeconomic Stability

1. Stable inflation, exchange rates, and fiscal policy improve investor confidence.

9. Infrastructure and Manufacturing Imperative

Infrastructure Deficit

1. India requires major investments in transport, energy, logistics, and urban infrastructure.

Manufacturing Expansion

1. Industrial growth requires long-term patient capital and policy stability.

Global Supply Chain Integration

1. Foreign investment can help India integrate into global value chains.

10. Risks Associated with Foreign Capital Dependence

Volatility of Portfolio Flows

1. Short-term capital flows may reverse during global crises.

External Vulnerability

1. Excessive dependence on external capital can expose economies to financial shocks.

Need for Balanced Strategy

1. Domestic savings and foreign investment must complement each other.

11. Way Forward

Build Investor Confidence

1. Ensure policy consistency and regulatory transparency.

Deepen Structural Reforms

1. Simplify taxation, land acquisition, labour regulation, and business procedures.

Strengthen Institutions

1. Improve contract enforcement and governance quality.

Enhance Infrastructure Financing

1. Expand long-term financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships.

Balance Stability with Openness

1. Maintain macroeconomic stability while encouraging productive foreign investment.

Conclusion

India's aspiration to become a developed economy by 2047 requires unprecedented levels of investment and institutional transformation. Foreign capital can play a crucial role in bridging the investment gap, but sustained investor confidence will depend on policy predictability, strong institutions, macroeconomic stability, and deep structural reforms.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/india-s-2047-ambitions-need-large-foreign-capital-inflows-deep-reforms-126051401779_1.html

Question

Q. "India's ambition of becoming a developed economy by 2047 requires both large foreign capital inflows and deep structural reforms." Examine. (250 words)

Introduction

India's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 requires sustained high economic growth supported by large-scale investment in infrastructure, manufacturing, and technology. Since domestic savings alone may not meet these requirements, foreign capital inflows become essential.

Importance of Foreign Capital

1. Foreign investment supplements domestic savings and supports capital formation.
2. FDI brings technology, managerial expertise, and global market integration.
3. Infrastructure and manufacturing sectors require long-term investment financing.

Need for Structural Reforms

1. Investors require policy stability and regulatory predictability.
2. Ease of doing business and efficient governance improve investment confidence.
3. Strong legal systems and contract enforcement reduce investment risks.
4. Stable macroeconomic conditions encourage long-term capital inflows.

Challenges

1. Policy uncertainty and excessive regulatory intervention discourage investors.
2. Global capital flows remain volatile and sensitive to geopolitical risks.
3. Infrastructure gaps and administrative delays reduce competitiveness.

Conclusion

Foreign capital can accelerate India's developmental transformation, but sustainable investment inflows require deep institutional reforms, predictable governance, macroeconomic stability, and a long-term commitment to creating a globally competitive investment environment.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/india-s-2047-ambitions-need-large-foreign-capital-inflows-deep-reforms-126051401779_1.html

Editorial of the Day – 16.05.2026

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1. **Trade, supply chains and economic statecraft (TH)** -01
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1. Trade, supply chains and economic statecraft (TH)

GS Paper - GS Paper II & GS Paper III
Subject - International Relations / Indian Economy
Topic - Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
Sub-Topic - Weaponization of Interdependence, Supply Chain Diplomacy, Strategic Autonomy, and Trade Promiscuity.

1. Introduction

The contemporary global order has experienced a structural collapse of the traditional boundaries separating economics from geopolitics. Supply chains, semiconductor ecosystems, energy corridors, and critical mineral flows have transitioned from corporate strategy decks into core national security briefings. In this new era of statecraft, international competition is waged not merely through military deployment or ideological battles, but through regulatory regimes, technological infrastructure, and the capacity to anchor global production networks.

2. The New Paradigm - Trade as Strategic Leverage

The post-Cold War globalization consensus—which posited that free trade inherently fosters global peace and shared prosperity—has broken down. Economic ties are now systematically repurposed as instruments of coercion and strategic leverage -

Weaponization of Interdependence - States intentionally exploit asymmetric economic dependencies. A prime example includes China's strict export controls on rare earth minerals to flex political muscle against the United States and India.

New Tools of Coercion - Tariffs, export restrictions, and targeted supply-chain blockades are used defensively and punitively, as illustrated by the transactional tariff politics of the U.S. administration.

Security-Driven Trade - Semiconductor alliances now mirror traditional defence pacts, where economic diplomacy is entirely inseparable from national security calculations.

3. India's Strategic Repositioning - Alignment of Strengths

This global shift has created a rare historical window where global strategic anxieties directly align with India's domestic structural capabilities, moving the nation from the periphery of globalization to an indispensable anchor node. Three macro-shifts underpin this transition -

A. Aggressive Domestic Reforms

1. Deep digital transformation via Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), rapid physical infrastructure expansion, and targeted regulatory de-cluttering have drastically lowered domestic transaction costs.
2. These interventions have enhanced market predictability, allowing global multi-nationals to seamlessly scale up long-term manufacturing capacity.

B. Global Decoupling from Concentrated Ecosystems

1. The systemic geopolitical recalibration away from China (the "China+1" strategy) has generated a structural demand for alternative manufacturing hubs.

2. India stands out as one of the few global economies capable of matching this demand due to its massive labor force, deep internal consumer market, and long-term political stability.

C. Expansion of India's Strategic Imagination

1. New Delhi has abandoned its historical hesitation toward trade agreements.
2. It now actively deploys preferential trade treaties, technology partnerships, and supply-chain diplomacy as primary, offensive instruments of statecraft.

4. Weaving Economic Resilience into Foreign Policy

India's contemporary engagements with major global powers are heavily dictated by economic security rather than standalone ideological alignments. This is visible through several strategic pillars -

Technology Front - Actively pursuing high-end semiconductor collaborations and defence-industrial co-production.

Mineral Front - Securing critical mineral supply chains through international partnerships to power the green transition.

Soft Power Front - Exporting India's proprietary Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) stack to emerging economies to build institutional goodwill.

The Rise of Pax Silica - Influence is increasingly flowing through dense technological production networks rather than formal military alliances, allowing India to project power without committing to rigid defence pacts.

5. Navigating Vulnerabilities - The Doctrine of "Trade Promiscuity"

While economic integration empowers, over-reliance on any single external node creates an existential security risk. To preserve its strategic autonomy, India must adopt a calculated approach -

The Concept of "Trade Promiscuity" - India must build a highly diversified, multi-aligned portfolio of economic relationships. In a fragmented trade world, "serial dating" multiple partners simultaneously is the most viable strategy.

The Rules of Engagement - This multi-alignment works best when all trading partners are aware of India's alternative options, driving competition among them without threatening individual bilateral security.

Necessary Precautions - India must deep-integrate into global markets without surrendering its sovereign strategic space, ensuring it attracts massive foreign capital without developing an asymmetric dependence on it.

6. Internal Imperatives for Sustained Global Leadership

To convert this transient geopolitical demand into permanent, long-term economic capability, India must continuously upgrade its internal landscape -

Logistics & Labor - Sharpening port-to-factory logistics, ensuring regulatory clarity, and upskilling the workforce to anchor high-end global supply chains.

Intellectual Capital - Investing heavily in domestic R&D, building strong intellectual property (IP) protections, and maintaining bulletproof, trusted digital networks.

Resource Security - Crafting sustainable, long-term mineral extraction policies at home while locking down mines abroad.

Institutional Credibility - Ensuring that rapid macroeconomic growth is balanced by robust democratic institutions, social cohesion, and predictable regulatory frameworks to stand out as a credible alternative to authoritarian manufacturing setups.

7. Transition in Global Trade Architecture

The classic era of multilateralism—anchored by the World Trade Organization (WTO), universal rules, and broad consensus—has lost momentum under the weight of geopolitical rivalries. In its place, the global trade landscape is fragmenting into flexible, custom-tailored bilateral and regional minilateral arrangements. For India, this fragmentation is an opening to practice an agile, interest-driven diplomacy, leveraging its market scale to craft variable coalitions across distinct sectors.

Conclusion

India stands at a historic crossroads where power moves through supply chains rather than traditional shipping lanes. Its success will be defined not by making a binary choice between absolute self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and naive globalism, but by mastering a calibrated, interest-driven integration. By confidently engaging the world on its own terms, India can protect its strategic autonomy while amplifying its global ambitions.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/trade-supply-chains-and-economic-statecraft/article70984368.ece#google_vignette

Question

"The traditional separation between corporate supply chains and national security architecture has fundamentally collapsed, giving rise to an era of 'Pax Silica'. Analyze how the weaponization of economic interdependence is reshaping global statecraft, and explain how India can leverage its structural strengths to navigate this new order." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is defined by the complete fusion of markets and statecraft. Supply chains, semiconductor alliances, energy corridors, and critical mineral flows have transitioned from corporate strategy decks into core national security briefings. In this new order, nations compete not merely with conventional armies or ideologies, but with regulatory regimes, technological infrastructure, and the capacity to anchor global production networks.

2. Weaponization of Economic Interdependence

An analysis of contemporary global statecraft reveals that economic ties are no longer neutral instruments of shared prosperity, but offensive tools of strategic leverage -

Commerce as Coercion - States intentionally exploit asymmetric economic dependencies. For instance, China's stringent export controls on rare earth minerals function as geopolitical muscle-flexing against the US and India.

Economic Security Blocs - Modern trade alliances increasingly mirror defences pacts. The race to dominate semiconductor manufacturing has created a high-tech battleground—Pax Silica—where the control of data, chips, and intellectual property determines global influence as decisively as military deployments once did.

The Erosion of Multilateralism - Rules-based universal consensus (WTO) has given way to flexible, custom-tailored bilateral and regional minilateral coalitions designed to insulate domestic supply chains from external shocks.

3. India's Structural Strengths and Strategic Leverage

This systemic fragmentation has created a unique alignment between global strategic needs and India's domestic capabilities, positioning the nation as an indispensable anchor node -

Alternative Production Ecosystems - As global firms aggressively pursue "China+1" diversification strategies to de-risk their supply chains, India offers an unmatched combination of political stability, market depth, and a massive, young labor force.

Lowered Friction via Domestic Reforms - Deep-seated internal transformations—such as the scaling of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), aggressive physical infrastructure spending, and targeted deregulation—have drastically lowered transaction costs and improved long-term predictability for foreign capital.

The Doctrine of 'Trade Promiscuity' - Moving away from historical trade hesitation, India's foreign policy has embraced a highly diversified, multi-aligned portfolio of economic relationships. This "serial dating" model allows India to integrate deeply into global production networks without surrendering its sovereign strategic space or binding itself to rigid military alliances.

Conclusion

The ongoing geo-economic shift presents India with a historic window of geopolitical demand. However, converting this transient demand into permanent, long-term economic capability requires a continuous focus on internal competitiveness—specifically in sharpening port-to-factory logistics, safeguarding intellectual property, and investing heavily in domestic R&D. Ultimately, India's future will be defined not by choosing between absolute isolationism and naive globalism, but by mastering the art of engaging a fragmented world entirely on its own terms.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/trade-supply-chains-and-economic-statecraft/article70984368.ece

2. Rajnath Singh To Lay Stone for AMCA Facility at Andhra's Putt Parthi on Friday (IE)

GS Paper III - Science and Technology; Indigenization of Technology & Defence Procurement
Topic - Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Awareness in the fields of Aerospace; Security challenges and their management.
Sub-Topic - Fifth-Generation Fighter Aircraft (AMCA), Stealth Technology, Aerospace Infrastructure, and Public-Private Partnership in Defence.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for a monumental ₹16,000 crore Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) infrastructure project in Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh. Developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) under the aegis of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), this facility establishes India's first dedicated integration and advanced flight-testing ecosystem for fifth-generation stealth fighters. This initiative marks a definitive transition for India from licensed defence production to high-end, sovereign aerospace design.

2. Understanding the AMCA and the Testing Infrastructure

A. The AMCA Platform

Definition - The Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) is India's premier, indigenously designed fifth-generation, twin-engine, stealth multirole fighter aircraft tailored for the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Strategic Role - It is engineered to deliver complete combat superiority over future contested airspaces through network-centric warfare capabilities and low radar observability.

Core Fifth-Generation Features -

1. Stealth (Low Radar Observability) **-** Features an optimized airframe geometry, radar-absorbent materials (RAM), and internal weapon bays to drastically reduce its Radar Cross-Section (RCS).
2. Super cruise Capability **-** The ability to maintain sustained supersonic flight speeds without engaging fuel-heavy afterburners, extending operational reach.
3. Sensor Fusion & AI Avionics **-** Automatically aggregates and processes real-time data from active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars, infrared sensors, and electronic warfare suites into a single unified display for the pilot.

B. Aircraft Integration & Flight-Testing Facility (Puttaparthi)

Mandate - The facility will serve as the national hub for structural assembly, advanced subsystem integration, ground-validation testing, and live flight-trial monitoring.

Global Benchmark - Building this highly complex, high-security validation matrix places India within a selective group of technologically advanced nations capable of testing fifth-generation stealth platforms independently.

Supply Chain Security - Eliminates long-standing reliance on foreign aerospace testing ranges, protecting classified signature data and accelerating overall development timelines.

3. The Institutional Architecture - Lead Role of ADA

Premier Mandate - The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) operates as India's apex aerospace design organization.

Proven Track Record - ADA previously served as the design anchor for the successful development of the HAL Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) platform.

AMCA Program Leadership - As the lead design authority for AMCA, ADA coordinates directly across a vast web of DRDO laboratories, defence Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like HAL, private sector manufacturing partners, and academic institutions.

4. Broad-Spectrum Defence Ecosystem Launches in Andhra Pradesh

Alongside the AMCA milestone, several other multi-crore strategic defence projects were introduced, establishing a diversified defence industrial corridor in Andhra Pradesh -

Project / Ecosystem	Manufacturing Entity	Investment Volume	Strategic Utility & Function
Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft Hub	ADA / DRDO	₹16,000 Crore	Central assembly, subsystem integration, and stealth flight-testing.
Advanced Autonomous Underwater Systems	Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)	*Strategic Asset*	Heavyweight torpedoes, autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), and maritime countermeasure systems.
Precision Future Warfare Systems	Agneyastra (Subsidiary of Bharat Forge)	₹1,500 Crore	Advanced land/air precision weapons systems; enhances private sector defence participation.
Electronic Fuse Manufacturing Facility	HFCL	₹1,294 Crore	Indigenization of critical ammunition electronics to eliminate import dependence.
Defence & Civilian Drone City (Kurnool)	Consortium of 8 Drone Companies	*Ecosystem Build*	Consolidated manufacturing base for military surveillance drones and civilian applications (agriculture, disaster logistics).

5. Strategic Significance of the Defence Push

Andhra Pradesh as a Defence Axis - The state is leveraging its geographical proximity to Bengaluru (India's aerospace capital), long coastline, and active policy incentives to emerge as a defence hub.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Blueprint - The integration of private heavyweights (Bharat Forge, HFCL) with defence PSUs creates a resilient, domestic multi-tier defence supply chain.

Sovereign Strategic Autonomy - Successfully localizing fifth-generation fighter manufacturing and electronic weapon components reduces vulnerability to foreign supply chain blockades during geopolitical crises.

Economic Value Realization - High-technology defence corridors stimulate regional economic development, generating high-skilled engineering employment and industrial technology spillovers.

6. Critical Challenges in Execution

Extreme Technological Complexity - Developing reliable radar-absorbent coatings, complex sensor-fusion software algorithms, and a high-thrust indigenous engine remains an engineering challenge.

Capital Intensity - High-end aerospace R&D demands vast, uninterrupted, long-term state capital commitments spanning over decades.

Aerospace Skill Deficit - India faces a critical shortage of highly specialized aerospace scientists, composite material technicians, and military software engineers.

Aggressive Global Competition - Established global defence aerospace syndicates continue to push their platforms, creating an implicit time-pressure to get the indigenous AMCA operational.

7. Way Forward

Scaling Up Defence R&D Budgets - Creating a non-lapsable national defence technology fund focused exclusively on next-generation aerospace and propulsion research.

De-risking Private Sector Investments - Providing long-term procurement guarantees to startups and MSMEs within the AMCA component supply chain to ensure financial viability.

Specialized Talent Pipelines - Creating dedicated aerospace engineering wings across premier Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in collaboration with ADA.

Streamlined Program Management - Deploying special purpose vehicles (SPVs) to minimize red tape, speed up bureaucratic approvals, and avoid the cost overruns historically seen in large defence projects.

Conclusion

The ₹16,000 crore AMCA project at Puttaparthi represents a foundational shift in India's defence industrial landscape. By building an advanced aerospace testing ecosystem alongside underwater and drone production facilities, India is moving away from its historical position as a top arms importer. The successful execution of this program will secure India's position as a self-reliant global aerospace power, ensuring that its national security is backed by technological sovereignty.

Source **-** https -//www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2026/May/15/rajnath-singh-to-lay-stone-for-amca-facility-at-andhras-puttaparthi-on-friday

Question

"The transition from licensed production to high-end indigenous aerospace design is the ultimate test of a nation's technological sovereignty. Analyze the strategic significance of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) infrastructure project in achieving 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' in defence, and discuss the challenges associated with developing fifth-generation fighter platforms." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Introduction

1. Contextualize the launch of the ₹16,000 crore AMCA integration and testing hub at Puttaparthi by ADA/DRDO in May 2026.
2. Define the AMCA as India's foundational jump into fifth-generation stealth multirole combat aircraft.

Strategic Significance in Achieving Defence Self-Reliance (The "Why it Matters")

Breaking the Import Cycle - Moves the country away from licensed assembly toward sovereign design ownership of complex fighter platforms.

Data Protection & Secure Testing - A domestic integration and testing facility ensures that highly classified stealth signatures and radar cross-section (RCS) details remain secure within India.

The Synergy Effect - The hub anchors a broader defence ecosystem, encouraging high-tech manufacturing spillovers into underwater systems, electronic fuses, and drone technology, as seen across Andhra Pradesh.

Challenges Associated with Fifth-Generation Development (The Bottlenecks)

Technological Hurdles - Mastering stealth aerodynamics, internal weapon bay mechanics, sensor-fusion software, and developing high-thrust indigenous power plants.

Financial Strain - The multi-decade gestation period requires a sustained, multi-billion-dollar financial commitment, prone to budgetary reallocations.

Human Resource Gaps - Shortage of highly specialized talent in advanced composite materials, low-observability engineering, and defence software architecture.

Conclusion

1. Conclude that the AMCA facility is an essential step toward long-term defence autonomy.
2. To ensure its success, the government must back this physical infrastructure with institutional speed, private sector risk-sharing, and a dedicated aerospace talent pipeline.

Source - https -//www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2026/May/15/rajnath-singh-to-lay-stone-for-amca-facility-at-andhras-puttaparthi-on-friday

3. Regulators As Board Leaders (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy and Regulatory Governance
Topic: Regulatory bodies and institutions
Sub-Topic: Accountability and transparency in governance

Introduction

India's regulatory architecture is evolving rapidly due to changing market structures, technological disruption, financial innovation, and increasing global integration. Traditionally, regulators primarily focused on legal compliance and rule enforcement. However, modern markets are more complex, uncertain, and innovation-driven. The article argues that regulators must increasingly function not merely as rule enforcers but also as strategic board leaders capable of balancing supervision, governance, innovation, and risk management.

1. Changing Nature of Regulation

Earlier Regulatory Model

1. Traditional regulation focused mainly on compliance, procedural oversight, and legal certainty.

Shift Towards Complex Market Governance

1. Modern markets involve rapid technological and financial innovation that create new forms of risks and uncertainties.

Need for Adaptive Regulation

1. Regulators must now respond dynamically to evolving market conditions.

2. Why Regulatory Transformation is Necessary

Financial and Technological Innovation

1. Fintech, Artificial Intelligence, digital platforms, and complex financial products require sophisticated oversight.

Globalisation of Markets

1. Increasing integration with global markets exposes domestic economies to external shocks and systemic risks.

Complexity of Corporate Structures

1. Large corporations and financial institutions involve interconnected governance and risk-management systems.

3. Regulators as Strategic Institutions

Beyond Rule Enforcement

1. Regulators must increasingly provide strategic guidance and market stability.

Board-Like Responsibilities

1. Modern regulatory leadership requires understanding governance, risk assessment, institutional behaviour, and long-term systemic impact.

Balancing Innovation and Stability

1. Regulators must encourage innovation while protecting public interest and financial stability.

4. Importance of Independent Directors and Governance

Role of Independent Oversight

1. Independent directors improve accountability and reduce governance failures.

Expertise Requirements

1. Boards increasingly require professionals with specialised knowledge in finance, technology, law, and risk management.

Governance Culture

1. Effective governance depends on ethical standards and institutional integrity.

5. Skills Required for Modern Regulators

Technical Expertise

1. Regulators require knowledge of finance, technology, cybersecurity, competition law, and market behaviour.

Strategic Thinking

1. Modern regulation requires anticipation of future risks rather than merely reacting to crises.

Communication and Coordination Skills

1. Regulators must engage with governments, industries, investors, and global institutions.

6. Regulatory Challenges in India

Institutional Capacity Constraints

1. Many regulatory institutions face shortages of specialised expertise and technological capability.

Regulatory Overlap and Fragmentation

1. Multiple agencies sometimes create coordination challenges.

Balancing Growth and Oversight

1. Excessive regulation may discourage innovation, while weak regulation can increase systemic risk.

7. Corporate Governance and Market Confidence

Investor Trust

1. Strong regulatory systems improve investor confidence and market credibility.

Prevention of Governance Failures

1. Effective oversight helps reduce fraud, excessive risk-taking, and mismanagement.

Market Stability

1. Regulatory credibility contributes to long-term financial stability.

8. Technology and Regulatory Evolution

Rise of Digital Markets

1. Digital finance and platform economies require new regulatory frameworks.

Cybersecurity Risks

1. Regulators must address data protection and cyber threats.

Regulatory Technology (RegTech)

1. Technology can improve monitoring, compliance, and supervision efficiency.

9. Need for Institutional Independence

Importance of Autonomy

1. Regulators require operational independence to function effectively.

Risks of Political Interference

1. Excessive political influence may weaken regulatory credibility.

Accountability Mechanisms

1. Independence must be balanced with transparency and accountability.

10. Global Best Practices in Regulation

Principles-Based Regulation

1. Modern systems increasingly focus on broad principles rather than rigid procedural rules.

Risk-Based Supervision

1. Regulators prioritise areas posing higher systemic risk.

Continuous Capacity Building

1. Regulatory institutions globally invest heavily in expertise development.

11. Way Forward

Strengthen Institutional Capacity

1. Regulators should recruit multidisciplinary experts and improve technical capabilities.

Enhance Coordination Mechanisms

1. Better coordination among regulatory bodies is essential.

Promote Ethical Governance

1. Transparency, accountability, and integrity should remain central to regulation.

Encourage Innovation-Friendly Regulation

1. Regulatory systems should support innovation while maintaining safeguards.

Build Adaptive Regulatory Frameworks

1. Flexible and forward-looking regulation is necessary for rapidly evolving markets.

Conclusion

Modern economies require regulators who can function not merely as legal supervisors but as strategic institutional leaders. Effective regulatory governance depends on independence, expertise, adaptability, and the ability to balance innovation with systemic stability and public trust.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/regulators-as-board-leaders/article70984275.ece#:~:text=The%20transition%20from%20regulator%20to,to%20guide%20rather%20than%20direct.

Question

Q. "The role of regulators in modern economies has expanded from rule enforcement to strategic governance and systemic risk management." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

Rapid technological innovation, financial complexity, and global market integration have transformed the role of regulatory institutions. Regulators today are expected not only to enforce laws but also to ensure systemic stability and responsible market development.

Expanding Role of Regulators

1. Regulators increasingly oversee complex financial and technological ecosystems.
2. They play a major role in risk management, market stability, and investor protection.
3. Modern regulation requires balancing innovation with public interest and systemic resilience.

Challenges Faced by Regulators

1. Technological disruption creates new regulatory uncertainties.
2. Institutional capacity and specialised expertise often remain inadequate.
3. Regulatory overlap and coordination gaps weaken effectiveness.
4. Excessive political influence may reduce regulatory credibility.

Measures Required

1. Strengthen institutional independence and accountability.
2. Build multidisciplinary expertise in finance, technology, and governance.
3. Promote adaptive and risk-based regulatory frameworks.
4. Improve coordination among regulatory institutions.
5. Encourage ethical corporate governance and transparency.

Conclusion

In rapidly evolving economies, regulators must function as strategic institutions capable of managing systemic risks, promoting responsible innovation, and sustaining public trust through effective and adaptive governance.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/regulators-as-board-leaders/article70984275.ece#:~:text=The%20transition%20from%20regulator%20to,to%20guide%20rather%20than%20direct.

4. Repurposing Coal Mines into Tourism Hubs (TS)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper II – Governance and Community Participation
Topic: Environmental conservation and rehabilitation
Sub-Topic: Community participation in development

Introduction

India is witnessing gradual closure and repurposing of several coal mining regions due to environmental pressures, economic transition, and changing energy priorities. One emerging idea is transforming abandoned or declining mines into tourism destinations through eco-parks, heritage circuits, and industrial tourism. However, the article argues that physical beautification alone is insufficient. Successful mine tourism requires community participation, local economic revival, institutional coordination, and preservation of cultural and industrial heritage.

1. Concept of Mine Tourism and Post-Mining Transition

Meaning of Mine Tourism

1. Mine tourism refers to converting old or inactive mining regions into tourism destinations showcasing industrial heritage, landscapes, culture, and ecological restoration.

Post-Industrial Transformation

1. Such initiatives attempt to create alternative livelihoods after decline of mining-based economies.

Global Examples

1. Several countries have transformed former industrial zones into heritage and tourism economies.

2. Why Mine Repurposing is Becoming Important

Decline of Traditional Mining Economies

1. Many mining regions face reduced economic activity due to resource depletion and energy transition.

Environmental Concerns

1. Mining activities often leave behind degraded landscapes and ecological damage.

Need for Alternative Livelihoods

1. Communities dependent on mining require new economic opportunities.

3. India's Current Approach to Mine Repurposing

Focus on Physical Redevelopment

1. Current strategies often emphasise eco-parks, beautification, and greening.

Tourism-Oriented Redevelopment

1. Governments are increasingly exploring industrial and heritage tourism models.

Role of Ministries and Agencies

1. Multiple institutions including tourism and coal ministries are involved in such projects.

4. Limitations of Existing Approach

Overemphasis on Infrastructure

1. Beautification alone may not create sustainable tourism ecosystems.

Neglect of Human Dimension

1. Local communities and former mining workers are often insufficiently integrated into planning.

Weak Economic Linkages

1. Tourism projects may fail if they do not generate durable local livelihoods.

5. Importance of Community Participation

Local Ownership of Tourism

1. Sustainable tourism requires active involvement of local residents.

Livelihood Diversification

1. Tourism can create opportunities in handicrafts, hospitality, transport, and local services.

Women's Participation

1. Self-help groups and women-led enterprises can strengthen inclusive development.

6. Industrial Heritage as a Tourism Asset

Preserving Mining Heritage

1. Old mining infrastructure, machinery, and industrial architecture possess historical value.

Educational and Cultural Significance

1. Industrial heritage can help preserve labour history and regional identity.

Experiential Tourism

1. Visitors increasingly seek authentic and knowledge-based tourism experiences.

7. Infrastructure and Accessibility Requirements

Connectivity Challenges

1. Successful tourism requires roads, transport, and digital connectivity.

Hospitality Infrastructure

1. Hotels, guides, sanitation, and visitor services are essential.

Interpretation Infrastructure

1. Museums, storytelling centres, and guided experiences improve tourist engagement.

8. Governance and Institutional Challenges

Multi-Agency Coordination

1. Tourism, mining, environment, and local government bodies must work together.

Lack of Unified Institutional Framework

1. Fragmented governance can slow implementation and reduce effectiveness.

Need for Long-Term Planning

1. Tourism ecosystems require sustained investment and policy continuity.

9. Sustainability and Ecological Restoration

Environmental Rehabilitation

1. Reforestation and ecological restoration are important for damaged mining landscapes.

Balancing Ecology and Economy

1. Tourism should support both environmental conservation and livelihood generation.

Sustainable Tourism Principles

1. Projects should minimise ecological pressure while benefiting local communities.

10. Economic Potential of Mine Tourism

Regional Economic Diversification

1. Tourism can reduce dependence on extractive industries.

Employment Generation

1. Hospitality, transport, guiding, and local enterprises create jobs.

Rural and Regional Development

1. Mine tourism can stimulate development in neglected regions.

11. Challenges to Long-Term Success

Lack of Visitor Demand

1. Some projects may fail due to inadequate tourist interest.

Weak Community Integration

1. Exclusion of local populations can reduce sustainability.

Financial Viability Issues

1. High maintenance costs and uncertain returns may create fiscal burdens.

12. Way Forward

Community-Centric Tourism Planning

1. Local communities should participate in ownership and decision-making.

Integrated Regional Development

1. Tourism must connect with broader local economic ecosystems.

Preserve Industrial Heritage

1. Authentic mining heritage should be protected rather than erased completely.

Develop Tourism Circuits

1. Linking mine tourism with nearby cultural, ecological, and heritage attractions can improve viability.

Strengthen Institutional Coordination

- Dedicated governance mechanisms are necessary for integrated implementation.

Conclusion

Repurposing mining regions into tourism destinations offers opportunities for ecological restoration and economic diversification. However, sustainable success depends not merely on beautification projects, but on community participation, preservation of industrial heritage, institutional coordination, and creation of long-term livelihood opportunities.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-pit-as-a-destination-1503594503.html

Question

Q. "post-mining tourism can become an instrument of sustainable regional transformation only when community participation and livelihood integration are prioritised." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

The transition away from mining-dependent economies has encouraged governments to explore tourism-based redevelopment of former mining regions. In India, abandoned coal mines are increasingly being considered for eco-tourism and industrial heritage tourism projects.

Potential Benefits of Mine Tourism

1. Tourism can diversify regional economies beyond extractive industries.
2. Ecological restoration improves environmental sustainability.
3. Industrial heritage preservation strengthens cultural identity and historical awareness.
4. Tourism creates employment opportunities in hospitality, transport, and local enterprises.

Challenges

1. Beautification alone cannot guarantee sustainable tourism.
2. Local communities are often excluded from planning and benefits.
3. Poor infrastructure and connectivity reduce tourist potential.
4. Fragmented governance weakens implementation efficiency.

Measures Required

1. Ensure community participation and local ownership of tourism initiatives.
2. Integrate tourism with regional economic development strategies.
3. Preserve industrial heritage and develop interpretation infrastructure.
4. Improve transport, hospitality, and digital connectivity.
5. Promote sustainable and environmentally responsible tourism models.

Conclusion

Mine tourism can become a powerful tool for post-industrial transformation only when it combines ecological restoration with inclusive development, local participation, and sustainable economic opportunities for affected communities.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-pit-as-a-destination-1503594503.html

Editorial of the Day – 18.05.2026

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1. **One-Horse Races Are No Triumph for Democracy (TH)** -01
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1. One-Horse Races Are No Triumph for Democracy (TH)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance
Topic - Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Salient features of the Representation of the People Act; Election Commission of India.
Sub-Topic - Electoral Integrity, Role of the Election Commission (Article 324), Level Playing Field, and Voter Disenfranchisement.

1. Introduction

The core thesis of the article posits that elections alone do not constitute a democracy; meaningful, fair, and rigorous political contestation is what gives democracy its substance. Using analogies from corporate strategy and cricket, the author argues that a "one-horse race" or an uncontested victory undermines democratic legitimacy. True democratic governance requires an unyielding commitment to a level playing field and an uncompromisingly neutral referee—the Election Commission of India (ECI).

2. The Philosophy of Contestation and Democratic Legitimacy

The Corporate and Sports Analogy - Just as dominant business monopolies stagnate without market competition, and legendary batsmen prove their mettle only against formidable bowling attacks, democracy thrives exclusively when tested by robust political rivals.
The Hemoglobin of Democracy - Competition allows citizens to operationalize the precept of "rule by the people" by giving them the practical leverage to "fire" underperforming incumbents and elect viable alternatives, liberating the electorate from the "TINA" (There Is No Alternative) trap.
Plebiscitary Autocracy vs. True Democracy - The author invokes political scientist Robert Dahl, who characterized political systems that feature high voter turnout/participation but low contestation (e.g., single-party states or predetermined races) as "plebiscitary autocracies" rather than genuine democracies.
The Psychology of the Loser - Healthy competition gives defeated candidates and their supporters the rational hope that they can win a future contest. This psychological assurance is what drives them to accept peaceful transitions of power—one of the healthiest achievements of any electoral democracy.

3. Statutory Imperfections - The Representation of the People Act, 1951

The Paradox of Section 53(2) - The author points out a structural flaw in Section 53(2) of the RPA, 1951, which legally provides for declaring "unopposed" winners if the number of contesting candidates is equal to or less than the number of seats to be filled.
The "Walkover" Phenomenon - This provision allows a candidate to become a people's representative without a single citizen actually casting a vote in their Favor. The author asserts that this structural walkover "kills" both the active game of elections and the foundational spirit of democratic mandates.
Mandate vs. Mere Power - Winning power without a contest yields raw authority, but it fails to deliver a genuine democratic mandate, which requires an active endorsement by the electorate through a competitive, fair process.

4. Case Study - The West Bengal Assembly Electoral Roll Anomalies

The article shifts from theory to a detailed analysis of systemic irregularities during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal -

Massive Constituency-Wise Deletions - Data analysis revealed that constituency-wise deletions of electors exceeded the actual victory margins in several areas, implying that the targeted removal of voters could have directly altered election outcomes.
The "Under Adjudication" Crisis - Instead of utilizing routine, gradual revision processes to remove permanently shifted, deceased, or duplicate entries, over 60 lakh electors were abruptly categorized under "under adjudication" due to their alleged ineligibility under Article 326 (which defines universal adult suffrage and voter qualifications).
The Lightning Exercise - Following a June 2025 ECI directive (modeled after a similar exercise in Bihar), over 700 judicial officers hastily appointed by the Supreme Court of India conducted a rapid marathon to dispose of these cases within an incredibly short timeframe.
Mass Disenfranchisement - This rapid adjudication resulted in the deletion of 27.16 lakh electors from the rolls. The author notes that neither after the Bihar SIR nor during the subsequent phases in West Bengal did the ECI release public figures clarifying the specific legal parameters under which these individuals failed to meet Article 326 eligibility criteria.

5. Comparative Analysis - Assam vs. West Bengal

The author highlights a glaring institutional double standard regarding voter data transparency between Assam and West Bengal -
The Assam Precedent - Years prior, when the ECI placed certain voters under the doubtful ("D-voter") category in Assam, no official aggregate data was placed in the public domain to confirm whether those citizens' voting rights were eventually restored or left in limbo.
The National Register of Citizens (NRC) Irony - The core irony lies in the fact that while the NRC process in Assam formally classified over 19 lakh people as "non-citizens," their voting rights remained legally unaffected at the time. Conversely, in the West Bengal instance, the ECI completely excluded 27 lakh individuals from the live voting process based on arbitrary "logical discrepancies," even though they had not been stripped of citizenship through any constitutional process.

6. Institutional Scrutiny of the Election Commission of India

The author directly questions the ECI's administrative neutrality, structural superintendence, and operational decisions, posing several critical questions -
The Indelible Taint - The engineering of a system that allowed for the mass deletion of 27 lakh voters under the ECI's active "superintendence" compromises the sanctity of its foundational slogan - *"No voter to be left behind."*
The "Logical Discrepancy" Tool - The author questions how the ECI could mandate the use of an unverified algorithmic tool that manufactured wide discrepancies in voter lists, thereby allowing third-party systems to usurp the legitimate statutory functions of local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).
Premature Schedules - The author questions why the ECI announced a rigid national election schedule when it was fully aware that its core, mandatory task—finalizing clean, indisputable electoral rolls—was far from complete.
Abdicating Legal Provisions - The ECI chose to ignore existing legal provisions that allow existing, older electoral rolls to remain valid for voters whose status is still "under adjudication" due to a lack of processing time.
Failure to Seek Judicial Deferral - Rather than approaching the Supreme Court to request a brief delay to systematically sort through the 27 lakh disputed voters, the ECI chose to suspend their constitutional voting rights entirely—a move the author terms "inexplicable and unfortunate."

7. Conclusion and the Broader Warning

The article concludes with a warning regarding the future of the Indian republic. As political rivals face gradual elimination or systemic weakening across state and national arenas, India risks entering a phase of "victories without a fight." When the umpire or referee begins to behave like an active participant or an "extra" on the field, the entire democratic experiment is compromised. High-profile,

structural slogans like "One Nation, One Election" or the theoretical push for an "Opposition-must Bharat" (Opposition-free India) work against the core concept of healthy contestation. Without political competition, elections become empty rituals, striking at the very roots of the nation's democratic character.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-horse-races-are-no-triumph-for-democracy/article70991099.ece

Question

"An election without robust contestation and absolute institutional neutrality transforms a democracy into a plebiscitary autocracy. Critically analyse this statement in light of recent debates surrounding the integrity of electoral rolls and the statutory powers of the Election Commission of India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Introduction -

1. Define the distinction between procedural democracy (merely holding regular elections) and substantive democracy (characterized by genuine competition, a level playing field, and institutional fairness).
2. Reference the concept of "plebiscitary autocracy" where high voter turnout masks a lack of real political choice.

The Critical Importance of Contestation & The Neutral Umpire -

1. Explain that meaningful competition gives legitimacy to the winner and instils hope in the loser, which ensures the peaceful transition of power.
2. Highlight Article 324, which vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the ECI, making absolute neutrality an explicit constitutional requirement.

Systemic Deficiencies and Operational Concerns (The Critical Analysis) -

Statutory Loopholes - Discuss Section 53(2) of the RPA, 1951, which permits uncontested walkovers, depriving citizens of their right to vote.

Electoral Roll Discrepancies - Analyse how rapid, technology-driven administrative actions (such as the sudden "under adjudication" status and deletion of 27 lakh voters in West Bengal) can lead to mass disenfranchisement without due process.

Data Opacity - Note the lack of public data regarding the restoration of rights for flagged voters (as seen in Assam and West Bengal), which erodes public trust.

Algorithmic Vulnerability - Point out that over-relying on automated tools to identify "logical discrepancies" can bypass the statutory oversight of local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).

Way Forward -

1. Implement strict judicial or independent audits of electoral roll deletions, especially when they occur close to election announcements.
2. Introduce guidelines to ensure that voters marked for adjudication can cast provisional ballots, preventing bureaucratic delays from stripping them of their constitutional rights.
3. Strengthen the inner-party democratic framework to ensure a constant supply of viable opposition voices.

Conclusion -

Conclude that numbers and logistics alone do not make an election successful. The enduring strength of India's democracy depends on protecting the right to contest and maintaining the ECI as a transparent, neutral guardian of the ballot box.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-horse-races-are-no-triumph-for-democracy/article70991099.ece

2. The Challenge for India's Renewables Surge - Storage (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy / Infrastructure / Science and Technology
Topic - Infrastructure - Energy; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
Sub-Topic - Renewable Energy Integration, Energy Storage Systems (ESS), Grid Stability, and Supply Chain Vulnerabilities (Lithium Dependency).

1. Introduction

As India rapidly expands its renewable energy footprint—with green sources accounting for over 53% 283GW of its total installed capacity—the power grid faces a structural crisis - intermittency. Solar power generation (which alone contributes over 150 GW) drops to absolute zero after sunset, while wind energy fluctuates wildly based on weather patterns. This creates a severe time-mismatch between when electricity is generated and when consumer demand peaks. Without robust energy storage infrastructure to save surplus power during high-generation periods and discharge it during peak deficits, grid stability is fundamentally threatened.

2. Core Technological Architecture - Dominant and Emerging Storage Modalities

The article details several prominent technologies being deployed or explored globally to capture and release electricity on demand -

A. Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS) — Mechanical/Gravitational Dominance

Mechanism - Uses surplus electricity during off-peak hours to pump water from a lower reservoir to an elevated higher reservoir.
Discharge - When grid demand peaks, the stored water is released downhill through high-capacity hydro turbines, instantly generating electricity.
Status - It stands alongside BESS as one of the two most widely deployed storage technologies globally.

B. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) — Electrochemical Efficiency

Mechanism - Captures excess green electricity and stores it chemically within modular battery packs, which later discharge power seamlessly back into the grid during shortages.
Dominant Chemistry - Lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) cells are the global industry standard due to their falling production costs, high round-trip efficiency, and long operational life.

C. Alternative and Emerging Storage Solutions

Concentrating Solar-Thermal Storage Systems - Deploys extensive mirror arrays to capture and focus intense sunlight onto a central receiver. The heat is absorbed by storage materials like molten salt and later used to generate steam to drive power turbines.
Compressed-Air Energy Storage Systems - Utilizes surplus power to compress atmospheric air and store it at high pressure within secure underground caverns or storage tanks. This compressed air is released to spin generation turbines during peak demand.
Flywheel Energy Storage Systems - Stores energy mechanically as rotational kinetic energy by spinning a heavy rotor at extremely high speeds. Known for delivering near-instantaneous bursts of power, flywheels are critical for maintaining real-time grid frequency stability.
Gravity Energy Storage Systems - Uses excess power to mechanically lift high-density weights to elevated positions. When power is required, the weights are lowered, converting gravitational potential energy back into electricity via linked generators.

3. India's Installed Capacity and Future Projections (2035–36)

A critical widening gap exists between India's rapid addition of renewable generation capacity and its parallel deployment of storage systems. The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has outlined an ambitious roadmap to bridge this gap -

Technology Domain	Current Installed Capacity (2026)	CEA Projected Target (By 2035–36)	Total Energy Capacity

Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS)	7.2 GW	94{GW}	567GWh
Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)	0.2 GW	80 GW	321GWh
Aggregate Capacity Metrics	~7.47 GW	174GW	888GWh}

The 4-to-6 Hour Operational Window - The top power planning agency emphasizes that integrating storage facilities capable of sustaining supply for 4 to 6 hours will become non-negotiable beyond 2030 to manage longer periods without sun or wind.

4. Infrastructure Pipelines and Project Execution Status

To achieve these long-term targets, the government has initialized a massive, multi-tiered project pipeline -

PHS Pipeline Status -

1. 13,120MW 78,720MWh of PHS capacity is actively under construction.
2. An additional 9,580MW 57,480MWh has received formal regulatory concurrence and awaits immediate construction deployment.
3. Projects totalling nearly 75,000MW are currently undergoing preliminary survey and field investigation stages.

BESS Pipeline Status -

1. 10,658.94MW 28,739.32MWh of battery capacity is under active construction.
2. Projects representing 22,347.15MW 69,836.70MWh are localized at the crucial competitive tendering stage.

5. Strategic Challenges and Supply Chain Vulnerabilities

The rapid scale-up of India's storage infrastructure faces deep geopolitical and economic risks -

Import Dependency - India suffers from a severe, concentrated reliance on imports for its battery systems, currently importing 75–80% of its lithium-ion cells.

Value Chain Concentration - Lithium-ion cells account for roughly 80% of the total cost of a grid-scale battery storage system.

Geopolitical Vulnerability - The CEA highlights that a single Asian country dominates 75–80% of global battery manufacturing, exposing India to trade frictions, price volatility, and supply chain bottlenecks.

6. Global Energy Storage Landscape

Global Capacity Benchmarks - According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), global installed PHS capacity stands at approximately 160GW. In 2025 alone, 108GW of new battery storage capacity was added worldwide—a staggering 40% increase over the previous year.

Geopolitical Leadership Matrix - * **China -** Leads the world with nearly 66 GW of installed storage capacity, dominating the battery supply chain by accounting for nearly 60% of all global additions in 2025.

1. Japan & United States - Hold secondary positions with 21.8GW and 18.9GW respectively.
2. Europe - Collectives account for approximately 28 GW of pumped hydro capacity.

7. Way Forward

Securing Raw Material Supply Chains - Diversifying raw mineral access through overseas mining acquisitions (via KABIL) and creating a domestic recycling ecosystem for electronic waste.

Accelerating Domestic Manufacturing - Aggressively scaling up the Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to manufacture lithium and alternative cells within India.

Streamlining Financial Tenders - Standardizing battery storage purchase agreements to provide long-term revenue visibility for private investors and developers.

Upgrading Grid Operational Software - Integrating advanced machine learning and AI forecasting tools into load dispatch centres to seamlessly coordinate storage discharge with real-time demand fluctuations.

Conclusion

India's target of transitioning to a clean energy future cannot be achieved by expanding generation capacity alone; it requires a parallel expansion in energy storage infrastructure. While the country's upcoming project pipelines are vast, over-reliance on imported lithium-ion cell components presents a clear strategic vulnerability. To ensure long-term energy security, India must combine physical grid integration with aggressive domestic manufacturing and cell diversification, turning storage from a bottleneck into an asset.

Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260518/282011858999718

Question

"While India's aggressive expansion of renewable energy generation has bypassed global benchmarks, its path to a clean energy transition is fundamentally bottlenecked by grid-scale storage infrastructure. Critically evaluate the technological options available to India to achieve grid stability and the strategic risks associated with its green energy supply chain." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's renewable energy capacity has crossed a milestone, accounting for over 53% 283 GW of its total installed power mix. However, because solar and wind energy are inherently intermittent, generation often fails to align with peak demand curves. This creates an urgent requirement for a parallel expansion in grid-scale energy storage systems (ESS) to prevent grid destabilization.

2. Technological Options for Grid Stability - Merits and Demerits

India is pursuing a dual-track storage strategy, supplemented by emerging technologies -

Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS) - Consists of pumping water to an elevated reservoir during surplus hours and releasing it downhill through turbines during peak deficits.

1. Merit - Excellent for large-scale, long-duration (4 to 6 hours) base-load balancing.
2. Demerit - High gestation periods, heavy capital requirement, and environmental/land acquisition challenges.

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) - Utilizes electrochemical cells, predominantly Lithium-Iron-Phosphate (LFP) chemistry, to instantly capture and discharge power.

1. Merit - Rapid deployment, high round-trip efficiency, and exceptional real-time grid frequency regulation.
2. Demerit - Shorter operational lifespan compared to hydro assets and highly prone to supply chain shocks.

Alternative Paradigms - Technologies like Flywheel systems (for short-term frequency management) and Mechanical Gravity storage are being explored but are yet to achieve commercial grid-scale viability in India.

3. Strategic Risks in the Green Supply Chain (The Critical Assessment)

An evaluation of India's storage ambitions highlights a deep vulnerability -

Asymmetric Import Dependence - BESS deployment is heavily reliant on external supply chains, with India importing 75–80% of its lithium-ion cells.

Geopolitical Monopoly - A single country, China, controls nearly 60% of global battery additions and 75–80% of global cell manufacturing.

The "Value" Concentration - Because cells constitute up to 80% of the total cost of a grid-scale battery project, India risks swapping its historical dependency on West Asian fossil fuels for an equally dangerous dependency on East Asian critical mineral monopolies.

4. Way Forward

To secure its clean energy transition, India must execute a synchronized domestic strategy -

Accelerating the ACC-PLI Scheme - Aggressively scaling the Advanced Chemistry Cell Production Linked Incentive to manufacture batteries domestically.

Diversifying Mineral Access - Securing long-term lithium, cobalt, and nickel mining assets abroad through state joint ventures like KABIL.
Tapping the PHS Pipeline - Streamlining clearances for the 13,120MW of pumped hydro capacity currently under construction to reduce immediate reliance on imported batteries.

Conclusion

Critically evaluating India's renewable energy surge reveals that adding generation capacity without building matching storage infrastructure is unsustainable. While the Central Electricity Authority's target of 174GW of integrated storage by 2035–36 is directionally correct, India's ultimate success will depend on its ability to build an indigenous, secure supply chain. Strategic self-reliance must match administrative scale to ensure the national power grid remains stable, secure, and sovereign.
Source - https -//www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260518/282011858999718

3. Why Conversion Cases Like TCS Nashik Persist? (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper I – Indian Society and Communalism
Topic - Fundamental Rights and secularism
Sub-Topic - Role of education in nation-building

Introduction

The article examines recurring communal tensions surrounding educational institutions in regions like Nashik and traces their roots to historical memories, religious identity politics, and unresolved social mistrust. It argues that controversies over conversion are not isolated incidents but manifestations of deeper anxieties linked to Partition, communal mobilisation, educational control, and identity-based politics in India.

1. Background of Conversion-Related Controversies

Educational Institutions and Religious Identity

1. Several disputes emerge around minority-run educational institutions accused of promoting religious conversion.

TCS Nashik Incident Context

1. The article links the Nashik case with wider debates on missionary institutions, cultural influence, and communal sensitivities.

Political and Social Polarisation

1. Conversion-related issues are often amplified within charged political environments.

2. Historical Roots of Communal Suspicion

Legacy of Partition

1. The trauma of Partition continues to influence Hindu-Muslim relations and public perceptions.

Colonial-Era Religious Mobilisation

1. Colonial policies often deepened communal identities and competitive religious politics.

Historical Memory and Identity

1. Communities continue to carry inherited narratives of victimhood, mistrust, and insecurity.

3. Religious Conversion Debate in India

Constitutional Protection

1. Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion.

Concerns Regarding Coercion

1. Critics argue that conversion through inducement, coercion, or exploitation of vulnerability should be prevented.

Debate on Voluntary Conversion

1. Supporters emphasise individual liberty and freedom of belief.

4. Educational Institutions as Social Spaces

Role in Socialisation

1. Schools and colleges shape cultural attitudes, civic values, and inter-community interaction.

Minority Educational Rights

1. Article 30 provides minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

Perception Challenges

1. Minority institutions are sometimes viewed through the lens of communal suspicion rather than educational contribution.

5. Rise of Identity Politics

Politicisation of Religious Issues

1. Conversion debates are frequently used for electoral mobilisation and ideological polarisation.

Community-Based Mobilisation

1. Religious identity increasingly influences public discourse and social alignment.

Social Fragmentation

1. Excessive identity politics weakens trust and social cohesion.

6. Impact on Social Harmony

Communal Polarisation

1. Repeated controversies deepen mistrust among communities.

Fear and Insecurity

1. Minority communities may feel targeted or socially isolated.

Weakening of Constitutional Values

1. Persistent communal conflict undermines secularism and fraternity.

7. Importance of Constitutional Secularism

Indian Model of Secularism

1. India follows principled equidistance rather than strict separation between religion and state.

Respect for Diversity

1. The Constitution protects pluralism and coexistence among communities.

Balancing Rights and Public Order

1. The state must protect both religious freedom and social harmony.

8. Need for Inter-Community Dialogue

Building Mutual Trust

1. Dialogue between communities can reduce misconceptions and hostility.

Importance of Local Social Leadership

1. Civil society, educators, and community leaders play a major role in maintaining harmony.

Preventing Radicalisation

1. Inclusive engagement reduces the possibility of communal extremism.

9. Role of Education in Nation-Building

Promoting Constitutional Values

1. Educational institutions should strengthen tolerance, critical thinking, and civic responsibility.

Shared Historical Understanding

1. Balanced teaching of history can reduce inherited prejudices.

Encouraging Social Integration

1. Education can act as a bridge between diverse communities.

10. Challenges Before India

Spread of Misinformation

1. Social media amplifies rumours and communal narratives rapidly.

Weak Institutional Trust

1. Communities often distrust state institutions and opposing groups.

Political Exploitation of Identity

1. Electoral incentives sometimes encourage polarisation instead of reconciliation.

11. Way Forward

Strengthen Constitutional Literacy

1. Citizens should better understand rights, secularism, and pluralism.

Ensure Transparent Investigations

1. Allegations of coercive conversion should be examined through lawful and impartial procedures.

Promote Inclusive Education

1. Institutions should encourage interfaith understanding and social integration.

Encourage Community Dialogue

1. Regular engagement between religious and civic groups can reduce tensions.

Resist Communal Polarisation

1. Political and media discourse should avoid inflammatory narratives.

Conclusion

Conversion-related controversies persist because they are linked not only to religion but also to historical memory, identity politics, and social mistrust. India's long-term stability depends on strengthening constitutional secularism, promoting dialogue, and nurturing mutual respect among communities.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/why-conversion-cases-like-tcs-nashik-persist

Question

Q. "Religious conversion controversies in India reflect deeper challenges of identity politics and social mistrust." Discuss in the context of constitutional secularism. (250 words)

Introduction

Religious conversion debates in India are closely connected with constitutional rights, communal relations, and identity politics. Incidents involving educational or religious institutions often reflect wider social anxieties and historical mistrust.

Causes Behind Conversion Controversies

1. Historical memories of Partition and communal conflict continue to shape public perceptions.
2. Religious identity is increasingly politicised for electoral mobilisation.
3. Allegations of coercive or inducement-based conversion create social tensions.
4. Social media amplifies communal narratives and misinformation rapidly.

Constitutional Perspective

1. Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to propagate religion.
2. Article 30 protects minority educational institutions.
3. Indian secularism aims to balance religious freedom with public order and harmony.

Impact on Society

1. Repeated controversies deepen communal polarisation and mistrust.
2. Minority communities may experience insecurity and alienation.
3. Social cohesion and constitutional fraternity are weakened.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen constitutional literacy and interfaith dialogue.
2. Ensure impartial investigations into allegations of coercion.
3. Promote inclusive and value-based education.
4. Prevent political exploitation of communal issues.

Conclusion

India's pluralistic democracy requires balancing religious freedom with social harmony. Long-term peace depends on constitutional morality, mutual trust, and sustained efforts toward inclusive nation-building.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/why-conversion-cases-like-tcs-nashik-persist

4. Nalanda And India's Civilisational Renaissance (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper I – Indian Culture
Topic - Indian culture and heritage
Sub-Topic - Globalisation and civilisational outreach

Introduction

The article reflects on the revival of Nalanda University and links it with India's broader civilisational resurgence. It argues that India's development should not be limited only to economic growth or technological advancement but must also reconnect with its ancient knowledge traditions, cultural confidence, and ethical worldview. The rebuilding of Nalanda symbolises India's attempt to revive a knowledge-based civilisation rooted in inclusiveness, learning, and global cooperation.

1. Historical Importance of Nalanda

Ancient Centre of Learning

1. Nalanda University was founded in the 5th century CE during the Gupta period.
2. It emerged as one of the world's earliest residential universities.

International Academic Hub

1. Students and scholars came from China, Korea, Tibet, Persia, and Southeast Asia.
2. It represented India's global intellectual influence in ancient times.

Multidisciplinary Knowledge Tradition

1. Nalanda taught philosophy, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, grammar, and Buddhist studies.
2. It symbolised open intellectual inquiry and academic excellence.

2. Destruction and Decline

Invasion and Destruction

1. Nalanda was destroyed during the invasions led by Bakhtiyar Khilji in the 12th century.

Loss of Knowledge Networks

The destruction represented not only physical damage but also disruption of India's global knowledge systems.

Civilisational Setback

1. India gradually lost its central role in global intellectual leadership.

3. Revival of Nalanda University

Modern Nalanda Initiative

1. Nalanda University was re-established in Bihar in the 21st century with international cooperation.

International Participation

1. Several Asian countries supported the project, reflecting Nalanda's historical internationalism.

Symbol of Civilisational Renewal

1. The revival signifies India's attempt to reconnect with its intellectual and cultural heritage.

4. Civilisational State and Cultural Confidence

Rediscovery of Indian Identity

1. The article highlights the importance of recovering confidence in India's civilisational strengths.

Beyond Colonial Narratives

1. India's traditional knowledge systems were often neglected during colonial and post-colonial periods.

Cultural Continuity

1. Civilisations survive through continuity of values, institutions, and knowledge traditions.

5. Knowledge as India's Soft Power

Education Diplomacy

1. Institutions like Nalanda strengthen India's educational and cultural diplomacy.

Global South Leadership

1. India can offer an alternative development and knowledge model rooted in inclusiveness and sustainability.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

1. The ancient Indian idea of "the world is one family" strengthens India's soft power projection.

6. Ancient Wisdom and Modern Development

Integration of Tradition and Technology

1. India's growth model should combine scientific advancement with ethical and cultural foundations.

Sustainable Development Perspective

1. Traditional Indian thought emphasised harmony between humans, society, and nature.

Knowledge Economy

1. Modern economies increasingly depend on innovation, research, and intellectual capital.

7. Role of Digital Transformation

India's Technological Achievements

1. Digital public infrastructure such as UPI and Aadhaar demonstrates India's innovation capacity.

Democratisation of Access

1. Technology can help expand educational access and knowledge sharing.

Bridging Ancient and Modern

1. India can combine digital infrastructure with civilisational values to create inclusive development models.

8. Challenges in Building Knowledge Leadership

Quality of Higher Education

1. Indian universities still face issues related to research quality and global rankings.

Brain Drain

1. Many talented students continue to migrate abroad for higher education and research opportunities.

Limited Research Ecosystem

1. Investment in research and innovation remains relatively low compared to advanced economies.

9. India's Emerging Global Role

Civilisational Diplomacy

1. India increasingly projects itself as a civilisation-state rather than merely a post-colonial nation-state.

Strategic Cultural Outreach

1. Cultural institutions, yoga, Ayurveda, Buddhism, and educational partnerships enhance India's influence.

Multipolar World Order

1. India seeks a larger role in shaping global governance and intellectual discourse.

10. Way Forward

Strengthen Higher Education

1. India must invest heavily in universities, research ecosystems, and faculty development.

Promote Indigenous Knowledge Systems

1. Traditional knowledge should be integrated with modern scientific inquiry.

Expand International Academic Collaboration

1. India should attract global scholars and students through world-class institutions.

Encourage Research and Innovation

1. Long-term investment in R&D and interdisciplinary education is essential.

Build Cultural Confidence

1. Development should include intellectual, ethical, and cultural dimensions alongside economic growth.

Conclusion

The revival of Nalanda symbolises more than the reconstruction of an ancient university. It represents India's attempt to reclaim its role as a global centre of knowledge, dialogue, and civilisational leadership by combining ancient wisdom with modern innovation.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/old-and-the-new-1503595061.html

Question

Q. "The revival of Nalanda reflects India's attempt to combine civilisational heritage with modern global aspirations." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

Nalanda University symbolised India's ancient intellectual leadership and cultural openness. Its modern revival reflects India's effort to reconnect with its civilisational heritage while projecting itself as a global knowledge power.

Significance of Nalanda Revival

1. Nalanda represents India's ancient tradition of higher learning and international academic exchange.
2. Its revival strengthens India's cultural diplomacy and soft power.
3. It reflects the idea of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and India's civilisational worldview.
4. The initiative combines historical identity with contemporary educational aspirations.

Relevance for Modern India

1. Knowledge economies increasingly depend on innovation and research ecosystems.
2. India can integrate traditional knowledge with modern science and technology.
3. Institutions like Nalanda can strengthen regional cooperation and global academic partnerships.
4. Cultural confidence can complement economic and technological progress.

Challenges

1. Indian universities face issues related to funding, research quality, and global competitiveness.
2. Brain drains and weak research infrastructure remain major concerns.

Conclusion

The revival of Nalanda represents India's aspiration to emerge not merely as an economic power but as a knowledge-based civilisation capable of contributing ethically, intellectually, and culturally to the modern world.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/old-and-the-new-1503595061.html

Editorial of the Day – 19.05.2026

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1. Waiting For the Storm - On Weather Events, India's Vulnerability (TH)

GS Paper III - Disaster Management / Geography
Topic - Important Geophysical phenomena (earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.); Disaster and disaster management.
Sub-Topic - Thunderstorms and Thundersqualls, Localized Extreme Weather Events, Early Warning Systems (EWS), and Last-Mile Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

1. Introduction

In May 2026, a deadly pre-monsoon weather system swept through Uttar Pradesh, impacting 26 districts and causing 111 deaths and 72 injuries. This extreme event—characterized by a destructive combination of thunderstorms, lightning, dust storms, heavy rain, and high-velocity thundersqualls—stands as one of the deadliest recent localized weather disasters in the region. The crisis highlights a widening gap in Indian disaster governance - while macro-meteorological forecasting has advanced significantly, local infrastructure vulnerability and last-mile communication failures continue to cause high casualties.

2. Meteorological Mechanics - Why Uttar Pradesh is a Storm Axis

The extreme intensity of the May 2026 pre-monsoon storms was driven by a volatile combination of thermal and atmospheric factors -

Collision of Contrasting Air Masses - Uttar Pradesh frequently acts as a geographic convergence zone. The collision of intense, dry, scorching heatwaves (Loo winds) originating from the Thar Desert with warm, highly moisture-laden winds blowing from the Bay of Bengal creates a highly unstable thermodynamic atmosphere.

Western Disturbance Instability - The convergence of these surface winds was heavily intensified by an active Western Disturbance moving over northwest India, creating strong convective triggers.

Orographic Amplification - Southern parts of the state, particularly the Vindhya hills region spanning Mirzapur and Sonbhadra districts, act as topographic elevations that rapidly force moist air upward, intensifying severe thunderstorm and squall activity.

A Predictable and Recurring Cycle - While the 2026 storms were unusually severe, similar deadly pre-monsoon convective systems have consistently formed during the May–June window every year since 2018.

3. The Early Warning System Paradox

The high death toll occurred despite active atmospheric tracking and widespread data transmission, revealing gaps in India's Early Warning Systems (EWS) -

Mass Notification Outlay - The India Meteorological Department (IMD) successfully generated timely thunderstorm and lightning alerts. In response, the Uttar Pradesh state administration dispatched over 34 crore red and orange alert messages via the centralized SACHET portal.

The Last-Mile Failure - Despite sending millions of automated SMS alerts, the system lacked precise target verification. It remains unclear whether these warnings reached the most marginalized, off-grid communities before the storms struck.

Lack of Actionable Intelligence - The disseminated alerts were mostly broad, text-based regional warnings. They lacked location-specific guidance and clear, actionable safety instructions on what vulnerable populations should do to protect themselves.

4. Infrastructure Vulnerabilities and Human Exposure

The high number of casualties was a direct consequence of weak structural resilience and long-standing vulnerabilities in rural and semi-urban infrastructure -

Fragile Housing Stocks - A significant percentage of casualties occurred in rural and peri-urban areas due to the collapse of structurally weak houses. Fragile thatch, mud, and unreinforced tin roofs turned into hazardous projectiles when the thundersqualls struck during evening and night hours.

Hazardous Commercial Infrastructure - Poorly installed commercial hoardings, weak public signboards, and uninsulated, hanging electrical wiring networks collapsed under high wind pressures, leading to electrocutions and crush injuries.

Agricultural and Economic Asset Loss - Beyond the human toll, the high winds caused widespread damage to standing horticulture crops, livestock, and local power infrastructure.

5. Gaps in Institutional Disaster Preparedness

Forecasting vs. Risk Reduction - State agencies knew the potential risks, as shown by pre-planned relief packages for different types of infrastructure and crop losses. However, institutional focus remains heavily biased toward post-disaster financial relief rather than pre-disaster vulnerability reduction.

Predictable Risk vs. Inadequate Resilience - The overall meteorological threat was entirely foreseeable. The continued high rate of casualties reflects a failure to translate weather forecasts into long-term, climate-resilient local infrastructure.

6. Strategic Way Forward

Transition to Impact-Based Forecasting - Moving past generic regional weather alerts to Impact-Based Forecasting (IBF), which clearly tells communities *what the weather will do* and provides step-by-step safety actions.

Upgrading the Last-Mile Communication Web - Utilizing local community networks, regional radio stations, and village-level sirens alongside the SACHET portal to ensure alerts reach non-smartphone users in time.

Structural Retrofitting & Cool/Resilient Roofs - Integrating mandatory wind-resistant structural codes into rural housing programs like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) to replace fragile, unsafe roofs.

Enforcing Strict Public Safety Zoning - Auditing and regulating the installation of heavy commercial billboards and electrical poles along public highways and dense markets to prevent structural collapses during storms.

Decentralized Emergency Response Hubs - Setting up village-level disaster response teams equipped with basic rescue tools and medical kits to provide immediate aid during the golden hour, before state teams arrive.

Conclusion

The 2026 Uttar Pradesh storms show that predictable weather risks become deadly disasters when they meet weak local infrastructure and inadequate community preparedness. True climate resilience requires moving past sophisticated weather forecasting to fix the systemic vulnerabilities on the ground. By investing in wind-resilient housing, improving last-mile communication networks, and enforcing strict public safety codes, India can bridge the gap between advanced weather science and public safety, ensuring communities are prepared before the next storm hits.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/waiting-for-the-storm-on-weather-events-indias-vulnerability/article70994042.ece

Question

"Despite significant advancements in meteorological forecasting and mass digital alerts, India's rural and peri-urban populations remain highly vulnerable to localized severe weather events. Examine the systemic bottlenecks in the 'last-mile' delivery of early warnings and suggest structural measures to build community-level climate resilience." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The occurrence of severe pre-monsoon storms in Uttar Pradesh in May 2026, which claimed 111 lives across 26 districts, highlights an institutional paradox in India's disaster management framework. While the India Meteorological Department (IMD) generated accurate alerts and the state sent over 34 crore warning messages via the SACHET portal, the high casualty count demonstrates that mass data transmission does not automatically translate into public safety if structural and communication bottlenecks persist.

2. Systemic Bottlenecks in 'Last-Mile' Delivery of Early Warnings

An examination of recent localized disasters reveals several critical gaps in the warning-to-action chain

The Digital and Accessibility Divide - Automated portals rely heavily on smartphone connectivity and literacy. The most vulnerable populations—such as agricultural labourers, migrant workers, and off-grid rural communities—often miss text-based alerts or lack the means to receive them in real time.

Lack of Actionable and Localized Intelligence - Most alerts are broad, regional meteorological statistics (e.g., predicting "thundersqualls at 60 km/h"). They do not practice Impact-Based Forecasting (IBF), which explains *what the weather will do* (e.g., warning that "fragile roofs may collapse") and provides clear, step-by-step safety guidelines.

Temporal and Situational Disconnect - Pre-monsoon convective storms develop rapidly and often strike during evening or night hours when families are asleep. Text alerts sent to switched-off or unmonitored phones fail to provide a proactive window for evacuation.

3. Structural Measures to Build Community-Level Resilience

To move beyond reactive relief, India must deploy targeted structural and institutional interventions -

Multi-Channel Decentralized Alert Systems - Supplementing digital portals with localized, low-tech alternatives such as village-level sirens, automated public address systems on religious or community buildings, and regional community radio broadcasts to ensure warnings cut across the digital divide.

Climate-Resilient Housing Infrastructure - Integrating mandatory wind- and lightning-resistant construction guidelines into rural housing programs like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). Replacing fragile thatch, mud, and unreinforced tin roofs with stable structures removes the primary hazard during high-velocity thundersqualls.

Public Safety Zoning and Engineering Codes - Enforcing rigid structural audits for commercial hoardings, highway billboards, and public signboards. Power distribution networks must transition to underground or heavily insulated overhead cables to eliminate the risk of electrocution during storms.

Institutionalization of First Responders - Training and equipping village-level disaster management committees (Aapda Mitras) with basic rescue tools and first-aid kits. Localized management ensures immediate rescue operations during the "golden hour" before district administrative machinery can reach the site.

Conclusion

Examining India's extreme weather vulnerabilities shows that advanced meteorology is only half the solution. True disaster risk reduction (DRR) occurs when scientific data is matched by secure local infrastructure and accessible public communication. By shifting the policy focus from massive digital data outlays to localized, impact-based communication and climate-proof housing, India can protect its most vulnerable populations and turn advanced weather forecasting into saved lives.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/waiting-for-the-storm-on-weather-events-indias-vulnerability/article70994042.ece

2. In Federalism Challenges, Consensus Is the Solution (IE)

GS Paper II – Indian Polity and Governance
Topic – Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.
Sub-Topic – Fiscal Federalism, Asymmetric Demography, Delimitation Dilemma, Cooperative vs. Combative Federalism, and Article 356.

1. Introduction

Indian federalism has been a dynamic, evolving architecture that serves as a vital instrument for nation-building. Historically shaped by the tension between the centralizing tendencies of the post-Partition era and the localized demands of diverse states, federalism has routinely grappled with challenges regarding vertical and horizontal equity. The authors look back on 75 years of India's constitutional journey, utilizing data from their recent book, *A Sixty-Year Humanity* (specifically chapters XIV and XV), to identify two proximate challenges and two deep-seated structural causes that are converting cooperative federalism into a contentious, combative system.

2. Proximate Challenge 1 - The Rising Democratic Deficit

The Democratic Principle – In a true democracy, equal citizenship demands that every individual citizen's vote carries equivalent weight (1person = 1vote = 1 value). This requires regular, periodic adjustments in electoral seat allocations to mirror shifting population dynamics.
The 1971 Freeze Policy – To encourage population control, constitutional amendments in 1976 (and again in 2002) froze political representation in the Parliament based on the 1971 Census until the first census after 2026.
The Representation Gap – This freeze created a structural divergence between a state's actual population share and its corresponding seat share in Parliament (as shown in Figure 1 - Over/Under-Representation) -

1. **The Southern Deficit –** By the 2024 general elections, the four southern states (Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana) would have collectively held 23 more seats if representation tracked current population realities.
2. **The Northern Surplus –** Conversely, four northern states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) would have held 31 fewer seats under the same demographic parameters.

The Delimitation Dilemma – This widening gap means that states that successfully implemented national population stabilization goals are being penalized with diminishing political relevance, while states with higher fertility rates are gaining legislative dominance.

3. Proximate Challenge 2 - Rising Fiscal Transfers

The Theoretical Objective – In an ideal federal framework, financial resources generated across states are partially redistributed. Transfers from wealthier, high-performing states to economically weaker ones ensure that all citizens have access to a comparable baseline of public goods and services.
The Divergence Index - Figure 2 plots the ratio between what a state receives via Finance Commission transfers versus its underlying tax base/contribution -

1. An Index > 1 denotes a Beneficiary state (transfers exceed contributions).
2. An Index < 1 denotes a Donor state (contributions exceed transfers).

The Widening Tax-to-Transfer Wedge – While the spread between donor and beneficiary states was tight in the 1960s, it has widened significantly over the last three decades -

3. In the early 1960s, the Hindi Heartland received roughly 20% more resources relative to its economic size, while the South and West received 20% less.
4. By 2023, the Hindi Heartland received 90% more resources relative to its tax base.
5. Concurrently, the South and West received 44% and 58% less, respectively, relative to their financial contributions.

The Non-Southern Contributors - The authors note that the largest net financial contributors are not solely southern states; western industrialized states like Gujarat and Maharashtra serve as primary engines of tax contribution, while eastern states like Odisha and West Bengal remain net fiscal beneficiaries.

4. Deeper Cause 1 - Divergent Economic Performance

The Divergence Phenomenon - The underlying driver of fiscal friction is the sharply uneven performance of states across health, education, fertility, and economic indicators.

The "China-Scale" Growth - Since 1980, per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the Southern and Western states has expanded at rates comparable to China's historic growth surge.

The Hindi Heartland Stagnation - These high-performing regions have rapidly pulled away from the Hindi heartland and West Bengal.

The Penalization Perception - This economic divergence creates a political narrative where economically disciplined states feel they are being financially penalized for their success (in demography and productivity), while lagging states are seen as receiving open-ended financial rewards for underperformance.

5. Deeper Cause 2 - Erosion of Democratic Sensibility

The Trust Deficit - The core issue undermining fiscal and political federalism is a growing distrust within Indian politics, impacting relationships between the Centre and states, among states themselves, and across religious minorities.

Unilateral Centralization - The authors point to a series of major policy measures—ranging from demonetization and the farm laws to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, the overhaul of the Indian Penal Code (via the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita), and sudden electoral roll revisions—as examples of top-down actions executed with minimal consultation with state governments.

The Partisan Imbalance - The persistent misuse of Article 356 to dismiss state governments, mounting grievances in regions like Kashmir, Ladakh, and Manipur, and the partisan role played by Governors have weakened institutional guardrails, replacing cooperative federalism with a combative variant.

6. The Way Forward - Reviving Democratic Sensibility

Beyond Technical Fixes - Standard policy remedies—such as new fiscal compacts, grand structural bargains, complex voter weighting matrices, or revised financial allocation formulas—will fail if the underlying political culture remains uncooperative.

The Core Solution - Resolving these systemic challenges requires the Central government, which holds a preponderance of constitutional power, to practice wide consultation, accommodation, compromise, and self-restraint.

The Historic Lesson of Unanimity - The authors cite an instructive historic precedent from a 2018 GST Council meeting -

When the then Finance Minister of Kerala, T.M. Thomas Isaac, walked out of a GST Council session because his state was in a minority regarding a tax proposal, the Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, chose not to override him using the Centre's dominant voting bloc. Instead, Jaitley halted proceedings, engaged in direct consultation, and accommodated Kerala's concerns to preserve complete unanimity among all 28 states.

Preserving Strategic Space - The Centre must treat state governments as essential partners in nation-building rather than political adversaries, ensuring that major policy transitions are rooted in consensus.

Conclusion

Indian federalism stands at a critical juncture where demographic divergence and economic polarization are testing the limits of constitutional integration. While technical adjustments to finance formulas and delimitation parameters are necessary, they are secondary to the preservation of democratic sensibility. The future stability of the Indian Union relies on the Centre's ability to engage with

states through institutional self-restraint and consensus-building, ensuring that economic productivity and population control are rewarded rather than marginalized.

Source - Indian express

https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-politics/india-federalism-debate-democracy-fiscal-transfers-expert-explains-10695802/

Question

"The post-2026 lifting of the freeze on the delimitation of parliamentary seats risks shifting political power away from states that have achieved demographic stability toward those with higher fertility rates. Critically evaluate the political and fiscal implications of this demographic divergence on the future of Indian federalism." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The structural stability of Indian federalism is facing a major challenge due to a growing gap between regional demographics and economic performance. Since the 1971 Census, political representation in Parliament has been frozen to shield states implementing population control policies from losing legislative influence. Lifting this freeze post-2026 without structural safeguards risks creating a severe representation gap between the northern and southern-western regions.

2. The Political Implications - Shifting Representation

Evaluating the political impact reveals a sharp division in legislative influence -

The Representation Deficit - States that successfully met national population stabilization goals (predominantly in the South and West) face a significant contraction in their parliamentary seat share. Data indicates that by the 2024 cycles, the four southern states lost out on an estimated 23 seats by sticking to the 1971 baseline.

The Northern Surplus - Conversely, states with delayed demographic transitions (the Hindi Heartland) stand to gain an estimated 31 additional seats based on current population metrics.

Erosion of the National Compact - This shift creates an institutional paradox - it penalizes states for policy compliance while rewarding lagging states with greater legislative dominance. These dynamic risks alienating high-performing regions and undermining the principle of cooperative federalism.

3. The Fiscal Implications - Contribution vs. Redistribution

The demographic imbalance directly shapes the dynamics of fiscal federalism -

The Tax-to-Transfer Wedge - Highly industrialized states function as net Donors (an index < 1), where their financial contributions far exceed what they receive back in central transfers. By 2023, western and southern states received 44% and 58% less relative to their tax contributions.

Open-Ended Beneficiaries - Lagging regions have become structural Beneficiaries (an index > 1). The Hindi Heartland now receives 90% more resources relative to its underlying economic base.

The Penalization Narrative - This economic polarization creates a damaging political narrative. High-performing states feel they are being financially and politically marginalized for their success in managing demography and driving economic growth.

4. Way Forward - Preserving Federal Sensibility

To prevent this combative dynamic from escalating, India must deploy a combination of policy and institutional remedies -

Decoupling Representation from Population - Amending the delimitation framework to weight parliamentary seats by a combination of population size and governance metrics (such as health, literacy, and demographic control).

Expanding the Role of the Rajya Sabha - Reforming the upper house to provide equal or more balanced representation to states regardless of size, acting as a structural check on population-weighted dominance in the Lok Sabha.

Rebalancing the Fiscal Formula - Ensuring the Finance Commission explicitly increases the weight assigned to "Efficiency" (tax collection, fiscal discipline, and fertility control) alongside "Equity" metrics.

Conclusion

Critically evaluating India's demographic divergence shows that relying strictly on population-based formulas will strain the constitutional compact. While equal voter representation (1person = 1vote = 1 value). is a fundamental democratic principle, it must not be enforced in a way that marginalizes high-performing states. The future stability of the Indian Union relies on the Centre exercising institutional self-restraint and consensus-building, ensuring that economic productivity and population control remain assets rather than political liabilities.

Source - Indian express

https -//indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-politics/india-federalism-debate-democracy-fiscal-transfers-expert-explains-10695802/

3. From Anai Mangalam to Leiden - Reclaiming A Civilisation's Memory (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper I - Indian Culture and History
Topic - Indian culture and heritage
Sub-Topic - Maritime history and transnational exchanges

Introduction

The article discusses the rediscovery and significance of the Anaimangalam copper plate inscription linked to the Chola period. It highlights how ancient inscriptions reveal India's sophisticated governance systems, maritime diplomacy, educational patronage, and global cultural interactions. The article also argues that reclaiming such historical records is essential for restoring India's civilisational memory and cultural confidence.

1. What is the Anaimangalam Inscription?

Chola-Era Historical Record

1. The inscription belongs to the Chola period and is associated with Rajaraja Chola I.

Stored in Leiden, Netherlands

1. The copper plates are preserved in Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Valuable Historical Source

1. The inscription provides details about governance, grants, trade, diplomacy, and religious patronage.

2. Importance of Inscriptions in Indian History

Primary Historical Sources

1. Inscriptions provide direct evidence about political, economic, and social life.

Reliable Documentation

1. Unlike legends or oral traditions, inscriptions offer precise administrative and chronological details.

Understanding Ancient Governance

1. They help historians reconstruct taxation, land grants, local administration, and diplomatic relations.

3. Chola Empire and Maritime Power

Strong Naval Tradition

1. The Cholas developed one of the most powerful naval systems in medieval India.

Indian Ocean Trade Networks

1. The empire maintained commercial and cultural relations with Southeast Asia.

Maritime Diplomacy

1. Chola interactions extended beyond conquest to diplomacy, trade, and cultural exchange.

4. India's Historical Global Connectivity

Cultural Exchanges Across Asia

1. Indian civilisation influenced Southeast Asia through religion, language, architecture, and trade.

Educational and Religious Networks

1. Temples and monasteries acted as centres of learning and cultural dissemination.

Cosmopolitan Nature of Indian Civilisation

1. Ancient India actively participated in global intellectual and commercial systems.

5. Civilisational Memory and Historical Consciousness

Loss of Historical Awareness

1. Colonial historiography often underplayed India's global influence and institutional sophistication.

Importance of Historical Recovery

1. Rediscovering inscriptions and archives help restore confidence in India's civilisational achievements.

Beyond Political History

1. Historical memory includes culture, institutions, trade, knowledge systems, and social organisation.

6. Heritage Preservation and Repatriation Debate

Preservation Abroad

1. Many Indian artefacts and manuscripts remain in foreign museums and archives.

Debate on Ownership and Access

1. Questions arise regarding repatriation, digital access, and shared global heritage.

Need for Archival Collaboration

1. International cooperation can improve conservation and scholarly research.

7. India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

Civilisational Diplomacy

1. India increasingly uses historical and cultural connections to strengthen international relations.

Shared Asian Heritage

1. Historical maritime links help deepen ties with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

Global Interest in Indian Heritage

1. Ancient Indian knowledge systems and historical records enhance India's soft power.

8. Governance Lessons from Ancient India

Administrative Sophistication

1. Chola inscriptions demonstrate organised land administration and institutional governance.

Local Self-Governance

1. Village assemblies and decentralised administration existed in several parts of South India.

Economic Management

1. Revenue systems, trade regulation, and temple administration reflected institutional maturity.

9. Relevance in Contemporary India

Cultural Confidence

1. Understanding historical achievements strengthens national self-confidence.

Academic Research and Public Awareness

1. Greater focus on epigraphy, archaeology, and manuscript preservation is required.

Linking Heritage with Modern Identity

1. Civilisational continuity can coexist with modern democratic and technological progress.

10. Challenges in Heritage Preservation

Neglect of Historical Archives

1. Many inscriptions and manuscripts remain undocumented or poorly preserved.

Limited Public Awareness

1. Historical and epigraphic studies receive limited mainstream attention.

Need for Skilled Researchers

1. India requires more trained historians, archaeologists, and epigraphists.

11. Way Forward

Digitisation of Historical Records

1. Ancient manuscripts and inscriptions should be digitally preserved and publicly accessible.

Strengthen Archaeological Research

1. Greater investment is needed in heritage studies and conservation institutions.

Promote Civilisational Studies

1. Universities should encourage interdisciplinary research on India's global historical networks.

International Cultural Cooperation

1. India should collaborate globally for preservation and access to historical artefacts.

Conclusion

The Anaimangalam inscription is not merely an ancient record but a reminder of India's deep civilisational heritage, administrative sophistication, and global connectivity. Reclaiming such historical memory is essential for building cultural confidence and understanding India's long-standing contribution to world civilisation.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/from-anaimangalam-to-leiden-reclaiming-a-civilisations-memory

Question

Q. "Ancient inscriptions are valuable instruments for reconstructing India's civilisational history and global interactions." Discuss with reference to the Chola period. (250 words)

Introduction

Ancient inscriptions are among the most reliable historical sources for understanding India's political, cultural, and economic history. Chola-period inscriptions particularly highlight India's advanced governance systems and maritime connections.

Importance of Chola Inscriptions

1. They provide detailed evidence regarding administration, taxation, and land grants.
2. Inscriptions reveal the role of village assemblies and decentralised governance.
3. They demonstrate the Chola Empire's strong naval and maritime capabilities.
4. They reflect India's cultural and trade relations with Southeast Asia.

Civilisational Significance

1. Chola inscriptions show India's participation in global commercial and cultural networks.
2. They highlight institutional sophistication and educational patronage.
3. Such records strengthen understanding of India's historical soft power and cosmopolitan traditions.

Contemporary Relevance

1. Rediscovery and preservation of inscriptions enhance cultural confidence.
2. Digitisation and research can improve public access to historical knowledge.
3. Civilisational heritage can strengthen India's cultural diplomacy and global engagement.

Conclusion

Ancient inscriptions are not merely historical artefacts but living records of India's civilisational depth, governance traditions, and global interactions. Their preservation is essential for understanding India's historical continuity and cultural legacy.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/from-anaimangalam-to-leiden-reclaiming-a-civilisations-memory

4. Bright Quantum Morning (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper IV – Ethics and Philosophy in Science
Topic - Emerging technologies and their applications
Sub-Topic - Indian philosophical traditions

Introduction

The article discusses the growing significance of quantum science and technology and connects it with philosophical ideas from Indian traditions, particularly Advaita Vedanta. It argues that quantum mechanics challenges classical notions of separateness and determinism, while also opening transformative possibilities in computing, medicine, communication, and materials science. The article further suggests that India can combine scientific advancement with civilisational wisdom to shape a more holistic technological future.

1. What is Quantum Science?

Study of the Microscopic World

1. Quantum mechanics explains the behaviour of matter and energy at atomic and subatomic scales.

Departure from Classical Physics

1. Classical physics assumes predictability and determinism.
2. Quantum physics introduces uncertainty, probability, and observer effects.

Foundation of Modern Technology

1. Quantum principles already underpin semiconductors, lasers, MRI machines, and modern electronics.

2. Key Concepts in Quantum Mechanics

Quantum Superposition

1. Particles can exist in multiple states simultaneously until observed.

Quantum Entanglement

1. Two particles can remain interconnected regardless of distance.

Wave-Particle Duality

1. Matter and light display both particle-like and wave-like behaviour.

Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle

1. Certain physical properties cannot be simultaneously measured with perfect precision.

3. Quantum Revolution and Technological Applications

Quantum Computing

1. Quantum computers use qubits capable of parallel computation.

Quantum Communication

1. Quantum encryption promises highly secure communication systems.

Quantum Sensors

1. Quantum technologies improve precision in navigation, defence, healthcare, and climate observation.

Drug Discovery and Materials Science

1. Quantum simulations may revolutionise chemistry and pharmaceutical research.

4. Global Quantum Race

Strategic Importance

1. Quantum technology is becoming a major area of geopolitical competition.

Investments by Major Powers

1. Countries like the US, China, and members of the EU are investing heavily in quantum research.

National Security Implications

1. Quantum technologies can reshape cybersecurity and intelligence systems.

5. India's Quantum Mission

National Quantum Mission (NQM)

1. India launched the National Quantum Mission to strengthen indigenous capabilities.

Objectives of the Mission

1. Development of quantum computing, communication, sensing, and materials research.

Building Domestic Ecosystem

1. India aims to create research institutions, startups, and skilled manpower in quantum technologies.

6. Link with Indian Philosophy

Advaita Vedanta and non-dualism

1. Advaita philosophy views reality as fundamentally interconnected.

Parallels with Quantum Ideas

1. Quantum entanglement and interconnectedness resemble philosophical notions of unity.

Science and Spiritual Inquiry

1. The article suggests that scientific and philosophical inquiry need not be mutually exclusive.

7. Vivekananda and Scientific Temper

Bridging Science and Spirituality

1. Swami Vivekananda encouraged harmonising scientific inquiry with spiritual understanding.

Rational Interpretation of Philosophy

1. Indian philosophical traditions often encouraged questioning and intellectual exploration.

Human-Centric Knowledge

1. Science should contribute to ethical and social advancement.

8. Ethical and Social Dimensions of Quantum Technologies

Responsible Innovation

1. Quantum technologies should be developed with ethical safeguards.

Digital and Strategic Inequality

1. Unequal access to advanced technologies may widen global power disparities.

Need for Global Governance

1. International cooperation is required to regulate emerging technological risks.

9. Challenges Before India

Research Infrastructure Constraints

1. Quantum science requires advanced laboratories and expensive infrastructure.

Talent and Skill Gaps

1. India needs a larger pool of quantum scientists and engineers.

Global Competition

1. Intense technological competition may create dependency risks.

Commercialisation Challenges

1. Translating laboratory research into scalable industrial applications remains difficult.

10. Opportunities for India

Demographic Advantage

1. India's young scientific workforce can contribute significantly to emerging technologies.

Strong IT Ecosystem

1. India's software and digital capabilities provide a foundation for quantum innovation.

Interdisciplinary Potential

1. India can uniquely integrate philosophy, ethics, mathematics, and technology.

11. Way Forward

Strengthen Quantum Education

1. Universities should promote specialised quantum science programmes.

Increase R&D Investment

1. Long-term funding for quantum research and startups is essential.

Encourage Industry-Academia Collaboration

1. Collaboration can accelerate innovation and commercialisation.

Promote Ethical Technology Governance

1. India should develop responsible regulatory and ethical frameworks.

Integrate Scientific Temper with Civilisational Wisdom

1. Science and philosophy can jointly contribute to sustainable and humane technological progress.

Conclusion

The quantum revolution represents not only a technological transformation but also a deeper shift in humanity's understanding of reality and interconnectedness. India has the opportunity to emerge as a major quantum power by combining scientific innovation with its rich philosophical and intellectual traditions.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/bright-quantum-morning-1503595460.html

Question

Q. "Quantum technologies are reshaping the future of science, security, and global power politics." Discuss India's opportunities and challenges in the quantum era. (250 words)

Introduction

Quantum technologies represent the next frontier in science and innovation. Quantum computing, communication, and sensing are expected to transform industries, defence systems, healthcare, and cybersecurity.

Importance of Quantum Technologies

1. Quantum computing can solve complex problems beyond the capability of classical computers.
2. Quantum communication provides highly secure encryption systems.
3. Quantum sensors improve precision in defence, navigation, and healthcare.
4. These technologies have major economic and strategic implications.

India's Opportunities

1. India has launched the National Quantum Mission to strengthen domestic capabilities.
2. Strong IT and digital ecosystems provide a foundation for innovation.
3. India's large scientific workforce can contribute significantly to quantum research.
4. India can emerge as a trusted global technology partner.

Challenges

1. Quantum research requires expensive infrastructure and advanced expertise.
2. Global competition from technologically advanced countries is intense.
3. Commercialisation and industry adoption remain limited.
4. Ethical and cybersecurity concerns require effective governance frameworks.

Conclusion

Quantum technologies are likely to redefine global technological leadership in the coming decades. India's success in the quantum era will depend on sustained investment, scientific innovation, skilled manpower, and responsible governance.

Source - https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/bright-quantum-morning-1503595460.html

Editorial of the Day – 20.05.2026

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1. **Rupee Falls to Record Low Of 96.25 Against U.S. Dollar (TH)** -01
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1. Rupee Falls to Record Low Of 96.25 Against U.S. Dollar (TH)

GS Paper - Indian Economy
Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; External Sector; Inflation.
Sub-Topic - Currency Depreciation vs. Appreciation, Foreign Exchange (Forex) Market Dynamics, imported Inflation, and RBI Open Market Interventions.

1. Introduction

In May 2026, the Indian Rupee (INR) experienced sharp downward volatility, breaching the psychologically significant threshold of ₹96 per US Dollar (USD) and touching historic lows near ₹96.96. This rapid descent is driven by structural shifts in the global macroeconomic landscape - an external energy shock from West Asian geopolitical tensions, closing maritime choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, and large capital outflows from foreign portfolio investors.
The situation highlights the complex task facing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in balancing exchange rate volatility, domestic inflation, and export competitiveness.

2. Conceptualizing Currency Dynamics - Appreciation vs. Depreciation

The external value of a floating currency is determined by market-driven demand and supply forces within the foreign exchange market.

A. Rupee Appreciation (Strengthening)

Definition - Occurs when the domestic currency gains purchasing power against a foreign benchmark currency (e.g., the USD).
Numerical Value - Fewer Rupees are required to purchase one unit of foreign currency. For example, a shift from $1 USD = ₹85 to $1US = {₹}80 denotes appreciation.
Primary Catalysts - Heavy inflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), robust export performance, high domestic interest rates relative to global markets, or strong economic growth prospects.

B. Rupee Depreciation (Weakening)

Definition - Occurs when the domestic currency loses purchasing power against foreign benchmarks due to market forces.
Numerical Value - More Rupees are required to purchase one unit of foreign currency. For example, a shift $1 USD = ₹85 to $1US = {₹}80 denotes depreciation.
Primary Catalysts - Persistent capital outflows, widening current account deficits, high domestic inflation, or global risk-aversion.

3. The Multi-Sectoral Impacts of Currency Fluctuations

Economic Dimension	Impact of Rupee Appreciation	Impact of Rupee Depreciation
Import Sector	Positive - Lowers the cost of importing critical inputs like raw petroleum, industrial machinery, and electronics.	Negative - Inflates the landing cost of dollar-denominated imports, widening the trade deficit.

Export Competitiveness	Negative - Makes Indian goods and services more expensive for foreign buyers, potentially lowering export volumes.	Positive - Makes Indian goods cheaper and more price-competitive in international markets.
Domestic Inflation	Positive - Reduces Imported Inflation by dampening the domestic price of imported fuel and commodities.	Negative - Fuels inflation as high fuel import costs pass through into domestic transport and manufacturing.
Service & Export Sectors (IT, Pharma, Textiles)	Negative - Compresses profit margins when converting dollar-based export revenues back into fewer rupees.	Positive - Boosts dollar-denominated revenue realizations, strengthening export-oriented sectors.
Outward Remittances & Expenditure	Positive - Lowers the domestic cost for outbound tourism, tech licensing, and overseas student education.	Negative - Increases the financial burden on Indian households financing foreign travel or education.

4. Structural Factors Driving the 2026 Rupee Depreciation

The sharp drop below the ₹96/$ mark is caused by a combination of domestic and global headwinds -

The Exogenous Energy Shock - Prolonged conflict in West Asia and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have pushed Brent crude oil prices toward $100–$110 per barrel. As the world's third-largest oil importer, India faces a rapidly expanding import bill.

Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) Outflows - Rising U.S. Treasury yields and global risk aversion have caused Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) to withdraw over ₹2.65 lakh crore from Indian capital markets in 2026, leading to a shortage of dollars locally.

The Strong Dollar Index (DXY) - Safe-haven buying has pushed the global dollar index near 99.24, putting pressure on emerging market currencies across Asia.

5. Policy Interventions and the Role of the RBI

Unlike a fixed currency regime, India follows a managed float exchange rate system. The central bank intervenes strategically rather than targeting a specific numerical level -

Sterilized Intervention - The RBI sells dollars from its foreign exchange reserves and buys rupees to absorb excess volatility and prevent a destabilizing, panic-driven slide.

Preserving the Macro-Balance - Central bank actions are calibrated to limit sudden drops without completely working against global market trends, preserving India's balance of payments position.

Complementary Fiscal Action - To assist monetary interventions, the government has used targeted fiscal measures, such as raising import duties on non-essential items like gold and silver, to reduce dollar demand.

6. Way Forward

Incentivizing Non-Debt Capital Inflows - Easing regulatory compliance for long-term Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to substitute volatile short-term portfolio flows (FPI).

Expanding Local Currency Trade Settlement - Broadening bilateral trade settlement mechanisms in Indian Rupees (INR)—similar to arrangements explored for crude oil—to partially bypass dollar-denominated invoicing.

Deepening Export Diversification - Moving past standard service exports toward high-value manufacturing segments like electronics and defines components to build a structural trade buffer.

Strategic Input Import Substitution - Accelerating domestic green energy transitions and ethanol blending programs to structurally lower India's high reliance on crude oil imports.

Conclusion

Currency fluctuations are a structural reality of an open, globally integrated economy. While a depreciating rupee helps text-based service exporters and manufacturing industries, its immediate

impact manifests as higher imported inflation and pressure on the fiscal deficit. Managing this trade-off requires a balanced approach. India's strategy must look beyond short-term central bank interventions, focusing instead on long-term structural resilience through energy diversification, export competitiveness, and stable capital inflows.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/business/markets/rupee-falls-to-record-low-against-us-dollar/article70992484.ece

Question

"The sharp depreciation of the domestic currency acts as a double-edged sword for an emerging economy like India. Discuss how a steep fall in the value of the rupee impacts different sectors of the economy and examine the limitations of central bank interventions in mitigating external currency shocks." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

When a currency operates under a managed float exchange rate system, its value is determined by market forces but monitored by the central bank. When the Indian Rupee sharply depreciates—as seen by it breaching the ₹96 per US Dollar threshold due to rising crude oil prices and Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) outflows—it triggers a cascading wave of positive and negative shocks across diverse sectors of the domestic economy.

2. Sectoral Impact of Rupee Depreciation - A Double-Edged Sword

A. Adverse Structural Impacts (The Negative Edge)

The Imported Inflation Trap - India imports nearly 80–85% of its crude oil requirements. A weaker rupee directly inflates the landed cost of dollar-denominated petroleum and critical industrial inputs. This filters into domestic logistics, driving up wholesale and retail inflation.

Fiscal Deficit Pressures - Costlier imports expand the value of government subsidies on essential commodities like fertilizers. Furthermore, a depreciating rupee increases the domestic capital required to service external commercial borrowings and foreign debt.

Household Strain - Outward remittances for overseas education and foreign travel become significantly more expensive, stretching middle-class household budgets.

B. Compensatory Advantages (The Positive Edge)

Export Price Competitiveness - A depreciating currency makes Indian products cheaper in global markets. This price advantage aids labour-intensive export sectors such as textiles, leather, and gems.

Boost to Service Exporters - High-earning export sectors, particularly Information Technology (IT) and pharmaceuticals, benefit significantly. Their dollar-denominated revenues yield higher returns when converted back into rupees, boosting corporate profit margins.

3. Limitations of Central Bank (RBI) Interventions

To defend a sliding rupee, the Reserve Bank of India strategically sells dollars from its foreign exchange reserves. However, this monetary intervention has clear structural limits -

Depletion of Sovereign Forex Reserves - Continuous open-market intervention risks draining finite foreign exchange reserves, reducing the country's import cover and its capacity to handle long-term external crises.

The Monetary Dilemma (Liquidity Squeezes) - When the RBI sells dollars, it absorbs an equivalent amount of Indian Rupees from the banking system. This can create domestic liquidity shortages, driving up short-term interest rates and increasing borrowing costs for local businesses.

Inability to Fix Fundamental Triggers - Central bank interventions handle short-term panic and market volatility, but they cannot alter structural global causes, such as high U.S. Federal Reserve interest rates, safe-haven dollar demand, or geopolitical spikes in global Brent crude oil prices.

Conclusion

A steep depreciation of the rupee presents a complex policy challenge, balancing short-term imported inflation against export advantages. While the RBI's market interventions are necessary to

maintain orderly conditions and prevent panic, they cannot substitute for structural economic resilience. Over the long term, India must move away from short-term monetary defences by focusing on structural solutions - expanding local-currency trade settlements, accelerating green energy transitions to lower oil imports, and attracting stable, long-term Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/business/markets/rupee-falls-to-record-low-against-us-dollar/article70992484.ece

2. Great-Power Competition Demands a First-Principles Foreign Policy (IE)

GS Paper II - International Relations

Topic - Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub-Topic - The Quad, Strategic Autonomy, Sino-Russian Axis, G-2 Vulnerabilities, and External Alignment.

1. Introduction

The core argument of the article states that India's traditional, post-Cold War foreign policy discourse is drifting away from basic economic and geopolitical realities. As US President Donald Trump visits Beijing and Russian President Vladimir Putin deepens ties with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, New Delhi must reassess its strategic calculations. The author argues that instead of fearing entrapment or worrying about external alignments, India must move past the defensive concept of "strategic autonomy" and focus on leveraging Western partnerships—specifically the Quad—to fuel its own modernization and balance a rising China.

2. The Shift in Great-Power Dynamics - The Sino-Russian Axis

The Fallacy of the Eurasian Balance - A key pillar of India's traditional strategic strategy is using its relationship with Russia to maintain a balance of power in Eurasia.

Russia's Deepening Dependence - The Eurasian reality of the past 25 years, particularly since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, reveals a growing bond between Moscow and Beijing. Russia has become increasingly dependent on China economically and geopolitically, limiting its ability to act as an independent balancer for India.

A Celebrating Partnership - While any potential US-China detente (a "G-2" arrangement) aims to stabilize ties, Putin's high-profile visits to Beijing emphasize a strategic partnership that directly reinforces China's regional dominance.

Historical Fluidity - The author notes that great-power relations among the US, China, and Russia have shifted repeatedly since World War II. Taken in pairs, these nations have been allies, friends, enemies, and frenemies at different times. India should expect this fluidity rather than being unsettled by every shift.

3. The China Challenge - A Growing Strategic Gap

The real, pressing challenge for India is managing the consequences of China's rapid rise and increasing assertiveness -

The Border and Regional Strain - India faces an active, tense boundary dispute alongside China's growing political and economic influence across South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

The Multilateral and Trade Imbalance - China continues to expand its footprint in global governance institutions at India's expense. Bilaterally, India grapples with a massive trade deficit exceeding $110 billion, rooted in a deep structural dependence on Chinese manufactured goods.

The Widening Power Gap - Following reforms initiated in the early 1990s, the economic and technological gap between the two nations has widened. Today, China's economy is five times larger than India's, and the disparity in higher education, R&D, technology, and military capability continues to grow.

4. Moving Past the "Strategic Autonomy" Trap

The Ideological Baggage - The term "strategic autonomy" is often framed as a neutral policy position. However, the author argues its actual political usage has historically been driven by an anti-Western bias shared by both political extremes (the Left and the Right) in India, focused on keeping a distance from the US and Europe.

The Multi-Polar Mismatch - In the 1990s, Indian discourse assumed that the answer to global imbalances lay in building deeper bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral ties with Russia and China. This view has run into a fundamental obstacle - an assertive China has emerged as India's primary security challenge.

Economic Reality vs. Mindspace - The author highlights a stark economic mismatch - India exports more goods to the Netherlands—a nation of 19 million people—than to China and Russia combined. Despite this reality, Russia and China continue to dominate India's foreign policy debates, while key European partners are often marginalized.

5. Leveraging Western Partnerships for Internal Modernization

Since India cannot close the power gap with China on its own anytime soon, it must use external cooperation to build its internal capabilities -

The Western Engine - India must look toward the West—the US and Europe—as its largest export markets, primary sources of high-end technology, and homes to its most influential diaspora.

Modernization over Isolation - While shifts in great-power alignments are beyond India's control, the country can direct its own internal development. Deeper engagement with Western markets and technology ecosystems provides the resources necessary to upgrade India's defense, technological, and economic foundations.

A Pragmatic Foreign Policy - In practice, New Delhi has already begun reconnecting its foreign policy to these core principles. This is reflected in efforts to sustain trade relations with the US, pursue a comprehensive trade deal with the EU, and deepen technology transfers over the last two years.

6. The Quad - A Sustainable Agenda

Hosting the Foreign Ministers - The upcoming Quad foreign ministers' meeting reflects a clear logic - the alliance's revival is rooted in the shared need to build a multipolar Asia that can manage challenges from China.

Surviving Leadership Shifts - The strategic need for the Quad remains steady regardless of shifting administrations in Washington. Even during high-profile US-China summits, the structural requirements of the Indo-Pacific architecture ensure the alliance remains relevant.

Dismissing the Critics - The author challenges domestic critics who previously warned that the Quad would "entrap" India in a military alliance, and who now claim the US is about to "abandon" the region. The government has taken a more measured, practical view, sustaining multiple rounds of official consultations with its partners.

A Window of Opportunity - The visit of high-level US officials provides an opportunity to engage directly with Washington's changing approach to alliances, helping India develop a productive and sustainable agenda for the Quad.

Conclusion

The changing global landscape requires India to move past the defensive, post-Cold War rhetoric of strategic autonomy. True autonomy is not achieved by maintaining an equal distance from all major powers, but by mastering the art of partnerships to build domestic strength. By positioning itself as an indispensable node within the Quad and deepening its economic and technological integration with the West, India can acquire the resources needed to balance regional asymmetries, protect its sovereign interests, and shape a multipolar Asia entirely on its own terms.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-india-strategic-autonomy-russia-china-us-trump-xi-putin-10697688/**

Question

"The traditional conceptualization of 'Strategic Autonomy' in India's foreign policy is increasingly out of sync with contemporary geo-economic and geopolitical realities. Comment on how India can leverage Mini lateral groupings like the Quad to manage regional asymmetries without compromising its sovereign decision-making." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Introduction -

1. Define "Strategic Autonomy" as India's historical foreign policy approach aimed at maintaining independent decision-making by avoiding formal alignment with major power blocs.
2. State the transition - Modern shifts—specifically a rising, assertive China and a close Sino-Russian partnership—require India to move from passive non-alignment toward active, interest-driven partnerships.

The Mismatch of Traditional Strategies (The Constraints) -

The Eurasian Imbalance - Explain how Russia's growing economic and strategic dependence on China limits its traditional role as a geopolitical balancer for India in Eurasia.

The Capabilities Gap - Highlight the structural power asymmetry with China, where a $110 billion trade deficit and a 5 -1 economic advantage makes absolute self-reliance difficult in the short term.

Ideological Limitations - Discuss how viewing strategic autonomy as an unyielding distance from the West ignores economic realities, given that India's trade, technology access, and diaspora interests are heavily linked to the US and Europe.

Leveraging the Quad for Strategic Resilience (The Opportunities) -

Internal Capability Building - Frame alignment with Quad partners (US, Japan, Australia) not as political entrapment, but as a mechanism to secure critical technology transfers, defense co-production, and infrastructure investments.

Securing a Multipolar Asia - Show how the Quad functions as a flexible, Mini lateral security umbrella to counter unilateral hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, preserving freedom of navigation without requiring a binding, mutual-defense military pact.

Variable Geometry Diplomatic Posture - Explain that India can practice "calibrated engagement"—cooperating closely with the West on maritime security and supply chain resilience (Pax Silica), while preserving its independent voice on global governance.

Conclusion -

Conclude that true strategic autonomy is an outcome of domestic strength, not a policy of diplomatic isolation. By utilizing the Quad to accelerate its internal economic and technological modernization, India can protect its sovereign space and engage the international order from a position of strength.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-india-strategic-autonomy-russia-china-us-trump-xi-putin-10697688/**

3. Fiscal Implications of the West Asian Conflict (BS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Fiscal Federalism

Topic - Fiscal policy and public finance

Sub-Topic - External sector vulnerabilities

Introduction

The article highlights the growing fiscal challenges faced by both the Union and State governments due to escalating tensions in West Asia. Rising crude oil prices, global uncertainty, supply-chain disruptions, and inflationary pressures can significantly affect India's fiscal deficit, subsidies, revenue mobilisation, and growth prospects. Since India is highly dependent on imported energy, geopolitical instability in West Asia directly impacts macroeconomic stability and public finances.

1. Why West Asia Matters for India

Dependence on Crude Oil Imports

1. India imports a major share of its crude oil requirements from West Asia.

Strategic Economic Linkages

1. The region is important for energy supplies, trade routes, remittances, and investments.

Vulnerability to Geopolitical Tensions

1. Conflicts in West Asia quickly affect global oil prices and shipping costs.

2. Impact of Rising Crude Oil Prices

Increase in Import Bill

1. Higher crude prices widen India's import expenditure and current account deficit (CAD).

Inflationary Pressures

1. Fuel price increases raise transportation and production costs across sectors.

Pressure on Foreign Exchange Reserves

1. Increased import payments strain forex reserves and currency stability.

3. Fiscal Implications for the Union Government

Higher Subsidy Burden

1. Governments may increase fuel, fertiliser, or food subsidies to protect consumers.

Revenue-Uncertainty

1. Reduced consumption and slower growth may lower tax collections.

Pressure on Fiscal Deficit

1. Additional expenditure combined with lower revenues can widen fiscal deficits.

Economic Stabilisation Measures

1. Emergency fiscal interventions may require additional borrowing.

4. Impact on State Governments

Reduced Revenue Collections

1. States dependent on fuel taxes may face revenue instability.

Welfare Expenditure Pressure

1. States may increase social support spending during inflationary periods.

Fiscal Stress in Highly Indebted States

1. States with already weak fiscal positions become more vulnerable.

5. Current Account Deficit (CAD) Concerns

Meaning of CAD

1. Current Account Deficit occurs when imports exceed exports and other foreign earnings.

Link Between Oil Prices and CAD

1. Higher oil imports directly worsen the current account balance.

External Vulnerability

1. Persistent CAD increases dependence on foreign capital inflows.

6. Inflation and Macroeconomic Stability

Cost-Push Inflation

1. Rising fuel prices increase costs across the economy.

Impact on Household Consumption

1. Inflation reduces purchasing power and consumer demand.

Monetary Policy Challenges

1. RBI may need tighter monetary policy to control inflation.

7. Impact on Economic Growth

Slower Industrial Activity

1. High energy costs increase operational expenses for industries.

Supply Chain Disruptions
1. Global instability disrupts trade routes and logistics networks.

Reduced Investment Confidence
1. Uncertainty discourages domestic and foreign investment.

8. Fiscal Federalism Dimension

Shared Fiscal Burden
1. Both Union and State governments bear the impact of external shocks.

GST and Revenue Coordination
1. Fiscal coordination between Centre and States becomes essential during crises.

Uneven State Capacity
1. Different states possess varying fiscal strengths and borrowing capacities.

9. Government Responses Mentioned in the Article

Austerity Measures
1. Governments may attempt expenditure rationalisation to contain deficits.

Conservation of Foreign Exchange
1. Measures may be introduced to reduce unnecessary imports.

Stabilisation Funds and Support Mechanisms
1. Emergency funds and targeted support schemes may be activated.

10. Broader Structural Challenges

Energy Import Dependence
1. India remains structurally vulnerable due to dependence on imported crude oil.

Limited Fiscal Space
1. High public debt restricts large-scale fiscal interventions.

Global Economic Uncertainty
1. External shocks increasingly influence domestic economic stability.

11. Way Forward

Diversify Energy Sources
1. Expand renewable energy, biofuels, and domestic energy production.

Strengthen Fiscal Prudence
1. Improve expenditure efficiency and maintain sustainable debt levels.

Build Strategic Petroleum Reserves
1. Larger reserves can reduce short-term energy shocks.

Enhance Centre–State Coordination
1. Cooperative fiscal management is essential during external crises.

Promote Energy Efficiency
1. Reduced dependence on fossil fuels can improve long-term resilience.

Conclusion

The West Asian conflict demonstrates how geopolitical instability can rapidly transform into a fiscal and macroeconomic challenge for India. Strengthening energy security, fiscal resilience, and cooperative federalism is essential for managing such external shocks effectively.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/not-just-an-external-threat-india-faces-strong-fiscal-headwinds-within-126051901793_1.html

Question

Q. "Geopolitical conflicts in West Asia pose significant fiscal and macroeconomic challenges for India." Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

India's economic stability is closely linked to developments in West Asia due to heavy dependence on imported crude oil. Escalating regional conflicts can significantly affect inflation, fiscal management, and external sector stability.

Fiscal and Economic Challenges

1. Rising crude oil prices increase India's import bill and widen the current account deficit.
2. Higher fuel costs create inflationary pressures across sectors.
3. Governments may face increased subsidy burdens and welfare expenditure demands.
4. Slower growth can reduce tax collections and worsen fiscal deficits.
5. State governments also face revenue and expenditure stress.

Broader Macroeconomic Impact

1. Currency depreciation and forex pressure may intensify.
2. Supply chain disruptions affect trade and industrial activity.
3. Investor confidence may weaken amid uncertainty.
4. RBI may face challenges in balancing inflation control and growth.

Measures Required

1. Expand renewable energy and diversify energy imports.
2. Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves.
3. Maintain fiscal prudence and coordinated Centre–State responses.
4. Improve energy efficiency and reduce import dependence.

Conclusion

West Asian conflicts highlight India's structural vulnerabilities in energy and fiscal management. Long-term resilience requires energy diversification, macroeconomic discipline, and stronger institutional preparedness against global shocks.

Source - https -//www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/not-just-an-external-threat-india-faces-strong-fiscal-headwinds-within-126051901793_1.html

4. Italy And India - A Strategic Partnership for The Indo-Mediterranean (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies II – International Relations
Topic - India and Europe relations
Sub-Topic - Technology cooperation and industrial policy

Introduction

The article discusses the growing strategic partnership between India and Italy and situates it within the broader concept of the "Indo-Mediterranean." It argues that India and Italy, as major maritime democracies and manufacturing economies, can cooperate in trade, technology, defence, connectivity, clean energy, and global governance. The partnership reflects the increasing interconnection between the Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean regions in a rapidly changing geopolitical order.

1. Evolution of India–Italy Relations

From Limited Engagement to Strategic Partnership

1. India and Italy have significantly expanded bilateral engagement in recent years.

Shared Democratic Values

1. Both countries emphasise democracy, pluralism, rule of law, and open societies.

Expanding Areas of Cooperation

1. Cooperation now includes trade, defence, clean energy, technology, innovation, and maritime security.

2. Meaning of the Indo-Mediterranean Concept

Connecting Two Strategic Regions

1. The concept links the Indo-Pacific with the Mediterranean region through trade, energy, and maritime routes.

Emerging Geopolitical Space

1. Economic and security developments increasingly connect Asia, Europe, West Asia, and Africa.

Maritime Interdependence

1. Shipping lanes through the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Mediterranean are globally critical.

3. Strategic Importance of Italy for India

Gateway to Europe

1. Italy is an important industrial and economic power within Europe.

Advanced Manufacturing Capabilities

1. Italy possesses strengths in machinery, engineering, automotive components, and design industries.

Mediterranean Access

1. Italy provides strategic connectivity to European and Mediterranean markets.

4. Strategic Importance of India for Italy

Large Consumer Market

1. India offers one of the world's fastest-growing major markets.

Manufacturing and Innovation Potential

1. "Make in India" and industrial reforms create opportunities for Italian investment.

Indo-Pacific Presence

1. India's growing role in the Indo-Pacific enhances Italy's strategic outreach in Asia.

5. Economic and Industrial Cooperation

Synergy Between "Make in India" and "Made in Italy"

1. India's manufacturing expansion complements Italy's industrial expertise and quality production.

Investment and Technology Transfer

1. Joint ventures can strengthen advanced manufacturing and industrial ecosystems.

MSME Collaboration

1. Both countries can cooperate in small and medium enterprise development.

6. Technology and Innovation Cooperation

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Technologies

1. The partnership includes cooperation in AI, semiconductors, and digital infrastructure.

Research and Academic Collaboration

1. Universities and innovation centres can support joint research initiatives.

Industry 4.0 and Advanced Manufacturing

1. Technological collaboration can improve productivity and competitiveness.

7. Maritime and Security Cooperation

Maritime Security

1. Both countries depend heavily on secure sea lanes and maritime trade.

Countering Emerging Threats

1. Cooperation is important against piracy, trafficking, cyber threats, and maritime instability.

Defence Collaboration

1. Strategic cooperation may expand in defence technology and naval engagement.

8. Energy and Green Transition

Renewable Energy Cooperation

1. India and Italy can collaborate in solar, green hydrogen, and sustainable technologies.

Climate Commitments

1. Both countries support sustainable development and climate resilience.

Clean Infrastructure Development

1. Green industrial partnerships can support long-term energy security.

9. Role of Artificial Intelligence

AI as an Economic Driver

1. AI is expected to transform manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, and governance.

Ethical AI Governance

1. Democracies must ensure that AI remains transparent, accountable, and human-centric.

Shared Technological Standards

1. India and Italy can cooperate on responsible technology frameworks.

10. Geopolitical Significance

Multipolar World Order

1. Middle powers increasingly shape global governance and regional stability.

Europe–India Strategic Convergence

1. Europe seeks stronger Indo-Pacific partnerships amid global geopolitical shifts.

Balancing Global Supply Chains

1. Diversified partnerships reduce dependence on concentrated supply systems.

11. Challenges Before the Partnership

Bureaucratic and Regulatory Barriers

1. Investment procedures and regulatory differences may slow cooperation.

Global Economic Uncertainty

1. External shocks and geopolitical tensions affect trade and investment flows.

Strategic Coordination

1. Long-term institutional coordination is required for sustained partnership.

12. Way Forward

Expand Trade and Investment

1. Encourage industrial corridors, technology parks, and joint ventures.

Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

1. Enhance naval coordination and secure sea-lane infrastructure.

Promote Innovation Ecosystems

1. Increase collaboration between startups, universities, and industries.

Build Human Capital Partnerships

1. Encourage academic exchange, skill development, and research mobility.

Deepen Strategic Dialogue

1. Regular high-level engagement can strengthen long-term cooperation.

Conclusion

The India–Italy partnership reflects the emergence of a broader Indo-Mediterranean strategic space shaped by connectivity, technology, trade, and maritime interdependence. By combining India's scale and growth potential with Italy's industrial and technological strengths, both countries can contribute to a more resilient and multipolar global order.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/news/india/italy-and-india-a-strategic-partnership-for-the-indomediterranean-11779276378781.html

Question

Q. "India's growing partnership with European powers is increasingly shaped by the strategic importance of the Indo-Mediterranean region." Discuss with reference to India–Italy relations. (250 words)

Introduction

India and Italy have expanded their bilateral relationship into a strategic partnership covering trade, technology, maritime security, and industrial cooperation. This partnership reflects the growing geopolitical importance of the Indo-Mediterranean region.

Importance of India–Italy Partnership

1. Italy serves as an important gateway to Europe and the Mediterranean region.
2. India offers a large market, technological talent, and Indo-Pacific strategic relevance.
3. Both countries share democratic values and support a multipolar world order.
4. Cooperation is expanding in manufacturing, AI, clean energy, and maritime security.

Indo-Mediterranean Significance

1. The Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean are increasingly interconnected through trade and energy routes.
2. Maritime security in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Suez region is globally critical.
3. Diversified supply chains and strategic connectivity have become major priorities.

Challenges

1. Regulatory barriers and global economic uncertainty may affect cooperation.
2. Sustained institutional coordination is required for long-term strategic outcomes.

Conclusion

The India–Italy partnership demonstrates how emerging geopolitical realities are creating new forms of cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Stronger Indo-Mediterranean engagement can contribute to resilient supply chains, maritime stability, and sustainable economic growth.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/news/india/italy-and-india-a-strategic-partnership-for-the-indomediterranean-11779276378781.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 21.05.2026

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1. Preparing India for a credible digital Census (TH)

GS Paper II – Polity and Governance / Social Justice

Topic – Salient features of the Representation of the People Act; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Sub-Topic – 2027 Census Methodology, Delimitation of Constituencies, Caste Enumeration Challenges, and Digital Governance.

1. Introduction

The upcoming 2027 Census represents a foundational milestone in India's administrative, statistical, and political history. It introduces two major structural shifts - moving data collection entirely to mobile electronic devices (smartphones and tablets) and conducting a nationwide caste enumeration for the first time since Independence. Because its population metrics will directly serve as the baseline for the next delimitation of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies, resolving operational bottlenecks, protecting data privacy, and accurately capturing migratory populations are vital to maintaining fair and equitable political representation.

2. Conceptual Mechanics of Census Enumeration

A. De Jure vs. De Facto Baselines

Neither the Constitution of India nor existing statutory laws specify the exact legal methodology for counting the population.

De Jure Census – Counts individuals strictly at their permanent, normal place of legal residence.

De Facto Census – Counts individuals exactly where they are physically present at the precise hour or night of the census count.

B. The Indian Compromise - "Extended De Facto" Method

To maximize accuracy across a massive and mobile population, the Indian Census deploys a hybrid extended de facto method over a standard 20-day enumeration window -

Usual Residents – Individuals found at their normal residence during the enumerator's visit.

Temporarily Absent Members – Normal household members who are absent at the time of the visit but have resided at the household for at least one night during the 20-day window.

Continuous Visitors – Guests or visitors who stay with the household throughout the entire 20-day census enumeration period.

Statutory Definition of a Household - Formally defined as a group of individuals—even if entirely unrelated—who share food from a **common kitchen**. This explicitly includes resident domestic helpers, paying guests, and nocturnal staff sharing meals.

3. The Delimitation Friction and the NRI Data Gap

There is a significant structural mismatch between the Census Population Rolls and the

ECI Voters' Lists -

The Registry Disconnect - A citizen requires a six-month continuous residence to register as a local voter, whereas the Census captures an extended 20-day structural snapshot.

The Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Omission - The Election Commission of India (ECI) allows Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) living abroad to register as voters. However, because the Census uses physical presence/usual residency, these 1.58 crore NRIs (over 1% of India's population) are entirely excluded from the Census data.

The Impact on High-Migration States

Because census data determines constituency boundaries, states with high global migration patterns face a direct threat of losing political representation -

The Scale of Impact - If the 1.58 crore NRIs were clustered into a single state, their numbers would equal approximately five Lok Sabha seats.

State-Level Representation Losses - States like Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu feature disproportionately higher diaspora percentages.

The Kerala Case Study - The *Kerala Migration Survey 2023* estimates that 22 lakh people from Kerala reside abroad. Omitting this diaspora from the state's aggregate census population would result in the direct loss of one Lok Sabha seat in future delimitation exercises.

Policy Recommendation –

India should pre-test an appropriately worded question allowing resident families to register members living abroad. This would capture critical data on fully or partially migrated households, preserving equitable regional weights during delimitation.

4. The Caste Enumeration Complexities

The Modern Precedent Gap - The 2027 Census is the first post-Independence national effort to map caste data. Recent administrative references are restricted entirely to state-level surveys, namely the Bihar Caste Survey and the Karnataka Socio-Economic and Caste Survey.

Pre-Testing Bottlenecks - The inclusion of complex caste metrics has significantly delayed the pre-testing schedules for the population enumeration phase. Field-testing is essential to ensure that sensitive definitions are clearly understood by both enumerators and citizens.

The Sub-Caste Acceptability Trap - Regional experiences from Bihar and Karnataka demonstrate a socio-political reality - regardless of data accuracy, certain communities will reject the final numbers if the results show a decline in their projected demographic share, leading to potential social friction.

5. Digital Governance and Technological Vulnerabilities

While transitioning to an electronic, smartphone-centric data collection model eliminates physical data-entry timelines and allows for real-time validation checks, it introduces several operational risks -

A. The Capacity Gap and Accountability Inflation

The Technology Deficit - A large percentage of the 3 million+ public school teachers appointed as census enumerators are not savvy with advanced smartphones or tablets.

The Proxy Enumeration Risk - To circumvent technical difficulties, enumerators may informally rely on family members or students to input data. This proxy arrangement creates clear administrative accountability issues and threatens the strict confidentiality of citizen data.

B. Questionnaire Complexity vs. Self-Enumeration Fatigue

Detailed Instructions - Census concepts are legally precise and lengthy. In the 2011 Census, explaining "disability" required six pages, while defining what constitutes "work" took over two pages.

The Drop-Down Fallacy - In a digital model featuring drop-down menus, it is unrealistic to expect citizens utilizing the self-enumeration portal to read pages of instructions before selecting options. This mismatch risks producing distorted data across complex categories like industry classification, occupation, and disability types.

Respondent Fatigue - Filling out long, individual digital profiles for large households causes severe respondent fatigue, increasing the risk of citizens deliberately choosing incorrect options to bypass detailed follow-up questions.

6. Mitigating Structural Omissions - A Data Correction Strategy

Past post-enumeration surveys reveal that distant relatives, temporary boarders, and domestic helpers face higher rates of omission—an issue that could worsen under unguided self-enumeration. To mitigate these errors, the questionnaire should feature highly structured, binary screening filters -

The Temporal Filter - Incorporate specific validation questions such as - *"Is the person currently present in the house? If not, were they present at any time after February 9, or likely to return before February 28?"*

The Structural Household Filter - Mandate explicit follow-up fields like - *"Is there any other relative of the head of the household, or any unrelated person such as a servant, helper, or nurse, who shares meals from the same kitchen and lives with the household?"*

7. Way Forward

Simplification of Definitions - Condensing multi-page operational definitions into clear, intuitive icons and brief, context-aware help text directly within the electronic app interface.

Phased Hybrid Flexibility - Retaining a backup paper-schedule option for remote regions or technically constrained enumerators, requiring data entry to occur only at secure, supervised government offices.

Preventing Fraudulent Self-Enumeration - Implementing strict biometric verification or multi-factor authentication (OTP linked to Aadhaar/Voter ID) within the self-enumeration portal to prevent coordinated, fraudulent entries aimed at inflating regional numbers.

Conclusion

The 2027 Census is an immense exercise in state capacity, moving beyond a simple population count to serve as a high-stakes baseline for future political representation and social policy. To navigate the challenges of caste profiling and digital transition, the government must move past a purely technical focus. By simplifying the questionnaire, building secure workflows for enumerators, and creating a clear mechanism to count the global diaspora, India can ensure its digital-first census remains accurate, inclusive, and trusted.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/preparing-india-for-a-credible-digital-census/article71003088.ece#google_vignette**

Question

"**The shift toward a digitally driven Census framework in 2027 offers significant administrative efficiencies but introduces clear structural vulnerabilities regarding data collection and population representation. Elaborate on the challenges of accounting for migratory and caste dynamics within**

an extended de facto census model, and suggest reforms to secure the integrity of the exercise." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Introduction -

State the context - The upcoming 2027 Census, its transition to mobile-based digital collection, and the inclusion of a national caste count for the first time since Independence. Define the extended de facto method used in India, where people are counted based on their presence at a household with a common kitchen during a 20-day window.

Elaborating the Core Challenges (The Structural Vulnerabilities) -

The Diaspora Representation Deficit - Explain how excluding 1.58 crore NRIs from the physical usual-resident count penalizes high-migration states (such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu) during subsequent constituency delimitation, risking the loss of Lok Sabha seats.

Caste Enumeration Fractures - Discuss the operational difficulties of capturing sub-caste data on a national scale, noting that regional examples (Bihar/Karnataka) suggest communities may resist results that don't match their expected political weight.

The Digital Divide & Proxy Burden - Highlight that mandating smartphones for over 3 million enumerators can lead to technical difficulties. This creates a risk of proxy data entry by unauthorized individuals, compromising data confidentiality and accuracy.

Respondent Fatigue - Note how complex definitions (such as work classifications and disability types) can lead to data errors on self-enumeration portals if users rush through drop-down menus without proper verification.

Suggested Reforms for Structural Resilience -

Diaspora Inclusivity Questionnaires - Add targeted questions allowing households to declare immediate family members working or studying abroad to ensure fairer population tracking for delimitation.

Algorithmic UI Simplification - Replace dense, multi-page instruction manuals with intuitive, language-agnostic user interfaces and validation checks built directly into the census application.

Securing Data Quality - Enact strict multi-factor verification checks to prevent fraudulent clustering or manufactured entries on the self-enumeration portal, while conducting regular post-enumeration audits.

Conclusion -

Conclude that a truly successful census relies on human clarity and trust rather than advanced digital tools alone. By balancing technology with clear, simplified definitions and inclusive data-mapping rules, India can preserve the integrity of its democratic representation and build a dependable foundation for future governance.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/preparing-india-for-a-credible-digital-census/article71003088.ece#google_vignette

2. India's highways need a green policy reset (IE)

GS Paper III - Infrastructure / Environment & Agriculture

Topic - Infrastructure - Highways; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Agroforestry and rural economy.

Sub-Topic - Highway Farm Forestry (HFF), Differentiated Tiered-Zone Framework, National Transit Pass System, and Ecological Connectivity.

1. Introduction

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is expanding India's transit corridors at an unprecedented pace. Managed under major flagship programs like Bharat Mala and the Vision 2047 framework, thousands of kilometres of newly constructed expressways are lowering logistics costs and driving macroeconomic growth. However, this massive infrastructure push has created an unintended environmental and public health crisis. Linear infrastructure corridors are increasingly turning into concentrated zones of pollution, landscape fragmentation, and agricultural vulnerability. The authors argue that highways must be re-imagined as interconnected ecological and socio-economic landscapes rather than simple transit assets.

2. The Challenge - Linear Infrastructure and Ecological Disruption

The Footprint Beyond the Road - The ecological damage caused by expressways extends far beyond the physical asphalt carriage way.

Landscape Fragmentation - Large linear corridors cut through contiguous natural habitats, disrupting wildlife migratory paths and destroying local microclimates.

Agricultural Pollution Risks - As highways cut through densely populated agricultural heartlands, vehicle exhaust and heavy metal depositions pollute adjoining farm plots, posing a direct threat to safety in food crop cultivation.

3. The Solution - Highway Farm Forestry (HFF)

To counter these disruptions, the authors propose a structured shift toward Highway Farm Forestry (HFF)—a market-linked, profitability-driven agroforestry approach -

Voluntary Buffers - Farmers owning land adjacent to major highways are incentivized to voluntarily cultivate commercially viable tree crops instead of pollution-sensitive food crops.

Tree Crop Buffer Zones - These specialized green bands act as living filters that absorb vehicular pollution, improve regional ecological connectivity, and generate sustainable secondary income for farming households.

Market-Led Sustainability - Unlike previous social forestry programs that failed due to a lack of commercial incentives, HFF is strictly profitability-driven. It focuses on tree species with high, assured industrial demand -

1. Poplar and Bamboo (paper and pulp industries).
2. Teak and Malabar Neem (timber and construction).
3. Gamhar (furniture and wood industries).

Guaranteed Returns - The success of the model relies on establishing robust buy-back guarantees between farmers and wood-processing industries, alongside technical extension support from state forest departments.

4. Macroeconomic and Fiscal Advantages

Reducing Import Reliance - India faces a substantial macro-fiscal deficit in wood products, importing nearly ₹70,000 crore worth of wood and timber products annually.

The "Make in India" Alignment - Scaling up HFF can increase domestic timber production, reduce heavy import dependence, create rural manufacturing jobs, and strengthen domestic wood-processing value chains.

Land-Acquisition Efficiency - Conventional roadside green belts require direct state land acquisition, which is often difficult, expensive, and legally complex. HFF bypasses this bottleneck by leaving ownership with the farmers, using voluntary commercial partnerships instead of forced land buying.

5. Spatial Design - The Differentiated Tiered-Zone Framework

To maximize both food security and ecological protection, the authors outline a practical, tiered zoning strategy for lands adjoining highways -

The Direct Buffer Zone (0 to 100 Meters) - For lands situated within roughly 100 meters of the highway carriage way—the area most exposed to vehicle emissions—the policy mandates a priority shift toward tree-based forestry systems over food crops.

The Peripheral Transition Zone (Beyond 100 Meters) - Moving beyond the 100-meter marker, land use can flexibly transition into mixed agroforestry or traditional agriculture, depending on local soil conditions, water availability, and community livelihoods.

6. Ecosystem Co-Benefits and Ecological Safeguards

Stepping Stones for Biodiversity - Well-designed, multi-tier roadside tree lines act as ecological "stepping stones" within fragmented agricultural landscapes, supporting native pollinators, birds, and beneficial microclimates.

Carbon Market Integration - The resulting biomass can enhance carbon sequestration, allowing Indian farmers to generate additional income by participating in emerging domestic and global carbon credit markets.

The Danger of Monocultures - The authors warn against poorly designed, single-species monoculture plantations, which can lower regional groundwater tables and create new ecological problems.

Science-Based Selection - Species selection must be region-specific, groundwater-sensitive, and scientifically validated. Invasive alien species must be strictly excluded in favor of native and mixed-species systems.

No Substitute for Clean Mobility - HFF must function as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, clean mobility transitions (like EVs) and strict environmental impact assessments (EIAs) during infrastructure planning.

7. Administrative Enablement and Policy Integration

Simplifying Transit Regulations - The biggest historical hurdle to private timber cultivation has been complex timber transit laws across different states.

The National Transit Pass System (NTPS) - The introduction of the NTPS platform has helped resolve this bottleneck. By establishing a unified "One Nation, One Pass" framework, it enables the seamless, paperless interstate movement of timber, giving farmers direct access to national markets.

Institutional Synthesis - The final step requires a comprehensive national policy vision that brings together the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), the Ministry of Agriculture, and state forest departments to manage highway corridors as landscapes for both ecological and economic resilience.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-highway-farm-forestry-green-policy-reset-timber-imports-10699495/

Question

"The conventional paradigm of highway development in India treats transport infrastructure and environmental conservation as conflicting goals. Elucidate how the concept of Highway Farm Forestry (HFF) can bridge this divide by delivering ecological benefits alongside economic security for rural communities." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's rapid expressway expansion under programs like Bharatmala has accelerated economic connectivity but introduced challenges like landscape fragmentation and agricultural pollution. Transitioning to Highway Farm Forestry (HFF) provides a landscape-level solution that shifts the focus from purely structural infrastructure to an approach that balances ecological restoration with rural economic development.

2. Bridging the Divide - How HFF Integrates Infrastructure and Ecology

Highway Farm Forestry involves the voluntary cultivation of commercial timber and non-food tree crops by farmers on private lands immediately adjoining highway corridors. It resolves the traditional infrastructure-versus-environment conflict through several key mechanisms -

Mitigating Environmental Externalities - The creation of a Tree Crop Buffer Zone within 100 meters of highways establishes a natural vegetative filter. These multi-tier canopies capture heavy metal depositions, absorb particulate emissions, and prevent vehicular pollution from contaminating nearby food crops, safeguarding regional food security.

Restoring Landscape Connectivity - Rather than acting as barriers that isolate wildlife, eco-designed highway plantations serve as ecological stepping stones. They restore local microclimates, prevent soil erosion along embankments, and provide safe habitats for native pollinators and birds within fragmented agricultural fields.

Bypassing the Land Acquisition Bottleneck - Conventional state-mandated green belts are difficult to scale due to high land costs and legal disputes. HFF leaves land ownership with the farmers, replacing expensive state land acquisition with a voluntary, market-driven agroforestry model.

3. Delivering Economic Security to Rural Communities

HFF moves away from older, non-commercial social forestry models by functioning as a profitability-driven enterprise -

Industrial Wood Synergy - By cultivating high-demand industrial species (e.g., Poplar, Teak, Bamboo, and Malabar Neem), farmers gain access to assured, market-linked revenues backed by buy-back agreements with wood-processing industries.

Import Substitution and Value Chains - This domestic production taps into a massive market, helping substitute a portion of India's ₹70,000 crore annual wood imports while generating manufacturing jobs in rural timber industries.

Ecosystem Services and Carbon Revenue - HFF allows smallholders to diversify their revenue streams. Farmers can earn secondary income from carbon sequestration benefits by participating in emerging carbon credit markets.

Regulatory Ease via NTPS - Backed by the National Transit Pass System (NTPS) and its *"One Nation, One Pass"* framework, farmers can move their timber across state borders without bureaucratic delays, ensuring fair price realization.

Conclusion

Highway Farm Forestry demonstrates that infrastructure growth and environmental health do not have to be mutually exclusive. By converting vulnerable, roadside farmlands into productive, science-based green buffers, HFF protects local ecosystems while boosting the rural economy. To fully realize this vision, India must combine its infrastructure planning with a unified policy framework that brings together highway authorities, forest departments, and local farming communities.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-highway-farm-forestry-green-policy-reset-timber-imports-10699495/

3. India's Export Tax Strategy and Agricultural Export Realisation (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper Indian Economy and External Sector

Topic - Export policy and trade competitiveness

Sub-Topic - Value addition and agro-processing

Introduction

The article analyses India's recent export taxation and export control measures, especially in agricultural commodities such as basmati rice, onions, and natural honey. It argues that while governments often impose export restrictions to control domestic inflation and ensure food security, such policies can reduce export earnings, weaken India's global market position, and discourage farmers and exporters. The article suggests that India should move towards higher value-added exports and more stable export policies.

1. Background of India's Export Restrictions

Government Measures

1. India imposed export duties and restrictions on several commodities to manage domestic inflation and supply shortages.

Commodities Affected

1. Measures covered rice, onions, pulses, edible oils, and other agricultural products.

Objective of Restrictions

1. Protect domestic consumers from rising food prices and inflationary pressures.

2. Impact on Export Earnings

Decline in Export Realisation

1. Export controls reduced per-unit export earnings in several sectors.

Reduced Competitiveness

1. Frequent policy changes create uncertainty for exporters and buyers.

Loss of Market Share

1. International buyers may shift toward more stable suppliers.

3. Case of Basmati Rice

India's Dominance in Global Market

1. India enjoys a strong position in global basmati rice exports.

Export Restrictions and MEP

1. Minimum Export Price (MEP) measures affected export volumes and competitiveness.

Geographical Indication (GI) Advantage

1. Basmati possesses unique branding and premium global demand.

4. Natural Honey and Agricultural Exports

Removal of Export Restrictions

1. The article highlights cases were reducing restrictions improved export prospects.

Importance of Value Addition

1. Processed and branded agricultural products generate higher returns.

Potential for Premium Markets

1. Organic and GI-tagged products can access high-value international markets.

5. Lessons from Other Countries

Export Tax Strategies Globally

1. Countries like Argentina, Indonesia, and Russia use export taxes strategically.

Domestic Value Addition

1. Several nations encourage local processing instead of exporting raw commodities.

Resource Retention Policies

1. Export restrictions are often used to secure domestic industrial growth.

6. Need for Value Addition in India

Moving Beyond Raw Exports

1. Exporting processed food products creates higher income and employment.

Agro-Processing Potential

1. Food processing improves farmer income and export competitiveness.

Branding and Premiumisation

1. India can leverage GI tags, organic farming, and regional branding.

7. Trade-Off Between Inflation Control and Export Growth

Domestic Price Stabilisation

1. Governments intervene to prevent sudden food inflation.

Impact on Farmers

1. Export restrictions may reduce farm-gate prices and farmer profitability.

Long-Term Export Credibility

1. Frequent restrictions can damage India's reputation as a reliable supplier.

8. Current Account and Forex Implications

Importance of Export Earnings

1. Exports generate foreign exchange and support external sector stability.

Agricultural Exports as Growth Drivers

1. High-value agricultural exports contribute to rural incomes and trade balance improvement.

Reducing Trade Deficit

1. Stable export growth helps reduce pressure on the current account deficit.

9. Challenges in India's Export Strategy

Policy Uncertainty

1. Sudden restrictions discourage investment in export-oriented sectors.

Infrastructure Gaps

1. Logistics, storage, and cold-chain deficiencies affect competitiveness.

Limited Processing Capacity

1. India exports many low-value raw products instead of processed goods.

10. Role of Geographical Indications (GI)

Premium Branding Tool

1. GI tags enhance product authenticity and international recognition.

Protecting Traditional Products

1. GI certification supports unique regional agricultural products.

Export Market Expansion

1. GI products often command higher prices in international markets.

11. Way Forward

Stable Export Policy

1. Predictable trade policies are necessary for long-term export growth.

Promote Value-Added Exports

1. Encourage processed food, organic products, and branded agricultural goods.

Strengthen Agro-Processing Infrastructure

1. Improve storage, logistics, packaging, and cold-chain systems.

Support Farmers and Exporters

1. Balance consumer protection with farmer income sustainability.

Expand Global Market Access

1. Use trade diplomacy and GI branding to enter premium markets.

Conclusion

India's export strategy must move beyond short-term restrictions toward long-term competitiveness, value addition, and policy stability. Agricultural exports can become a major source of rural prosperity and foreign exchange if supported through predictable policies, infrastructure development, and global branding.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/minimum-export-price-on-agri-items-will-lift-forex-coffers/article71003335.ece

Question

Q. "Frequent export restrictions may protect domestic consumers in the short term but can weaken India's long-term trade competitiveness." Discuss with reference to agricultural exports. (250 words)

Introduction

India frequently uses export restrictions and minimum export price mechanisms to control domestic inflation and ensure food security. However, such measures also influence export competitiveness and farmer incomes.

Benefits of Export Restrictions

1. Help stabilise domestic food prices during shortages.
2. Protect consumers from inflationary shocks.
3. Ensure domestic availability of essential commodities.

Negative Consequences

1. Frequent policy changes create uncertainty for exporters.
2. International buyers may shift to alternative suppliers.
3. Farmers may receive lower prices for export-oriented crops.
4. Export earnings and foreign exchange inflows may decline.
5. India's reputation as a reliable trading partner may weaken.

Importance of Value Addition

1. Processed and branded agricultural exports generate higher returns.
2. GI-tagged products like basmati rice can access premium markets.
3. Agro-processing industries create employment and rural growth.

Conclusion

India's long-term export strategy should balance domestic food security with export competitiveness. Stable policies, value addition, and improved infrastructure are essential for strengthening agricultural exports and enhancing farmer prosperity.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/minimum-export-price-on-agri-items-will-lift-forex-coffers/article71003335.ece

4. Great Nicobar Project - Balancing Strategy, Ecology and National Interest (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper- India and its Neighbourhood / Strategic Affairs

Topic - Maritime security and Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Sub-Topic - Strategic importance of islands

Introduction

The Great Nicobar Island project is one of India's most ambitious strategic and infrastructure initiatives. Located near the Malacca Strait, the island occupies a highly significant geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The project includes a transshipment port, airport, township, roads, and energy infrastructure. While it promises economic growth and strategic advantages, it has also raised concerns regarding ecological damage, biodiversity loss, and impact on indigenous communities.

1. Strategic Importance of Great Nicobar Island

Location Advantage

1. Great Nicobar lies close to the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes.
2. A substantial portion of global trade and energy shipments passes through this route.

Maritime Security

1. The island enhances India's naval and surveillance capability in the Indian Ocean.
2. It strengthens India's strategic presence amid increasing geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Countering Regional Influence

1. The project helps India respond to expanding Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean Region.

2. Components of the Great Nicobar Project

Major Infrastructure Proposals

1. International transshipment terminal
2. Greenfield airport
3. Urban township
4. Power infrastructure
5. Road and logistics networks

Economic Vision

1. Transform the island into a major maritime and logistics hub.
2. Improve connectivity and trade competitiveness.

3. Economic Significance

Trade and Logistics Hub

1. The proposed transshipment port can reduce dependence on foreign ports such as Singapore and Colombo.

Employment Generation

1. Infrastructure development may create jobs in logistics, tourism, shipping, and services.

Regional Development

1. The project can stimulate economic activity in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

4. Ecological Importance of Great Nicobar

Biodiversity Hotspot

1. Great Nicobar hosts rich tropical rainforests and unique ecosystems.

Endemic Species

1. The island is home to several rare and endemic flora and fauna.

Fragile Coastal Ecosystem

1. Mangroves, coral reefs, and nesting sites are environmentally sensitive.

5. Environmental Concerns

Deforestation

1. Large-scale infrastructure development may lead to forest diversion and habitat destruction.

Threat to Marine Ecosystems

1. Port construction and increased shipping activity may affect coral reefs and coastal biodiversity.

Disaster Vulnerability

1. The island lies in a seismically active zone vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Climate Change Risks

1. Rising sea levels and extreme weather events pose long-term risks to infrastructure sustainability.

6. Indigenous Communities and Social Concerns

Tribal Populations

1. Great Nicobar is home to indigenous communities such as the Shompen tribe.

Cultural and Livelihood Impact

1. Rapid urbanisation and migration may disrupt traditional lifestyles and social structures.

Need for Inclusive Development

1. Development should ensure protection of tribal rights and cultural identity.

7. Strategic vs Ecological Debate

Arguments Supporting the Project

1. Enhances India's maritime dominance and logistics capability.
2. Strengthens national security and economic resilience.
3. Supports Indo-Pacific strategic objectives.

Arguments Against the Project

1. Risks irreversible ecological damage.
2. Threatens biodiversity and tribal habitats.
3. Large-scale construction may undermine sustainability goals.

8. Sustainable Development Approach

Balanced Development

1. Infrastructure expansion should not compromise ecological security.

Environmental Safeguards

1. Strict Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) mechanisms are essential.

Green Infrastructure

1. Adopt low-impact and climate-resilient construction practices.

Community Participation

1. Local and indigenous communities must be involved in decision-making.

9. Policy and Governance Challenges

Coordinated Planning

1. Requires integration of environmental, strategic, and developmental priorities.

Long-Term Ecological Monitoring

1. Continuous biodiversity assessment and disaster preparedness are necessary.

Transparent Governance

1. Public accountability and scientific review should guide implementation.

10. Way Forward

Strategic Development with Ecological Prudence

1. India should pursue infrastructure growth while preserving ecological integrity.

Strengthen Conservation Measures

1. Expand protected zones and biodiversity safeguards.

Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure

1. Ensure climate-resilient and earthquake-resistant construction standards.

Sustainable Maritime Hub Model

1. Develop Great Nicobar as a model for green maritime infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar project represents both an opportunity and a challenge for India. It can significantly enhance India's strategic and economic position in the Indo-Pacific region, but unchecked development may cause irreversible ecological and social damage. A balanced approach integrating national security, environmental sustainability, and community welfare is essential.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/great-nicobar-project-balancing-strategy-ecology-and-national-interest

Question

Q. The Great Nicobar project reflects the challenge of balancing strategic infrastructure development with ecological sustainability. Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

The Great Nicobar project aims to transform the island into a strategic maritime and logistics hub near the Malacca Strait. While it strengthens India's Indo-Pacific presence, it also raises ecological and social concerns.

Strategic and Economic Importance

1. Enhances India's maritime security and naval reach.
2. Reduces dependence on foreign transshipment ports.
3. Improves trade logistics and regional connectivity.
4. Supports India's Indo-Pacific strategic vision.

Ecological and Social Concerns

1. Large-scale deforestation may threaten biodiversity.
2. Coral reefs and marine ecosystems may be damaged.
3. The island is vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.
4. Indigenous communities may face displacement and cultural disruption.

Way Forward

1. Ensure rigorous environmental impact assessments.
2. Promote climate-resilient and low-impact infrastructure.

3. Protect tribal rights through participatory governance.
4. Integrate strategic development with ecological conservation.

Conclusion

The success of the Great Nicobar project depends on India's ability to balance national security objectives with environmental sustainability and social justice. A carefully regulated and inclusive development model is essential for long-term success.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/great-nicobar-project-balancing-strategy-ecology-and-national-interest

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 22.05.2026

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1. Ladakh Seeks Belonging Through Representation (TH)

GS Paper II – Indian Polity, Governance, and Constitutional Law

Topic – Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure of the Constitution.

Sub-Topic – UT Governance, Sixth Schedule Protections, Administrative vs. Democratic Decentralization, Frontier Integration, and Fiscal Federalism.

1. Introduction

Following the abrogation of Article 370 and the creation of the separate Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh in 2019, the region has been at the centre of intense constitutional debates. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently introduced a major governance change by creating five additional districts - Nubira, Changsheng, Sham, Zanskar, and Drass.

While this expansion improves administrative access across nearly 59,000 square kilometres of high-altitude terrain, the Union argues that Ladakh's sparse population, strategic sensitivity, and fiscal dependence on New Delhi make a local legislature or Sixth Schedule safeguards unnecessary. The essay challenges this argument, stating that administrative decentralization cannot substitute for genuine democratic representation and political agency.

2. The MHA's Position vs. The Colonial Logic Paradox

The Union government uses three primary arguments to justify withholding a legislature from Ladakh - low population density, extreme strategic sensitivity, and an inability to achieve fiscal self-sufficiency. The text argues that this rationale suffers from deep structural flaws -

The Paternalistic Framework – This reasoning echoes the paternalistic arguments used by the British Empire, which claimed that colonial India lacked the institutional maturity and economic capacity for self-rule (*Swaraj*).

The Dignity Quotient – It works against the philosophy of Purna Swaraj championed by Sri Aurobindo, who argued that absolute self-governance is an unalienable right tied to human dignity and national selfhood, rather than a reward for economic profitability or demographic size.

The Question of Capability – Forcing Ladakhis to continuously prove their demographic or financial viability to earn basic political representation undermines the inclusive principles of Indian democracy.

3. Instruments of Administration vs. Instruments of Representation

The core of the governance crisis lies in confusing administrative expansion with democratic empowerment -

Dimension of Analysis	District Administration (Bureaucratic Node)	State/UT Legislature (Representative Body)
Primary Institutional Role	An instrument of administrative execution and logistical convenience.	An instrument of political representation and popular sovereignty.
Direction of Accountability	Reports upward to the centralized bureaucratic hierarchy and the Centre.	Answers downward directly to the voting citizens of the region.
Policy Capacity	A District Magistrate can only implement pre-existing executive policies.	An elected body can actively legislate and shape a long-term development vision.
Core Structural Mandate	Focuses on institutional maintenance and administrative tidiness.	Empowers citizens with true political agency and legislative selfhood.

Legislative Limitations of Districts - Additional districts cannot pass laws on critical regional issues, including -

1. Land ownership protections and demographic safeguards against unrestricted settlement.
2. Ecological preservation laws for fragile, high-altitude glaciated ecosystems.
3. Local employment priorities and the preservation of distinct cultural identities.
4. Large-scale renewable energy infrastructure agreements and regional education policies.

4. The Broken Covenant - Expendable Electoral Commitments

The Post-2019 Assurances - Following the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir, senior leadership of the ruling party publicly promised Sixth Schedule protections to the frontier population of Ladakh.

Manifesto Integration - These explicit constitutional guarantees were highlighted in official election manifestos for both the 2019 Parliamentary elections and the 2020 Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) elections.

The Post-Election Pivot - Once these electoral cycles concluded and legislative mandates were secured, the establishment moved away from its commitments. This shift raises ethical concerns regarding the reliability of constitutional promises made to sensitive frontier populations.

5. Comparative Constitutional Precedents - The Northeast Frontier

The Union's security-based objections are directly challenged by how India has historically integrated other sensitive border regions -

A. The Security Paradigm - Arunachal Pradesh (1987)

1. Arunachal Pradesh occupies an exceptionally sensitive border zone subject to external territorial claims. It is geographically vast, sparsely populated, and financially dependent on central transfers.
2. When granted full statehood in 1987, its strategic location was treated as an argument *for* political empowerment rather than *against* it.
3. India recognized that border regions cannot be secured by bureaucratic networks or military deployments alone; citizens who feel politically enfranchised and constitutionally respected defend a nation's sovereignty out of a sense of shared belonging.

B. The Demographic Precedents

When the Indian Union integrated other strategic border states, low population thresholds were not treated as barriers to legislative representation -

Nagaland (1963) - Granted full statehood when its population was barely 3.5 lakh.

Mizoram (1987) - Transitioned to full statehood with a population of approximately 5 lakh.

Sikkim (1975) - Entered the Union as a state with a population of barely 2 lakh.

6. Deconstructing the Fiscal Solvency Objection

The argument that Ladakh's inability to generate sufficient internal revenue disqualifies it from having a legislature misinterprets the principles of Indian fiscal federalism -

Redistribution as a Core Value - The Indian federal structure is explicitly designed around horizontal redistribution. The Finance Commission exists precisely because economic capacity is unevenly distributed across geographies.

The Subsidy Dependence Reality - Major states rely heavily on central tax devolution, grants-in-aid, and central schemes. Highly populous states like Uttar Pradesh draw massive financial transfers from the Centre. Poorer states like Bihar, Assam, and multiple Northeastern states depend on central transfers to fund 70% to 90% of their total public expenditure.

Equity Over Profitability - Democratic representation in India has never been contingent on regional revenue generation. Dismissing a territory's legislative rights due to fiscal dependence is an approach rejected by India's constitutional history.

7. The Geo-Economic Stake - The Arithmetic of Pang (Changthang)

The claim that Ladakh is an economically negligible territory is contradicted by its central role in India's green energy transition -

The Megawatt Landscape - The Union is planning a massive 13-Gigawatt (GW) renewable solar energy infrastructure project in the Pang region of Changthang, spanning acres of high-altitude pasturelands.

The Revenue Matrix - This mega-project represents an estimated investment capital layout of ₹50,000 crore, with the potential to yield ₹7,000 crore in annual income.

The Core Conflict - This immense industrial scale means Ladakh is central to India's energy future. The key question is - *who negotiates the terms of this transition?* A district officer cannot decide land rights, grazing access for indigenous Changpa herders, ecological safeguards, local job quotas, or inter-generational resource royalties. That is the role of a locally accountable legislature.

8. Constitutional Imagination and the Sixth Schedule

Uniformity is Not Equity - India's constitutional history has succeeded by accommodating differences rather than forcing administrative uniformity.

The Purpose of the Sixth Schedule - This framework was created precisely to provide autonomous legislative, judicial, and administrative protections to fragile tribal and frontier areas, shielding them from pressures the plains do not face.

Belonging More, Not Less - The political movement in Ladakh is not an effort to detach from the Union; it is an appeal to belong more fully—transitioning from an area managed by a distant bureaucracy to an empowered community shaping its own future.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/ladakh-seeks-belonging-through-representation/article71007423.ece**

Question

"In frontier regions, integrating territories into the national mainstream is achieved more effectively through political enfranchisement and democratic belonging than through bureaucratic

administration and fiscal subsidies. Comment on this statement in light of the ongoing constitutional demands in Ladakh." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The creation of five new districts in Ladakh improves administrative access across its vast, high-altitude terrain. However, the region's broader demand for a local legislature and Sixth Schedule safeguards highlights a fundamental principle of Indian polity - administrative decentralization cannot serve as a substitute for democratic representation and popular sovereignty.

2. The Limits of Bureaucratic Integration

The argument that Ladakh's strategic sensitivity, sparse population, and fiscal dependence make a legislature unnecessary overlooks the distinction between administration and representation -

Administrative vs. Political Power - New districts are instruments of executive execution where officials report upward to a centralized bureaucracy. In contrast, legislatures are instruments of public representation that are accountable downward to local citizens.

The Policy Deficit - Bureaucratic structures can implement directives, but they lack the legal mandate to pass laws on vital regional issues, such as protecting fragile ecosystems, regulating land rights, safeguarding local job priorities, and managing cultural identity.

The Energy Transition Dilemma - With major initiatives like the ₹50,000 crore, 13-GW solar power project in Changthang, an elected legislature is essential to represent local interests. Such a body ensures the community can negotiate terms regarding land use, royalties, and grazing rights for indigenous Changpa herders.

3. Historic Precedents of Frontier Enfranchisement

India's constitutional history demonstrates that strategic sensitivity and financial dependence have consistently been treated as reasons *for* political empowerment rather than against it -

The Security Paradigm (Arunachal Pradesh) - When full statehood was granted to Arunachal Pradesh in 1987, the state was heavily dependent on central funding and located on a highly sensitive border. India recognized that border populations who feel politically enfranchised and constitutionally respected are vital to defending national sovereignty.

The Demographic Precedent - Low population thresholds did not prevent the creation of legislatures in Nagaland (1963), Sikkim (1975), or Mizoram (1987).

The Principle of Fiscal Redistribution - Fiscal dependence is a reality across Indian federalism, with states like Bihar and several Northeastern territories relying on central devolution for 70% to 90% of their budgets. Democratic representation has never been a reward for regional fiscal profitability.

Conclusion

India's constitutional strength lies in its ability to accommodate diverse regional requirements through creative safeguards like the Sixth Schedule, rather than forcing a uniform administrative model. As Sri Aurobindo noted, self-governance is essential to a community's dignity. Fulfilling Ladakh's aspirations for a legislative voice will strengthen national security along a sensitive frontier, shifting the region's status from a centrally managed territory to a fully integrated partner in the nation's future.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/ladakh-seeks-belonging-through-representation/article71007423.ece**

2. Why Ladakh's Democratic Aspirations Cannot Be Reduced to The Administrative Convenience of Districts (IE)

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While this expansion improves administrative proximity across 59,000 square kilometers of high-altitude terrain, the Union argues that Ladakh's sparse population, strategic sensitivity, and fiscal dependence on New Delhi make a local legislature or Sixth Schedule safeguards unnecessary. The essay systematically refutes this position, stating that administrative decentralization cannot substitute for genuine democratic representation and political agency.

2. The MHA's Position vs. The Colonial Logic Paradox

The Union government uses three primary indicators to deny Ladakh a legislature - low population thresholds, extreme strategic vulnerability, and fiscal dependency. The text highlights that this rationale replicates outdated governance mindsets -

The Paternalistic Framework – This reasoning mirrors the paternalistic arguments used by the British Empire, which claimed that colonial India lacked the institutional maturity, literacy, and economic capacity for self-rule (*Swaraj*).

The Dignity Quotient – It directly opposes the philosophy of Purna Swaraj championed by Sri Aurobindo, who argued that absolute self-governance is an unalienable right tied to human dignity and national selfhood, rather than a reward for economic profitability or demographic mass.

The Obligation of Proof – Forcing frontier populations to continuously prove their demographic or financial viability to earn basic political representation undermines the inclusive principles of Indian democracy.

3. Instruments of Administration vs. Instruments of Representation

The core flaw in the MHA's alternative lies in confusing administrative expansion with democratic empowerment -

District Administration (Bureaucratic Node) – It is an instrument of administrative execution and logistical convenience. It reports upward to the centralized bureaucratic hierarchy and the Centre. A District Magistrate can only implement pre-existing executive policies.

State/UT Legislature (Representative Body) – It is an instrument of political representation and popular sovereignty. It answers downward directly to the voting citizens of the region, allowing them to actively legislate and shape a long-term developmental vision.

Legislative Limitations of Districts

Additional districts are legally powerless to protect regional vital interests, including -

1. Land ownership protections and demographic safeguards against unrestricted external settlement.

2. Ecological preservation laws for fragile, high-altitude glaciated ecosystems.
3. Local employment priorities and the preservation of distinct cultural identities.
4. Large-scale renewable energy infrastructure negotiations and regional education policies.

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The argument that Ladakh's inability to generate sufficient internal revenue disqualifies it from having a legislature misinterprets the principles of Indian fiscal federalism -

Redistribution as a Core Value - The Indian federal structure is explicitly designed around horizontal redistribution. The Finance Commission exists precisely because economic capacity is unevenly distributed across geographies.

The Subsidy Dependence Reality - Major states rely heavily on central tax devolution, grants-in-aid, and central schemes. Highly populous states like Uttar Pradesh draw massive financial transfers from the Centre. Poorer states like Bihar, Assam, and multiple Northeastern states depend on central transfers to fund 70% to 90% of their total public expenditure.

Equity Over Profitability - Democratic representation in India has never been contingent on regional revenue generation. Dismissing a territory's legislative rights due to fiscal dependence is an approach rejected by India's constitutional history.

7. The Geo-Economic Stake - The Arithmetic of Pang (Changthang)

The claim that Ladakh is an economically negligible territory is contradicted by its central role in India's green energy transition -

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The Revenue Matrix - This mega-project represents an estimated investment capital layout of ₹50,000 crore, with the potential to yield ₹7,000 crore in annual income.

The Core Conflict - This immense industrial scale means Ladakh is central to India's energy future. The key question is - *who negotiates the terms of this transition?* A district officer cannot decide land rights, grazing access for indigenous Changpa herders, ecological safeguards, local job quotas, or inter-generational resource royalties. That is the role of a locally accountable legislature.

8. Constitutional Imagination and the Sixth Schedule

Uniformity is Not Equity - India's constitutional history has succeeded by accommodating differences rather than forcing administrative uniformity.

The Purpose of the Sixth Schedule - This framework was created precisely to provide autonomous legislative, judicial, and administrative protections to fragile tribal and frontier areas, shielding them from pressures the plains do not face.

Belonging More, Not Less - The political movement in Ladakh is not an effort to detach from the Union; it is an appeal to belong more fully—transitioning from an area managed by a distant bureaucracy to an empowered community shaping its own future.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ladakh-democratic-aspirations-reduced-administrative-convenience-districts-10701993/

Question

"The creation of additional administrative districts can improve governance accessibility, but it cannot serve as a substitute for political agency. Elaborate on this statement in the context of the current constitutional demands of Ladakh, highlighting the limitations of a purely bureaucratic administrative model in frontier regions." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Union government's creation of five new districts in Ladakh improves administrative access across its vast, high-altitude terrain. However, the region's broader demand for an elected legislature and Sixth Schedule safeguards highlights a fundamental principle of Indian polity - administrative decentralization cannot serve as a substitute for democratic representation and popular sovereignty.

2. Limitations of a Purely Bureaucratic Model (Administration vs. Representation)

The argument that Ladakh's strategic sensitivity, sparse population, and fiscal dependence make a legislature unnecessary overlooks the structural difference between a district-based bureaucracy and an elected assembly -

Direction of Accountability - District administrations are instruments of executive execution where officials report upward to a centralized bureaucracy. In contrast, legislatures are instruments of public representation that answer downward directly to local citizens.

The Legislative Deficit - Bureaucratic structures can implement directives, but they lack the legal mandate to pass laws on vital regional issues, such as protecting fragile high-altitude ecosystems, regulating land rights, safeguarding local job priorities, and managing cultural identity.

The Energy Transition Dilemma - With major initiatives like the ₹50,000 crore, 13-GW solar power project in Changthang, an elected legislature is essential to represent local interests. A district officer cannot legally negotiate terms regarding land use, royalties, and grazing rights for indigenous Changpa herders.

3. Constitutional Precedents of Frontier Integration

India's constitutional history demonstrates that strategic sensitivity and financial dependence have consistently been treated as reasons *for* political empowerment rather than against it -

The Security Paradigm (Arunachal Pradesh) - When full statehood was granted to Arunachal Pradesh in 1987, the territory was heavily dependent on central funding and located on a sensitive border. India recognized that border populations who feel politically enfranchised and constitutionally respected are vital to defending national sovereignty.

The Demographic Precedent - Low population thresholds did not prevent the creation of legislatures in Nagaland (1963), Sikkim (1975), or Mizoram (1987).

The Principle of Fiscal Redistribution - Fiscal dependence is a reality across Indian federalism, with states like Bihar and several Northeastern territories relying on central devolution for 70% to 90% of their budgets. Democratic representation has never been a reward for regional fiscal profitability.

Conclusion

India's constitutional strength lies in its ability to accommodate diverse regional requirements through creative safeguards like the Sixth Schedule, rather than forcing a uniform administrative model. As Sri Aurobindo noted, self-governance is essential to a community's dignity. Fulfilling Ladakh's aspirations for a legislative voice will strengthen national security along a sensitive frontier, shifting the region's status from a centrally managed territory to a fully integrated partner in the nation's future.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ladakh-democratic-aspirations-reduced-administrative-convenience-districts-10701993/**

3. Immediate And Deeper Factors Behind Rupee Fall (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper Indian Economy

Topic - Indian economy and issues relating to planning and growth

Sub-Topic - Inflation and monetary policy

Introduction

The Indian rupee has witnessed periodic depreciation against the US dollar due to both short-term shocks and long-term structural weaknesses. Immediate triggers include rising oil prices, global uncertainty, foreign capital outflows, and a strong US dollar. However, deeper structural issues such as trade deficits, dependence on imports, and inadequate productivity growth also contribute to rupee weakness.

1. Meaning of Rupee Depreciation

What is Rupee Fall?

1. Rupee depreciation means more rupees are required to buy one US dollar.
2. Example - If ₹80/$ becomes ₹86/$, the rupee has weakened.

2. Immediate Factors Behind Rupee Fall

Rising Crude Oil Prices

1. India imports a large share of its crude oil requirements.
2. Higher oil prices increase dollar demand for imports.
3. This widens the current account deficit (CAD).

Strong US Dollar

1. Higher US interest rates attract global capital toward the US.
2. Investors shift funds from emerging markets to safer dollar assets.

Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) Outflows

1. FPIs withdraw funds during global uncertainty.
2. Increased dollar demand weakens the rupee.

Geopolitical Tensions

1. Wars and global conflicts increase risk aversion.
2. Energy and commodity prices rise sharply.

Currency Hedging and Speculation

1. Importers and investors buy dollars to protect themselves from volatility.
2. This increases pressure on the rupee.

3. Structural or Deeper Factors

Persistent Current Account Deficit (CAD)

1. India imports more goods than it exports.
2. Large import dependence creates continuous dollar demand.

Dependence on Energy Imports

1. Heavy dependence on crude oil, gas, and critical imports weakens external stability.

Limited Export Competitiveness

1. Manufacturing and high-value exports remain insufficient compared to major economies.

Productivity Constraints

1. Slow productivity growth reduces long-term currency strength.

Infrastructure and Logistics Bottlenecks

1. High logistics costs reduce export competitiveness.

4. Impact of Rupee Depreciation

Inflationary Pressure

1. Imported goods become costlier.
2. Fuel, fertiliser, electronics, and edible oils become expensive.

Increased Import Bill

1. Government and businesses spend more on imports.

Pressure on Fiscal Balance

1. Fuel subsidies and welfare expenditure may rise.

External Debt Burden

1. Repayment of dollar-denominated loans becomes costlier.

Positive Impact on Exports

1. Indian exports may become relatively cheaper globally.
2. However, benefits are limited if export capacity is weak.

5. Role of RBI

Forex Market Intervention

1. RBI sells dollars from forex reserves to reduce volatility.

Monetary Policy Measures

1. Interest rate adjustments can influence capital flows and inflation.

Managing Currency Stability

1. RBI aims to prevent excessive fluctuations rather than fixing a specific exchange rate.

6. Why Artificial Defence of Rupee is Risky

Excessive Use of Forex Reserves

1. Large interventions can rapidly reduce foreign exchange reserves.

Unsustainable in Long Run

1. Structural weaknesses cannot be solved only through intervention.

Market Distortion

1. Artificial exchange rate management may weaken export competitiveness.

7. Long-Term Solutions

Strengthening Manufacturing

1. Promote Make in India and export-oriented industries.

Diversifying Energy Sources

1. Expand renewable energy and reduce oil dependence.

Improving Productivity

1. Invest in technology, innovation, and skill development.

Infrastructure Development

1. Reduce logistics costs through better ports, railways, and digital infrastructure.

Stable Capital Inflows

1. Encourage long-term FDI instead of volatile short-term flows.

8. Global Factors Influencing Rupee

US Federal Reserve Policies

1. Higher US interest rates strengthen the dollar globally.

Commodity Price Volatility

1. Oil and food price shocks affect India's import bill.

Global Economic Slowdown

1. Weak global demand affects exports and capital flows.

9. Rupee Fall - Opportunity and Challenge

Challenges

1. Imported inflation
2. Higher external vulnerability
3. Pressure on consumers and industries

Opportunities

1. Export competitiveness
2. Push for domestic manufacturing
3. Incentive for energy transition and self-reliance

Way Forward

Balanced Exchange Rate Management

1. RBI should manage volatility without targeting rigid exchange levels.

Focus on Structural Reforms

1. Productivity, exports, infrastructure, and manufacturing must improve.

Enhance External Sector Resilience

1. Diversify trade partners and reduce import dependence.

Promote Long-Term Investment

1. Stable FDI and innovation-driven growth strengthen currency fundamentals.

Conclusion

The fall of the rupee is not merely a short-term currency issue but reflects broader structural realities of the Indian economy. While global shocks and capital outflows create immediate pressure, long-term currency stability depends on productivity growth, export competitiveness, and reduced external vulnerability. Sustainable economic reforms, rather than excessive intervention, are the key to strengthening the rupee.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/immediate-and-deeper-factors-behind-re-fall/article71007298.ece**

Question

Q. The depreciation of the Indian rupee reflects both global economic pressures and domestic structural weaknesses. Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

The Indian rupee has periodically depreciated due to rising global uncertainty, strong dollar dominance, and structural imbalances within the Indian economy. The issue affects inflation, trade, and macroeconomic stability.

Immediate Causes of Rupee Depreciation

1. Rising crude oil prices increase India's import bill.
2. Higher US interest rates attract global capital toward dollar assets.
3. Foreign portfolio investor outflows increase dollar demand.
4. Geopolitical tensions create financial market volatility.

Structural Weaknesses

1. Persistent current account deficit weakens external stability.
2. Dependence on imported energy and technology raises dollar demand.
3. Limited export competitiveness and productivity growth constrain currency strength.

Measures Required

1. Strengthen manufacturing and exports.
2. Promote renewable energy and reduce oil dependence.
3. Improve logistics and infrastructure efficiency.
4. Encourage stable long-term FDI inflows.

Conclusion

Rupee stability ultimately depends on improving India's economic fundamentals. Sustainable growth, productivity enhancement, and external sector resilience are more effective than excessive currency intervention.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/immediate-and-deeper-factors-behind-re-fall/article71007298.ece**

4. Flex-Fuel - The Future of India's Ethanol Push (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Energy, Environment and Economy

Topic - Biofuels and renewable energy

Sub-Topic - Infrastructure and industrial policy

Introduction

India has made significant progress in ethanol blending through programmes such as E20 (20% ethanol blending in petrol). However, rising oil import dependence and uncertainties in the electric

vehicle (EV) transition have revived interest in flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs). Flex-fuel technology allows vehicles to run on different blends of petrol and ethanol, offering India a practical pathway toward energy security, agricultural diversification, and lower fossil fuel dependence.

1. What is Flex-Fuel?

Meaning

1. Flex-fuel vehicles are capable of operating on varying blends of petrol and ethanol.
2. These vehicles automatically adjust engine performance according to the fuel blend.

Common Fuel Blends

1. E20 → 20% ethanol + 80% petrol
2. E85 → 85% ethanol + 15% petrol
3. E100 → Pure ethanol

2. Why India is Promoting Ethanol and Flex-Fuel

Reducing Oil Import Dependence

1. India imports a major share of its crude oil requirements.
2. Ethanol blending reduces dependence on imported petroleum.

Energy Security

1. Diversification of fuel sources strengthens long-term energy resilience.

Environmental Benefits

1. Ethanol burns cleaner than conventional fossil fuels.
2. It can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicular pollution.

Support to Farmers

1. Ethanol production creates additional markets for agricultural produce such as sugarcane and maize.

3. Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)

Government Initiative

1. India launched the Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme to increase ethanol use in transport fuel.

Achievements

1. India has rapidly expanded ethanol blending levels in recent years.
2. E20 rollout has become a major policy target.

Economic Savings

1. Reduced crude oil imports help save foreign exchange reserves.

4. Advantages of Flex-Fuel Vehicles (FFVs)

Fuel Flexibility

1. Vehicles can operate using locally available ethanol blends.

Lower Carbon Emissions

1. Ethanol-based fuels generally emit fewer pollutants.

Better Energy Diversification

1. India need not rely exclusively on EVs for decarbonisation.

Utilisation of Agricultural Surplus

1. Surplus sugarcane, maize, and crop residues can be converted into fuel.

5. Flex-Fuel vs Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Challenges with EV-Only Strategy

1. EV batteries depend heavily on imported critical minerals and components.

2. Charging infrastructure remains uneven across regions.

Why FFVs are Seen as Complementary

1. FFVs can act as a transition solution alongside EVs.
2. Existing fuel infrastructure can still be utilised.

Broader Mobility Mix

1. Future mobility may include EVs, FFVs, hydrogen vehicles, and biofuels together.

6. Concerns Related to Ethanol Expansion

Food vs Fuel Debate

1. Excessive diversion of food crops toward fuel production may affect food security.

Water Consumption

1. Sugarcane cultivation requires large quantities of water.

Land Use Concerns

1. Expansion of ethanol crops may affect biodiversity and ecological balance.

Regional Imbalance

1. Ethanol production is concentrated in certain states.

7. Environmental and Economic Challenges

Sustainability of Feedstock

1. Ethanol production should increasingly shift toward agricultural waste and second-generation biofuels.

Vehicle Compatibility

1. Existing engines may require modifications for higher ethanol blends.

Infrastructure Requirements

1. Fuel distribution systems and storage facilities require adaptation.

8. Role of Second-Generation (2G) Ethanol

Waste-to-Fuel Approach

1. 2G ethanol uses crop residues and biomass instead of food crops.

Reducing Stubble Burning

1. Agricultural waste utilisation can help control air pollution.

Circular Economy Benefits

1. Converts waste into productive economic resources.

9. Government Measures Needed

Promote Sustainable Biofuel Policy

1. Encourage diversified feedstock beyond sugarcane.

Expand Research and Innovation

1. Invest in engine technology and advanced biofuels.

Strengthen Farmer Participation

1. Ensure stable pricing and procurement mechanisms.

Develop Balanced Energy Mix

1. Combine EVs, FFVs, hydrogen, and renewables for long-term energy transition.

10. Strategic Importance of Flex-Fuel for India

Energy Self-Reliance

1. Reduces vulnerability to global oil price shocks and geopolitical disruptions.

Rural Economic Growth

1. Creates rural employment and supports agro-industries.

Transition Fuel Strategy

1. Offers a practical intermediate solution before complete electrification.

Way Forward

Avoid Single-Solution Energy Strategy

1. India should adopt a diversified mobility approach.

Focus on Sustainable Ethanol Production

1. Prioritise 2G ethanol and non-food biomass feedstock.

Improve Vehicle Ecosystem

1. Expand FFV-compatible automobile manufacturing and fuel networks.

Ensure Environmental Safeguards

1. Biofuel expansion must not compromise water security or food production.

Conclusion

Flex-fuel technology represents an important component of India's broader energy transition strategy. While electric vehicles remain significant, India's diverse geography, infrastructure constraints, and energy needs require a multi-pathway approach. If implemented sustainably, flex-fuel vehicles can strengthen energy security, support farmers, reduce oil dependence, and contribute to cleaner mobility.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/flex-fuel-the-future-of-indias-ethanol-push

Question

Q. Flex-fuel vehicles can play an important role in India's energy transition, but their expansion must address sustainability concerns. Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

Flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs) are capable of operating on different blends of petrol and ethanol. India views FFVs as an important tool for reducing oil imports and promoting cleaner energy alternatives.

Importance of Flex-Fuel Vehicles

1. Reduce dependence on imported crude oil.
2. Support ethanol blending and energy security.
3. Lower vehicular emissions compared to fossil fuels.
4. Generate additional income opportunities for farmers through biofuel crops.
5. Complement EV adoption in India's diversified mobility strategy.

Challenges and Concerns

1. Excessive sugarcane cultivation may increase water stress.
2. Diversion of food crops raises food security concerns.
3. Existing engines and infrastructure require modifications.
4. Ethanol production remains regionally concentrated.

Way Forward

1. Promote second-generation ethanol using crop residues.
2. Encourage diversified biofuel feedstock.
3. Invest in FFV-compatible infrastructure and technology.
4. Integrate FFVs with broader renewable energy and EV policies.

Conclusion

Flex-fuel vehicles offer India a practical and transitional pathway toward cleaner mobility and energy security. However, sustainability, water conservation, and balanced agricultural policy must guide their long-term expansion.

Source - **https -//dailypioneer.com/news/flex-fuel-the-future-of-indias-ethanol-push**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

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Editorial of the Day – 23.05.2026

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1. Alarm Bells - On the Index of Eight Core Industries Data (TH)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and Industrial Growth

Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Sub-Topic - Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI), Structural Growth Deceleration, Energy Infrastructure Deficits, and Macro-Industrial Indicators.

1. Introduction

India's industrial economy has begun the Fiscal Year 2026–27 on a highly fragile note, with the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) slowing sharply to a growth rate of 1.7% in April 2026. While recent external headwinds—such as the escalating geopolitical crisis in West Asia—have exacerbated global supply chains, India's core sector slowdown represents a deeper domestic structural problem rather than a temporary external shock.

The deceleration follows a downward trend line, where annual core sector growth averaged just 2.8% in FY 2025–26, a substantial decline from the 4.5% recorded in FY 2024–25. Because these eight infrastructure sectors contribute over 40.27% of the total weight in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), this persistent slowdown signals systemic demand-side and supply-side challenges.

2. Deepening Vulnerabilities in the Energy Sector

The energy landscape within the eight core industries is facing significant stress, with key production metrics continuing a prolonged multi-month decline -

The Contraction Timeline - Out of the eight core industries, only steel, cement, and electricity registered positive growth in April 2026. Conversely, crude oil and natural gas production contracted continuously for 16 and 22 months, respectively.

The Storage Infrastructure Deficit - This domestic production decline highlights a major vulnerability in India's energy security framework - the lack of adequate, long-term strategic commercial gas storage infrastructure, which restricts the country's capacity to manage sudden external supply shocks.

Forex Défense Interventions - To control large foreign exchange outflows amid currency volatility, the government reduced Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) imports by 30% in April 2026.

Industrial Spill over - The combination of falling domestic output and forced import cuts has restricted total industrial power capacity and input fuel access for energy-intensive manufacturing units.

3. Upstream Fuel Shocks and Rural Agrarian Distress

The core sector data reveals a parallel contraction in fuel utilization and chemical inputs, pointing to underlying stress in the rural economy -

Suppressed Commercial Consumption - Overall domestic natural gas consumption registered a clear decline. This drop is partially driven by direct state-level restrictions on commercial and industrial fuel use to conserve stocks for critical household sectors.

The Fertilizer Contraction - Following a brief, short-term recovery in March, fertilizer production slipped back into negative territory.

The El Niño and Monsoon Link - This contraction in fertilizer demand is closely tied to seasonal uncertainties, with weather models predicting a below-normal southwest monsoon and an intensifying El Niño pattern.

Socio-Economic Risks - Lower fertilizer consumption and drought concerns pose risks to total kharif agricultural output, threatening to worsen rural distress, lower farm-sector incomes, and depress broader rural consumer demand.

4. Infrastructure Buffers and Fiscal Stress Limits

The steel and cement sectors remain the only consistent drivers of growth within the ICI framework, though their long-term sustainability faces limits -

State-Driven Momentum - Steady production expansion in steel and cement indicates that public construction and infrastructure asset creation are ongoing.

The Fiscal Constraint Balance - This infrastructure momentum is primarily driven by targeted government capital expenditure (CapEx). However, maintaining this level of public spending is becoming difficult due to mounting fiscal pressures and narrow budgetary cushions.

Private Investment Void - The absence of a strong revival in private corporate capital expenditure leaves infrastructure growth entirely dependent on state funding, which is vulnerable to broader economic uncertainties.

5. Convergence of Macro-Economic Risk Indicators

The core sector slowdown matches a broader drop visible across several primary macroeconomic metrics -

PMI at Historic Lows - The manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) has dropped close to a four-year low, confirming an absolute contraction in new industrial order books and factory output.

Stagnant GST Inflows - Growth in monthly Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections originating from domestic sales has slowed, rising only slightly above prevailing inflation levels, which points to flat core consumer spending.

The Structural Triad - The intersection of weak consumption, declining energy output, and rural distress signals that the economy is facing structural demand-side challenges rather than a temporary cyclical dip.

6. Way Forward

Securing Strategic Energy Reserves - Accelerating the construction of underground strategic gas storages and diversifying LNG supply networks to protect domestic industries from regional geopolitical conflicts.

Reviving Private Sector CapEx - Transitioning away from state-funded infrastructure growth by introducing targeted tax incentives and regulatory simplifications to encourage private investment in manufacturing.

Strengthening the Rural Safety Net - Deploying proactive micro-irrigation subsidies, expanding the MGNREGA asset-creation matrix, and providing direct credit support to insulate rural incomes from El Niño shocks.

Optimizing Supply Chain Inputs - Re-evaluating domestic natural gas allocation priorities to ensure that essential, employment-generating industries receive steady fuel access during import reductions.

7. Conclusion

The 1.7% core sector growth recorded in April 2026 serves as an early warning for India's macroeconomy, revealing deeper structural vulnerabilities that require policy attention. Managing this slowdown effectively involves looking beyond short-term relief measures. By building resilient energy storage infrastructure, addressing the root causes of rural demand distress, and managing fiscal pressures through private-public partnerships, India can stabilize its core industrial base and secure sustainable, long-term economic growth.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/alarm-bells-on-the-index-of-eight-core-industries-data/article71011079.ece**

Question

"The performance of India's eight core industries is heavily dependent on state-driven capital expenditure, masking structural vulnerabilities in energy security and rural demand. Elaborate on this statement in light of the recent deceleration in the Index of Core Industries, and suggest policy interventions to secure sustainable industrial growth." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) slowed to 1.7% in April 2026, marking a fragile start to the new fiscal year. Because these eight foundational sectors comprise over 40.27% of the weight within the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), this sharp deceleration highlights structural vulnerabilities across India's energy, agricultural, and infrastructure landscapes.

2. State CapEx Masking Structural Vulnerabilities

An elaboration of the recent core sector data reveals a widening gap between state-supported construction and a broader slowdown in industrial activity -

The Energy Security Bottleneck - While the overall index slowed, crude oil and natural gas production continued a long-term decline of 16 and 22 months, respectively. This structural shortfall is worsened by India's lack of long-term commercial gas storage facilities. To control foreign exchange outflows, the government implemented a 30% cut in LNG imports, which has restricted input fuel access for energy-intensive domestic manufacturing.

The Agrarian Demand Deficit - Fertilizer production contracted due to projections of a below-normal monsoon and an intensifying El Niño pattern. This reduction in input demand points to underlying rural distress, threatening to lower farm incomes and depress broader rural consumer demand.

The Fiscal Capital Imbalance - Steel and cement remain the only sectors growing consistently, driven almost entirely by government capital expenditure on public infrastructure. However, relying solely on state funding is unsustainable over the long term due to rising fiscal pressures, while private corporate capital investment remains sluggish.

3. Suggested Policy Interventions

Restoring sustainable industrial growth requires moving beyond reactive measures toward targeted structural interventions -

Building Energy Infrastructure - Prioritizing public-private partnerships to build underground strategic natural gas reserves, reducing vulnerability to geopolitical supply shocks in West Asia.

Incentivizing Private Investment - Transitioning infrastructure funding away from an exclusive reliance on state budgets by offering clear regulatory pathways and asset-monetization incentives to crowded-in private capital.

Insulating the Rural Economy - Expanding climate-smart agricultural interventions, upgrading localized canal networks, and adjusting natural gas pricing mechanisms to ensure the domestic fertilizer industry has steady access to affordable feedstock during energy crises.

Conclusion

The slowdown in the core sector shows that public infrastructure spending alone cannot sustain high industrial growth if energy security and rural demand remain vulnerable. Achieving long-term economic resilience requires balancing state-led capital expenditure with structured energy storage solutions, agricultural protection policies, and reforms that encourage private sector participation. This approach will ensure India's core sectors can withstand both external shocks and domestic demand transitions.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/alarm-bells-on-the-index-of-eight-core-industries-data/article71011079.ece**

2. For India, Weakening Monsoon and Fertiliser Crisis, A Double Whammy (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy / Agriculture / Food Security

Topic - Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies; Buffer stocks and food security; Major crops - cropping patterns; Government policies and interventions.

Sub-Topic - Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS), Weaponization of Maritime Chokepoints (Strait of Hormuz), El Niño and Kharif Vulnerability, and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).

1. Introduction

India's agricultural sector is facing an unprecedented structural crisis as it enters the 2026 kharif sowing season. The sector is caught in a "double whammy" - a severe, geopolitically driven fertilizer supply disruption combined with an atmospheric shock to the southwest monsoon. Following maritime chokepoint closures in West Asia, the fundamental issue for India's food security has shifted. The primary challenge is no longer merely sourcing sufficient volumes of crop nutrients, but whether the Union exchequer can continuously afford the rapidly expanding fiscal burden required to guarantee stable, subsidized prices for farmers.

2. Geopolitical Shock - The Strait of Hormuz Crisis

The Maritime Choke Point - Following regional military escalations in West Asia, Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz.

Global Transit Interruption - This closure is highly significant because one-third of the world's fertilizers normally transit through this narrow strait.

The Domestic Production Shock - The supply disruption severely hit domestic manufacturing. India's internal fertilizer production declined by 24.6% in March 2026—marking the sharpest single-month contraction in recent memory, which broke a consecutive three-month streak of expansion.

The Deficit Scale - To save the upcoming kharif crop, India must source nearly four times its current urea opening stocks. This shortfall must be bridged entirely through emergency international spot imports purchased at inflated, crisis-level global prices.

3. The Fiscal Dilemma - Subsidy Absorbency Limits

The Policy Response - To shield farmers ahead of the June peak sowing window, the Union Cabinet approved a 12% increase in the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) for the kharif 2026 season. Concurrently, retail prices for key fertilizers like Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) have been held flat.

Fiscal Spending Shock - Under the current design, every additional dollar spike in global fertilizer prices translates directly into an open-ended subsidy liability for the government.

Budgetary Strain - If the West Asian maritime conflict continues, absorbing these inflated import costs will create a spending shock that the fiscal budget cannot easily accommodate, creating a clear trade-off with other developmental capital expenditure.

4. Atmospheric Headwinds - The El Niño Impact

The supply chain shock matches a severe meteorological deficit -

Below-Normal Projections - The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast indicates that the 2026 southwest monsoon will drop to 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA). This marks the first below-normal forecast in three years.

Kharif Vulnerability - This deficit is driven by the rapid development of El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean.

The Timing Mismatch - The sharpest drop in rainfall is projected for the second half of the monsoon season—precisely when standing kharif crops like paddy, cotton, pulses, and oilseeds enter their most water-dependent development stages.

The Strategic Vacuum - Unlike food grains or crude oil, India completely lacks a centralized strategic reserve architecture or alternative routing pathways for bulk fertilizers, leaving the supply chain highly vulnerable to sudden maritime blockades.

5. Socio-Economic Risks and Impact on SDG 2

The Squeeze on Incomes - If fertilizer input costs rise due to supply limits or if the monsoon fails, India risks facing a combination of food price inflation and a sharp drop in rural agricultural incomes.

The Shadow on Progress - This crisis threatens India's commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger by 2030).

Persistent Vulnerability - India has made progress by reducing its undernourished population from 243 million in 2006 to 172 million today. However, the country still ranks 102nd out of 123 nations on the 2025 Global Hunger Index. Any crisis that lowers agricultural yields risks reversing these hard-won nutritional gains.

6. Way Forward

Building Strategic Fertilizer Reserves - Establishing a national strategic buffer stock for urea and DAP—similar to strategic petroleum reserves—to insulate farmers from sudden geopolitical shocks.

Diversifying Supply Geographies - Reducing absolute reliance on West Asian transit corridors by securing long-term supply agreements with alternative producers in Africa, North America, and Central Asia.

Enhancing Nutrient Efficiency - Accelerating the rollout and adoption of Nano-Urea and precision drone-based spraying to lower total bulk chemical demand per acre.

Expanding Domestic Capacity - Investing in indigenous production, particularly green ammonia and coal-gasification-based urea plants, to structurally decouple India's food security from global gas and maritime volatility.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-monsoon-fertiliser-crisis-urea-iran-war-strait-hormuz-10703157/

Question

"The intersection of volatile geopolitical chokepoints and climate-linked monsoon deficits exposes structural vulnerabilities in India's agricultural supply chain. Comment on the sustainability of using open-ended fiscal subsidies to manage external input shocks while maintaining national food security." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's agricultural economy is facing a critical juncture as it enters the 2026 kharif season, caught between a below-normal monsoon forecast (92% of LPA) driven by El Niño and a major fertilizer supply shock caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This situation highlights a key policy challenge - while the subsidy system stabilizes internal prices in the short term, relying on open-ended fiscal absorption to handle global supply crises faces clear financial and structural limits.

2. The Limits of Subsidies in Managing External Shocks

The government's response—approving a 12% increase in the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) to keep retail Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) prices flat—protects farm incomes but creates broader macroeconomic challenges -

Unpredictable Fiscal Burden - Because India relies heavily on imported raw components and must source four times its urea opening stocks at crisis-level spot prices, flat retail pricing turns global market shocks directly into central debt. If maritime disruptions continue, this rising subsidy bill will strain the national budget.

The Lack of Strategic Buffers - Unlike crude oil, India lacks a centralized strategic reserve architecture for fertilizers. Without physical buffer stocks, financial subsidies alone cannot fix real supply shortages if ships cannot pass through vital trade routes.

The Threat to Food Security (SDG 2) - Rising input costs combined with an El Niño-driven drought during critical crop growth cycles threaten the yields of essential crops like paddy and pulses. This pressure on output risks fuelling food inflation and slowing down India's progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), where the nation still ranks 102nd on the Global Hunger Index.

3. Proposed Policy Shift

To ensure sustainable agricultural growth, India must move away from purely reactive fiscal measures toward structural supply chain resilience -

Supply Diversification - Reducing dependence on West Asian shipping lanes by locking in multi-year import contracts with alternative producers in South America and Africa.

Physical Strategic Reserves - Building dedicated, state-managed storage facilities for bulk fertilizers to maintain a minimum two-month supply buffer before peak sowing seasons.

Demand-Side Efficiency - Expanding the use of technology-driven alternatives, such as Nano-Urea and precision farming, to lower overall chemical input requirements.

Conclusion

Using fiscal subsidies to absorb global price spikes protects farmers during immediate crises, but it functions as a short-term solution for deeper structural vulnerabilities. Long-term agricultural

resilience cannot be sustained by the exchequer alone. To protect national food security against future climate and geopolitical shocks, India must combine its pricing support with strategic storage buffers, diversified trade routes, and domestic manufacturing self-sufficiency.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-monsoon-fertiliser-crisis-urea-iran-war-strait-hormuz-10703157/

3. Recent FTAS Could Erode India's Policy Space (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – International Relations

Topic - Effects of liberalisation on the economy

Sub-Topic - WTO and trade negotiations

Introduction

India has recently signed or negotiated multiple Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries such as the UAE, Australia, UK, and the European Union. These agreements aim to improve market access, increase exports, and integrate India into global value chains. However, concerns are emerging that certain provisions related to intellectual property, government procurement, digital trade, and investment rules may reduce India's future policy flexibility or "policy space."

1. What is Policy Space?

Meaning

1. Policy space refers to the freedom of governments to design domestic economic, industrial, social, and technological policies according to national priorities.

Importance

1. Helps countries protect vulnerable sectors.
2. Allows governments to support MSMEs, agriculture, public health, and strategic industries.
3. Enables flexibility during crises and development transitions.

2. Why India is Pursuing FTAs

Expanding Export Markets

1. FTAs reduce tariffs and improve access to foreign markets.

Diversifying Trade Partners

1. India seeks alternatives amid global supply chain shifts and geopolitical tensions.

Attracting Investment

1. Trade agreements may encourage foreign investment and manufacturing.

Integrating into Global Value Chains

1. FTAs help India participate in international production networks.

3. Concerns Regarding Erosion of Policy Space

Restrictive Trade Commitments

1. Deep trade agreements may limit future domestic policy flexibility.

Pressure on Domestic Industries

1. Small and medium enterprises may struggle against foreign competition.

Regulatory Constraints

1. Certain FTA clauses may restrict government intervention in strategic sectors.

4. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Concerns

Stronger Patent Rules

1. Some FTAs seek stricter IPR provisions beyond WTO obligations ("TRIPS-plus").

Impact on Generic Medicines

1. India's pharmaceutical sector depends heavily on generic drug production.
2. Stronger patent protections may increase medicine prices.

Compulsory Licensing Issues

1. FTA provisions may weaken India's ability to issue compulsory licences during health emergencies.

5. Government Procurement Concerns

Market Access for Foreign Firms

1. FTAs may require opening public procurement to foreign companies.

Impact on MSMEs

1. Domestic firms may lose preference in government contracts.

Reduced Industrial Support

1. Government procurement is often used to promote domestic manufacturing.

6. Digital Trade and Data Governance Issues

Restrictions on Data Localisation

1. Some digital trade provisions discourage local data storage requirements.

Impact on Digital Sovereignty

1. Limits government control over strategic digital infrastructure and data governance.

AI and Emerging Technologies

1. Policy flexibility is important for regulating future technologies and digital platforms.

7. Environmental and Labour Standards

Non-Tariff Barriers

1. Developed countries may use sustainability standards as trade barriers.

Compliance Burden

1. MSMEs may face difficulties meeting strict environmental and labour norms.

8. Impact on Agriculture and Farmers

Import Competition

1. Cheaper imports may affect domestic agricultural producers.

Food Security Concerns

1. Trade commitments should not undermine India's public food procurement systems.

9. Importance of FTAs Despite Concerns

Export Opportunities

1. FTAs can improve access for Indian goods and services.

Strategic Partnerships

1. Trade agreements strengthen geopolitical and economic ties.

Technology and Investment Flows

1. FTAs may support industrial modernisation and infrastructure growth.

10. Balancing Trade and Sovereignty

Need for Calibrated Negotiations

1. India must protect sensitive sectors while pursuing trade integration.

Safeguard Clauses

1. Agreements should preserve flexibility for public health, food security, and industrial policy.

Support for MSMEs

1. Domestic industries need financial, technological, and policy support to compete globally.

11. India's Strategic Trade Approach

Shift from Defensive to Selective Liberalisation

1. India increasingly prefers carefully negotiated bilateral FTAs.

Emphasis on National Interest

1. Trade agreements should align with long-term developmental priorities.

Way Forward

Protect Core Policy Space

1. Preserve flexibility in public health, digital governance, and industrial policy.

Strengthen Domestic Competitiveness

1. Improve logistics, productivity, and innovation capacity.

Ensure Inclusive Trade Growth

1. MSMEs and farmers must benefit from trade integration.

Balanced Trade Diplomacy

1. India should pursue FTAs without compromising economic sovereignty.

Conclusion

Free Trade Agreements provide important opportunities for exports, investment, and global integration. However, excessively restrictive commitments may reduce India's ability to pursue independent economic and developmental policies. India must therefore negotiate FTAs carefully to balance global integration with national policy autonomy, public welfare, and long-term strategic interests.

Source – https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/recent-ftas-could-erode-our-policy-space/article71011579.ece#google_vignette

Question

Q. While Free Trade Agreements can boost exports and investment, they may also constrain domestic policy flexibility. Examine in the context of India's recent FTAs. (250 words)

Introduction

India has actively pursued Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with several countries to enhance exports, investment, and strategic partnerships. However, concerns remain regarding the erosion of India's policy space in areas such as public health, digital governance, and industrial policy.

Benefits of FTAs

1. Improve market access for Indian goods and services.
2. Attract foreign investment and technology transfer.
3. Integrate India into global value chains.
4. Strengthen geopolitical and economic partnerships.

Concerns Regarding Policy Space

1. TRIPS-plus intellectual property provisions may affect access to affordable medicines.
2. Government procurement rules may disadvantage MSMEs.
3. Digital trade clauses may restrict data localisation policies.
4. Environmental and labour standards may become non-tariff barriers.
5. Reduced flexibility in industrial and public welfare policies.

Way Forward

1. Negotiate balanced and sector-sensitive agreements.
2. Preserve flexibility in public health and digital regulation.

3. Strengthen competitiveness of domestic industries and MSMEs.
4. Include safeguard mechanisms for strategic sectors.

Conclusion

India must adopt a calibrated trade strategy that promotes economic integration without compromising developmental priorities, economic sovereignty, and policy flexibility.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/recent-ftas-could-erode-our-policy-space/article71011579.ece**

4. The Slow Death of Peacekeeping (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Internal Security and Conflict Management

Topic - Role of international organisations

Sub-Topic - United Nations peacekeeping operations

Introduction

United Nations peacekeeping operations were established to maintain peace and stability in conflict-affected regions. For decades, peacekeeping symbolised collective global responsibility and multilateral cooperation. However, declining political consensus, inadequate funding, troop shortages, geopolitical rivalry, and changing nature of conflicts are weakening the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions worldwide.

1. What is Peacekeeping?

Meaning

1. Peacekeeping refers to international efforts, usually under the United Nations, to maintain peace and security in conflict zones.

Main Functions

1. Monitoring ceasefires
2. Protecting civilians
3. Supporting political transitions
4. Humanitarian assistance
5. Disarmament and conflict prevention

2. Evolution of UN Peacekeeping

Cold War Period

1. Peacekeeping mainly focused on monitoring ceasefires between states.

Post-Cold War Expansion

1. Missions expanded into nation-building, elections, and civilian protection.

Modern Peacekeeping

1. Current operations often deal with terrorism, civil wars, insurgencies, and humanitarian crises.

3. Why Peacekeeping is Weakening

Declining Political Consensus

1. Major powers increasingly disagree on global conflicts.
2. Rivalries among powerful countries weaken collective decision-making.

Funding Constraints

1. Many member states delay or reduce financial contributions.
2. Missions face shortages in equipment and resources.

Troop Shortages

1. Countries are becoming reluctant to deploy soldiers in dangerous conflict zones.

Mandate Expansion

1. Peacekeeping missions now carry extremely broad responsibilities.
2. Limited resources are insufficient for complex mandates.

4. Changing Nature of Conflicts

Rise of Non-State Actors

1. Terrorist groups, militias, and insurgent organisations complicate peacekeeping operations.

Urban Warfare and Civil Conflicts

1. Conflicts increasingly occur within states rather than between states.

Hybrid Threats

1. Cyber threats, misinformation, and transnational networks create new security challenges.

5. Operational Challenges Faced by Peacekeepers

Lack of Clear Mandates

1. Ambiguous objectives reduce mission effectiveness.

Host Government Resistance

1. Some governments restrict peacekeeping operations or cooperation.

Security Risks

1. Peacekeepers increasingly face direct attacks.

Limited Accountability

1. Allegations of misconduct in some missions have affected credibility.

6. Crisis of Multilateralism

Geopolitical Competition

1. Great power rivalry weakens the UN Security Council's ability to act decisively.

Erosion of Collective Security

1. Countries increasingly prioritise national interests over global cooperation.

Selective Intervention

1. Humanitarian responses often depend on political calculations.

7. Consequences of Weakening Peacekeeping

Increased Humanitarian Crises

1. Civilian populations become more vulnerable during conflicts.

Spread of Instability

1. Fragile states may collapse further without stabilising forces.

Refugee and Migration Pressures

1. Conflict zones generate large-scale displacement.

Loss of Faith in Global Institutions

1. Weak peacekeeping reduces trust in international governance mechanisms.

8. Importance of Peacekeeping Despite Challenges

Preventing Escalation

1. Peacekeeping missions help prevent conflicts from spreading regionally.

Supporting Fragile States

1. They provide breathing space for political reconciliation and institution-building.

Humanitarian Protection

1. Peacekeepers often support civilians during crises.

9. India's Role in UN Peacekeeping

Major Troop Contributor

1. India has historically been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions.

Professional Reputation

1. Indian peacekeepers are widely respected for professionalism and humanitarian service.

Strategic Importance

1. Peacekeeping strengthens India's global diplomatic image and commitment to multilateralism.

10. Need for Peacekeeping Reforms

Clearer Mandates

1. Missions should have realistic and achievable objectives.

Better Funding Mechanisms

1. Timely financial support is necessary for operational effectiveness.

Technology Integration

1. Use of drones, surveillance systems, AI, and digital intelligence can improve mission capability.

Stronger Political Backing

1. Sustainable peacekeeping requires diplomatic consensus among major powers.

11. Future of Peacekeeping

From Traditional Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding

1. Long-term stability requires governance, development, and reconciliation efforts.

Regional Cooperation

1. Regional organisations may increasingly complement UN missions.

Flexible and Adaptive Missions

1. Future operations must adapt to hybrid and asymmetric conflicts.

Way Forward

Revitalise Multilateral Cooperation

1. Strengthen collective commitment to international peace and security.

Reform the UN Security Council

1. Improve representativeness and decision-making efficiency.

Enhance Operational Capacity

1. Better training, funding, and technology are essential.

Focus on Preventive Diplomacy

1. Early conflict prevention is more effective than post-conflict intervention.

Conclusion

The weakening of global peacekeeping reflects a broader crisis in international cooperation and multilateralism. While peacekeeping faces serious political, financial, and operational challenges, it remains an essential instrument for maintaining global stability and protecting vulnerable populations. Revitalising peacekeeping will require renewed political commitment, institutional reform, and collective global responsibility.

Source – https -//dailypioneer.com/news/the-slow-death-of-peacekeeping

Question

Q. The decline of United Nations peacekeeping reflects the broader crisis of multilateralism in the contemporary world. Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

United Nations peacekeeping operations were created to maintain international peace and security through collective global action. However, geopolitical rivalries, funding shortages, and changing conflict patterns have weakened their effectiveness.

Reasons for the Decline of Peacekeeping

1. Increasing geopolitical tensions weaken consensus in the UN Security Council.
2. Funding shortages and troop fatigue reduce operational effectiveness.
3. Modern conflicts involving militias and terrorism complicate peacekeeping.
4. Expanding mandates exceed available resources and capabilities.
5. Host governments often resist external intervention.

Consequences

1. Greater instability in fragile states.
2. Increased humanitarian crises and civilian suffering.
3. Declining credibility of international institutions.
4. Weakening of collective security mechanisms.

Measures Required

1. Reform and strengthen UN institutions.
2. Ensure adequate funding and technological modernisation.
3. Promote preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation.
4. Build stronger political consensus among major powers.

Conclusion

Peacekeeping remains indispensable for global peace and humanitarian protection. Reviving it requires renewed commitment to multilateralism, institutional reforms, and cooperative international leadership.

Source - **https -//dailypioneer.com/news/the-slow-death-of-peacekeeping**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 25.05.2026

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1. The U.S. Ends Russia Oil Waiver, Implications for India (TH)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy / Infrastructure / Environment

Topic - Infrastructure - Energy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation.

Sub-Topic - Clean Energy Transition, Capacity vs. Generation Gap, Intermittency and Baseload Reliability, and Market Settlement Mechanisms.

1. Introduction

A recent escalation of geopolitical conflict in West Asia has pushed global energy prices upward, once again exposing India's vulnerability to external resource shocks. Despite a sustained policy emphasis on scaling up clean energy, nearly half of India's total fossil fuel imports continue to transit through the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz maritime chokepoint, including critical crude shipments from Saudi Arabia and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports from Qatar. This import dependency sits uneasily alongside the dominant domestic narrative celebrating India's rapid clean energy transition. The authors emphasize that while India has succeeded in expanding green energy *capacity*, it has yet to structurally displace coal in actual *generation*.

2. The Illusion of the Capacity Metrics

By standard capacity-based metrics, India appears to be at the forefront of a global green energy transition -

Historical Capacity Growth - Since 2017, renewable energy sources have consistently accounted for the largest share of new power capacity additions in India.

The Scale of Change - Renewable energy sources accounted for 42.4% of India's total installed power capacity by March 2026, up from just 0.72% in March 2005. Over the exact same period, coal's share in the installed capacity matrix fell from 58.7% to 42.2%.

The Policy Paradox - Despite these capacity shifts, vulnerability to external price shocks remains unchanged because installed capacity does not equate to actual electricity generation.

3. The Capacity and Generation Gap

The fundamental reality of India's power system is a widening mismatch between generation potential and real-time grid supply -

The Generation Split - While renewables account for over two-fifths (42.4%) of total installed capacity, they generated only 15.8% of actual electricity in April 2026.

The Coal Anchor - Conversely, coal-fired power plants still generated 71.8% of total electricity during the same month—only marginally lower than the 76.2% share recorded in March 2019.

Addition vs. Displacement - Renewable energy infrastructure is effectively being added *on top* of the existing coal baseline rather than structurally displacing it. The data shows that since 2018, India has added almost no new fossil fuel capacity, retired very few old coal plants, and experienced a decline in gas-based capacity, leaving coal as the main backup source.

4. Structural Bottlenecks - Intermittency and Baseload Reliability

The underlying reason for coal's persistence within the grid architecture is rooted in physics and infrastructure limitations -

Variable vs. Continuous - Solar and wind energy are intermittent power sources whose output fluctuates unpredictably based on seasonal weather conditions and diurnal cycles. Electricity demand, by contrast, remains continuous and peaks during non-solar hours.

The Balancing Deficit - In the absolute absence of grid-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), flexible smart grids, and adequate alternative balancing capacity, coal-fired thermal assets must run continuously to provide the baseload reliability required to keep the national grid from collapsing.

The Tariff Spillover - Because fossil fuels continue to determine the marginal cost of power in India's electricity markets, domestic electricity tariffs remain closely tied to volatile global commodity indices like Brent crude, exposing even green-heavy states to external market shocks.

5. Comparative International Matrix - India, China, and Spain

The article provides a brief comparative overview of how different nations handle energy transition vulnerabilities -

China's Insulation Strategy - China remains exposed to global maritime supply lines, with oil and gas making up only 4% of its electrical power mix. Furthermore, electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrids now account for over half of all new car sales in China, reducing its domestic transport oil demand by over one million barrels per day.

Spain's Decoupling - Spain serves as a Western model for successfully breaking the historic link between gas markets and domestic electricity pricing through aggressive renewable integration and structural grid reforms.

The Indian Reality - India's transition remains real in capacity terms, but structurally incomplete in actual generation terms.

6. Way Forward - Moving to System Transformation

The next phase of India's green transition must move past simple capacity addition toward a comprehensive overhaul of the energy system -

Aggressive Storage Capitalization - Investing heavily in utility-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS) to smooth out the intermittent output of solar and wind generation.

Grid Modernization - Upgrading transmission networks to enable flexible, real-time power routing across regional load dispatch centres.

Reforming Market Pricing Mechanisms - Redesigning electricity market settlement rules so that green power can be integrated at scale without being tied to the marginal cost of fossil fuels.

Acknowledging Coal's Transitionary Role - Recognizing that coal's current persistence is not an institutional failure or a policy oversight, but a necessary stabilizing mechanism. Coal provides the baseload security that intermittent green platforms cannot yet replicate.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-us-ends-russia-oil-waiver-implications-for-india/article71018329.ece

Question

"In the context of India's clean energy transition, metrics focused on installed capacity create an incomplete picture of energy security. Critically evaluate the structural bottlenecks that prevent green energy capacity from displacing coal in actual generation, and suggest measures for comprehensive energy system transformation." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's clean energy transition has expanded rapidly, with renewable energy sources growing to comprise 42.4% of total installed power capacity by March 2026. However, a structural divide persists - in actual electricity generation, renewables contributed only 15.8% of the power mix in April 2026, while coal continued to supply 71.8%. This indicates that renewable capacity is being built on top of the energy mix rather than replacing fossil fuels.

2. Structural Bottlenecks Preventing Coal Displacement

The Challenge of Intermittency - Solar and wind energy are highly variable and weather-dependent power sources. Because their generation cycles do not align with evening consumer demand peaks, they cannot provide a steady supply without structural support.

The Lack of Storage Infrastructure - India faces a deficit in grid-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro Projects. Without adequate storage assets to save afternoon solar surpluses, the national grid must rely on conventional coal-fired plants to maintain system balance.

Baseload Reliability Demands - To ensure grid frequency stability and avoid blackouts, the power system requires steady baseload power. As gas-based power generation has declined, coal has remained the primary source of operational reliability.

Marginal Cost Pricing Limitations - Domestic power market pricing mechanisms remain linked to fossil fuel costs. Consequently, spikes in global commodity benchmarks like Brent crude continue to drive up domestic electricity tariffs, even as renewable capacity increases.

3. Measures for Energy System Transformation

To achieve genuine energy self-reliance, India must shift its policy focus from capacity expansion to full system transformation -

Developing Storage Assets - Deploying targeted public incentives and implementing the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for advanced chemistry cells to scale up utility-scale battery banks and pumped hydro storage.

Modernizing Grid Transmission - Upgrading regional load dispatch centers with AI-driven forecasting tools to better balance variable renewable inputs with real-time demand fluctuations.

Reforming Power Markets - Redesigning electricity trading platforms to uncouple renewable energy pricing from the marginal cost of thermal generation, ensuring green energy can scale affordably.

Conclusion

India's energy challenge is no longer just about generating more green power; it requires building a resilient grid where renewables can reliably replace fossil fuels in daily electricity generation. Until storage infrastructure and grid flexibility are fully integrated, the clean energy transition will remain dependent on coal. Addressing these core bottlenecks is essential to insulate the economy from global energy shocks and secure long-term, sustainable energy autonomy.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-us-ends-russia-oil-waiver-implications-for-india/article71018329.ece

2. Rupee Depreciation, Available Realised Equity and Road Dust (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy

Topic - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; External Sector; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Sub-Topic - Balance of Payments (BoP) Crisis, Current Account vs. Capital Account Dynamics, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Squeeze, Monetary Policy Dilemmas, and External Sector Resiliency.

1. Introduction

Three months into the intensifying West Asia geopolitical conflict, India has successfully managed to prevent widespread domestic energy shortages. However, the economic burden-sharing of higher global energy prices between the public and private sectors has officially begun. While retail prices are being raised, further upward calibrations will be required to induce necessary behavioral adjustments among households and firms. Crucially, the true underlying pressure point for the Indian macroeconomy is not immediate energy logistics, but the Balance of Payments (BoP) and the stability of the Indian Rupee. The author stresses that identifying the unique nature of this currency episode is vital because the structural drivers of this external crisis differ completely from past historical episodes.

2. Two Unique Elements of the Current BoP Crisis

Unlike past macro-fiscal shocks, the current pressure on the external sector features two unprecedented characteristics -

A. A Chronic Underlying Phenomenon

1. External pressures heavily pre-date the recent escalation of the West Asia conflict.
2. For the first time in several decades, India's Balance of Payments (BoP) has been in a net deficit for two consecutive years, and the country is currently on course to record a third successive deficit. This persistent trend points to a chronic, underlying structural vulnerability rather than a temporary external shock.

B. Capital Account Origin vs. Current Account Origin

1. In typical historical currency crises, a widening Current Account Deficit (CAD)—driven by excessive imports—becomes heavily dependent on short-term, volatile capital inflows. When those inflows dry up, the rupee depreciates, forcing policymakers to squeeze the CAD via demand compression.
2. In this current episode, the Current Account Deficit has remained benign, averaging less than 1% of GDP over the past three years.
3. Instead, the pressure is driven entirely by a severe contraction on the Capital Account. Net capital inflows, which historically averaged 2.5% of GDP pre-pandemic, have consistently slowed since 2023 and completely dried up by 2025, triggering strong downward pressure on the rupee.

3. The Genesis - The Squeeze on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

The structural slowdown on the capital account is driven by changes in international investment behavior -

The Interdependence on Global Yields - Between 2010 and 2025, India's net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows showed a strong correlation with US 10-year Treasury bond yields.

The Yield Correlation - When US yields were low, global capital sought out emerging markets, leading to an inflow of FDI into India. Conversely, as US yields hardened over the last two years due to persistent inflation and tight fiscal conditions in the US, global net FDI inflows into India dried up.

The "Push" Factor Dominance - India's FDI inflows since 2010 have been heavily governed by global liquidity "push" factors rather than domestic "pull" factors. The last time India experienced a domestic, pull-factored FDI boom was during the strong corporate capital expenditure (CapEx) cycle of 2005–2010.

The Vietnam Comparison - In contrast to India's variable inflows, Vietnam has consistently attracted FDI inflows above 4% of its GDP, maintaining this pace regardless of shifting global interest rate cycles.

4. The Macroeconomic Pincer Effect

The combination of tight global financial conditions and localized energy shocks creates a dual pressure point -

Elevated Global Yields - Sticky inflation and complex fiscal situations in developed economies mean US bond yields are likely to remain elevated for longer, keeping capital tightly contained within Western markets.

The Crude Oil Multiplier - Due to West Asian conflict disruptions and shipping lane bottlenecks, global crude prices are projected to remain in triple digits ($100+ per barrel) as supply stabilization takes time while demand holds steady.

The $100 Billion Deficit Warning - Even if trade through the Strait of Hormuz remains partially open, high oil prices are on track to more than double India's CAD, pushing it close to $100 billion for the current fiscal year. This combination of dry capital accounts and an expanding trade bill creates a pincer effect on the BoP.

5. The First Line of Défense and the Self-Fulfilling Hedging Spiral

The Exchange Rate as a Shock Absorber - The Reserve Bank of India's initial response has been to let the rupee gradually depreciate. This serves as an automatic stabilizer - a weaker currency discourages non-essential imports and improves export price competitiveness, helping narrow the CAD via "expenditure switching."

The Risk of an Overshooting Currency - However, relying exclusively on currency depreciation to close a massive BoP gap creates a major financial risk.

The Hedging Spiral - If the rupee drops too rapidly, foreign institutional investors, external commercial borrowers, and multinational firms face an incentive to aggressively hedge their existing Indian assets. This surge in defensive hedging increases the demand for US dollars, creating a self-fulfilling downward spiral that pushes the rupee far below its fundamental equilibrium value.

6. Reassessing Traditional Policy Interventions

The current capital-account crisis renders traditional monetary and fiscal options counterproductive -

The Failure of Demand Compression - In past crises, like the 2013 Taper Tantrum, the standard solution was to implement "expenditure compression"—tightening fiscal spending and raising interest rates to suppress domestic demand and lower the import bill.

The Current Economic Slack - Today, India's core inflation is stable at a low 2–3%, indicating significant economic slack. Furthermore, a highly anticipated private corporate investment cycle remains delayed due to global geopolitical uncertainties.

The Danger of Pro-Cyclical Tightening - Implementing macro-fiscal demand compression in this environment would be counterproductive. It would slow down domestic growth and cannibalize public capital expenditure to fund rising fuel and fertilizer subsidies. This slowdown would reduce corporate profitability, discouraging the foreign capital inflows needed to fix the BoP.

7. The Policy Solution - A Foreign Capital Augmentation Circuit Breaker

To stop the self-fulfilling depreciation loop without slowing economic growth, India requires an immediate policy shift -

The Structural Circuit Breaker - Policymakers must deploy targeted foreign capital augmentation measures to pull in near-term international capital.

Deploying Subsidized Swaps - The central bank should implement a subsidized foreign exchange swap window—similar to the policy deployed successfully during the 2013 crisis—to change investor and importer behavior, inject dollar liquidity, and prevent the rupee from overshooting.

The Ultimate Structural Imperative - The core lesson of this BoP episode is that attracting stable, long-term, and high-volume FDI is a critical macroeconomic necessity. India must implement structural reforms to improve its underlying industrial competitiveness, ensuring it can attract consistent capital independent of global financial cycles.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-key-rupee-depreciation-available-realised-equity-and-road-dust-10707372/**

Question

"Unlike past external sector crises, contemporary pressures on the Indian Rupee are driven by structural shifts on the capital account rather than imbalances on the current account. Elaborate on this distinction and discuss the policy interventions required to stabilize the currency without slowing down domestic economic growth." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's Balance of Payments (BoP) is facing pressure, heading toward a historic third consecutive year of net deficit. While historical currency depreciations—such as the 2013 Taper Tantrum—were caused by wide Current Account Deficits (CAD) driven by high domestic consumption, this current episode is different, originating primarily from structural vulnerabilities within the Capital Account.

2. Elaborating the Capital Account vs. Current Account Structural Split

The Benign Current Account - Over the past three years, India's domestic CAD has remained stable, averaging less than 1% of GDP. Core domestic inflation is low at 2–3%, indicating that the economy is not overheating and that import demand is not driven by excess consumption.

The Capital Account Drain - The external stress is caused by a sharp contraction in capital inflows, which have fallen from a pre-pandemic average of 2.5% of GDP to near-zero net inflows. High interest rates and hardening yields on US 10-year Treasuries have drawn global capital back to Western markets, exposing India's dependence on global liquidity "push" factors rather than strong domestic "pull" factors.

The Geopolitical Pincer Effect - With the West Asia conflict keeping crude oil prices high, India's CAD is projected to expand toward $100 billion. Letting the rupee depreciate naturally helps act as a shock absorber via expenditure switching, but a rapid decline risks triggering a self-fulfilling hedging spiral among foreign investors, putting further pressure on the currency.

3. Policy Interventions Required to Balance Stability and Growth

Traditional solutions focused on compressing demand through interest rate hikes and fiscal tightening would be counterproductive today. Because of existing economic slack and delayed private investment, tightening policy would slow down domestic growth, hurt corporate returns, and discourage the foreign capital needed to stabilize the BoP. Instead, India should deploy targeted capital augmentation strategies -

Implementing Subsidized Forex Swaps - The Reserve Bank of India should introduce a dedicated, subsidized foreign exchange swap window for banks and institutional investors. This measure provides immediate dollar liquidity, anchors market expectations, and stops the self-fulfilling depreciation loop.
Attracting Stable, Long-Term FDI - Moving past a reliance on volatile portfolio flows by easing regulatory compliance for greenfield foreign investments. India must enhance its industrial competitiveness—matching peers like Vietnam, which consistently maintains FDI inflows above 4% of GDP—to ensure steady capital access across global yield cycles.
Promoting Local Currency Trade Invoicing - Expanding bilateral trade frameworks that allow for settlement in Indian Rupees (INR) or alternative non-dollar currencies, structurally reducing the economy's immediate requirement for US dollars during energy market shocks.

Conclusion

The current external sector challenge shows that maintaining macro-stability requires a shift from traditional demand-side restriction to active capital augmentation. By deploying a targeted financial circuit breaker to protect the rupee and implementing structural competitiveness reforms, India can safeguard its external accounts without compromising its domestic economic growth.
Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-key-rupee-depreciation-available-realised-equity-and-road-dust-10707372/

3. Creating Semiconductor Dependency? (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Science & Technology
Topic - Semiconductor technology
Sub-Topic - Data governance and digital sovereignty

Introduction

India has recently accelerated investments in semiconductor manufacturing under initiatives such as the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM). While major progress has been made in attracting assembly, testing, and packaging (ATMP) facilities, concerns remain that India may become dependent on foreign technology, intellectual property, and supply chains. Critics argue that without strengthening chip design, research, fabrication capability, and data sovereignty, India risks entering a "high-investment, low-value" semiconductor ecosystem.

1. Importance of Semiconductors

What are Semiconductors?

1. Semiconductors are essential electronic components used in computers, smartphones, vehicles, telecom systems, AI systems, and defence technologies.

Strategic Importance

1. They form the backbone of the digital economy and modern industrial systems.

Economic Importance

1. Semiconductor industries drive innovation, manufacturing growth, exports, and high-skilled employment.

2. Why India is Investing in Semiconductors

Reducing Import Dependence

1. India imports a significant share of advanced electronic components.

Strategic and National Security Concerns

1. Semiconductor access is increasingly linked with geopolitical competition and technological sovereignty.

Supporting Digital Economy

1. Expanding electronics manufacturing requires reliable chip supply chains.

Attracting Global Investment

1. India seeks to become part of global semiconductor value chains.

3. Current Focus of India's Semiconductor Push

Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging (ATMP)

1. India is primarily attracting facilities focused on packaging and assembly.

Incentive-Based Approach

1. Production-linked incentives (PLI) and subsidies are being used to attract investment.

Emerging Ecosystem

1. New semiconductor parks and fabrication proposals are under development.

4. Concerns Regarding Semiconductor Dependency

Limited Indigenous Capability

1. Much of the core technology and intellectual property remains foreign-controlled.

Focus on Low-Value Segments

1. Assembly and packaging generate lower value compared to chip design and fabrication.

Dependence on Imported Technology

1. India still relies heavily on foreign equipment, materials, and expertise.

Vulnerability to Export Controls

1. Global geopolitical tensions can disrupt technology access and supply chains.

5. Chip Design vs Assembly Debate

High-Value Activities

1. Chip design, architecture, and fabrication capture most of the value in semiconductor supply chains.

Risk of "Assemble but Not Control" Model

1. India may become a manufacturing subcontractor without technological autonomy.

Need for Indigenous R&D

1. Long-term competitiveness depends on innovation and domestic intellectual property creation.

6. Semiconductor Supply Chain Challenges

Capital Intensive Industry

1. Semiconductor fabrication plants require extremely high investment.

Technological Complexity

1. Advanced chips need precision engineering, clean rooms, and specialised equipment.

Resource Requirements

1. Semiconductor fabs consume large amounts of water, power, and rare materials.

7. Data and Digital Sovereignty Concerns

AI and Data Economy

1. AI development increasingly depends on large-scale data processing and chip infrastructure.

Foreign Control Risks

1. External control over computing infrastructure may affect India's digital autonomy.

Strategic Importance of Data Governance

1. Domestic semiconductor capability is linked with national digital sovereignty.

8. Global Semiconductor Geopolitics

US-China Technology Rivalry

1. Semiconductor supply chains are increasingly shaped by strategic competition.

Export Restrictions

1. Countries are imposing restrictions on advanced chip exports and technology transfers.

Supply Chain Fragmentation

1. Nations are trying to build resilient and secure semiconductor ecosystems.

9. Why India Needs a Comprehensive Semiconductor Strategy

Beyond Manufacturing

1. India must focus on design, research, materials, equipment, and talent development.

Building Indigenous IP

1. Domestic intellectual property creation is essential for technological sovereignty.

Developing Skilled Workforce

1. Semiconductor ecosystems require highly trained engineers and researchers.

10. Opportunities for India

Large Talent Pool

1. India already possesses strong software and engineering capabilities.

Growing Electronics Market

1. Rising domestic demand supports semiconductor ecosystem growth.

AI and Emerging Technologies

1. Semiconductor development can support India's ambitions in AI, defence, telecom, and quantum technologies.

11. Government Measures Required

Strengthen Chip Design Ecosystem

1. Expand design-linked incentives and research support.

Invest in R&D and Innovation

1. Promote university-industry collaboration and semiconductor research centres.

Develop Semiconductor Supply Chains

1. Encourage domestic manufacturing of materials, components, and equipment.

Build Strategic Partnerships

1. Collaborate internationally while protecting long-term national interests.

Way Forward

Move Up the Value Chain

1. India should gradually transition from packaging to advanced fabrication and chip design.

Promote Technological Sovereignty

1. Develop indigenous semiconductor intellectual property and research capability.

Ensure Secure Supply Chains

1. Diversify technology partnerships and reduce strategic vulnerabilities.

Integrate Semiconductor Policy with AI and Digital Strategy

1. Chips, AI, and data governance should be treated as interconnected strategic domains.

Conclusion

India's semiconductor push represents a major strategic opportunity, but focusing only on assembly and packaging could create long-term technological dependency. Sustainable semiconductor sovereignty requires investment in chip design, research, fabrication, skilled manpower, and indigenous intellectual property. India must therefore build not only the hardware ecosystem, but also the knowledge and innovation systems that power it.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/creating-semicon-dependency/article71018454.ece**

Question

Q. India's semiconductor mission must move beyond assembly and packaging to achieve technological sovereignty. Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction

Semiconductors are critical to the digital economy, defence systems, AI, and industrial production. India's semiconductor mission seeks to reduce import dependence and strengthen strategic technological capabilities.

Importance of Semiconductor Development

1. Enhances digital and technological sovereignty.
2. Supports electronics manufacturing and AI ecosystems.
3. Reduces vulnerability to global supply chain disruptions.
4. Promotes high-skilled employment and innovation.

Concerns Regarding Current Approach

1. Excessive focus on assembly and packaging creates limited value addition.
2. Dependence on foreign intellectual property and technology persists.
3. Export controls and geopolitical tensions may disrupt access to advanced chips.
4. Limited indigenous research and fabrication capability weakens autonomy.

Measures Required

1. Invest heavily in chip design, fabrication, and R&D.
2. Promote domestic semiconductor intellectual property creation.
3. Develop skilled manpower and research institutions.
4. Build resilient domestic supply chains and strategic partnerships.

Conclusion

India's semiconductor ambitions can succeed only if the country moves beyond low-value manufacturing toward innovation-driven technological capability and semiconductor self-reliance.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/creating-semicon-dependency/article71018454.ece**

4. The Rupee Is Facing an Exogenous Shock - Let's Respond Accordingly (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic - Balance of Payments (BoP)

Sub-Topic - Global geopolitical shocks and Indian economy

Introduction

The Indian rupee has recently witnessed depreciation pressures against the US dollar due to external global developments rather than purely domestic weaknesses. Rising geopolitical tensions, global uncertainty, crude oil price volatility, and foreign capital outflows have increased pressure on emerging market currencies, including the rupee. Economists argue that such "exogenous shocks" require calibrated and pragmatic policy responses instead of panic-driven interventions.

1. Meaning of Exogenous Shock

Definition

1. An exogenous shock refers to an external event that affects an economy from outside the domestic system.

Examples

1. Global wars and geopolitical conflicts
2. Oil price shocks
3. US Federal Reserve interest rate hikes
4. Global financial instability
5. Sudden capital outflows

2. Why the Rupee is Under Pressure

Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) Outflows

1. Global investors often withdraw funds from emerging markets during uncertainty.

Rising Crude Oil Prices

1. India imports a large share of its crude oil requirements.
2. Higher oil prices increase dollar demand and widen the import bill.

Strong US Dollar

1. Higher US interest rates attract global capital towards dollar assets.

Geopolitical Tensions

1. West Asian conflicts and global instability create uncertainty in currency markets.

3. Nature of the Current Rupee Depreciation

Largely External in Origin

1. The recent rupee weakness is primarily linked to global financial and geopolitical developments.

Not Entirely Due to Domestic Weaknesses

1. India's macroeconomic fundamentals remain relatively stable compared to many emerging economies.

Market Sentiment Driven

1. Currency markets often react strongly to uncertainty and risk perceptions.

4. Impact of Rupee Depreciation on India

Negative Impacts

Higher Import Costs

1. Cost of crude oil, electronics, fertilizers, and machinery increases.

Imported Inflation

1. Expensive imports can raise domestic inflation.

Pressure on External Accounts

1. Current account deficit (CAD) may widen.

Increased Debt Burden

1. External debt repayments become costlier in rupee terms.

Positive Impacts

Export Competitiveness

1. Indian exports become relatively cheaper globally.

Support to Services Exports

1. IT and software export earnings may rise in rupee value.

Higher Remittances

1. Foreign remittances convert into more rupees domestically.

5. Role of RBI in Managing Currency Volatility

Forex Market Intervention

1. RBI can sell foreign exchange reserves to reduce excessive volatility.

Monetary Policy Coordination

1. Interest rate decisions influence capital flows and currency stability.

Liquidity Management

1. RBI ensures adequate liquidity while controlling speculative pressures.

6. Why Excessive Intervention Can Be Risky

Rapid Reserve Depletion

1. Aggressive defence of exchange rates can reduce forex reserves quickly.

Artificial Exchange Rate Stability

1. Over-management may distort natural market adjustments.

Unsustainable Strategy

1. Long-term currency stability depends on economic fundamentals, not only intervention.

7. Structural Factors Behind Currency Stability

Strong Economic Growth

1. Sustained productivity growth strengthens currency confidence.

Export Competitiveness

1. Diversified exports reduce external vulnerability.

Stable Capital Flows

1. Long-term FDI is more stable than volatile portfolio investments.

Fiscal Discipline

1. Lower fiscal deficits improve investor confidence.

8. India's Relative Strengths

Strong Forex Reserves

1. India possesses significant foreign exchange reserves compared to many emerging economies.

Diversified Economy

1. Services exports and domestic demand provide resilience.

Improving Manufacturing Base

1. Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes aim to strengthen industrial capacity.

9. Key Policy Responses Needed

Avoid Panic Measures

1. Policymaking should remain measured and data-driven.

Encourage Stable Capital Inflows

1. Promote long-term foreign direct investment (FDI).

Reduce Import Dependence

1. Accelerate renewable energy and domestic manufacturing.

Maintain Macroeconomic Stability

1. Control inflation and fiscal deficits.

10. Long-Term Strategy for Rupee Stability

Strengthen Productive Capacity

1. Currency strength ultimately depends on economic productivity.

Improve Export Ecosystem

1. Expand manufacturing and high-value exports.

Deepen Financial Markets

1. Stronger domestic financial markets reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

Build Energy Security

1. Lower oil dependence reduces external account pressure.

Way Forward

Calibrated Currency Management

1. RBI should smooth excessive volatility rather than target a fixed exchange rate.

Focus on Structural Reforms

1. Productivity, exports, and investment climate are more important than short-term currency defence.

Promote Long-Term Capital

1. Encourage stable investment rather than speculative inflows.

Enhance External Sector Resilience

1. Diversify trade partners, energy sources, and export markets.

Conclusion

The current rupee depreciation reflects a combination of global geopolitical tensions, capital outflows, and external financial shocks. While short-term volatility may continue, India's response should remain pragmatic and stability-oriented. Sustainable currency strength cannot be achieved through intervention alone; it ultimately depends on productivity growth, export competitiveness, macroeconomic discipline, and resilient economic institutions.

Source - **https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/rupee-external-shock-optimal-response-policymakers-west-asia-rbi-fiscal-monetary-policy-11779568064372.html**

Question

Q. The recent depreciation of the Indian rupee is largely driven by external shocks rather than domestic weaknesses. Discuss the causes, consequences, and policy responses required to manage currency volatility. (250 words)

Introduction

The Indian rupee has recently depreciated against the US dollar due to geopolitical tensions, rising crude oil prices, and global capital outflows. Such external disturbances are often referred to as exogenous shocks.

Causes of Rupee Depreciation

1. Rising global uncertainty and geopolitical conflicts
2. Increase in crude oil prices raising import demand for dollars
3. Foreign portfolio investor outflows from emerging markets
4. Strong US dollar due to higher US interest rates

Consequences

1. Higher import costs and imported inflation
2. Increase in current account deficit
3. Costlier external debt repayments
4. However, exports and remittances may benefit

Policy Responses

1. RBI should manage excessive volatility through calibrated intervention
2. Encourage stable long-term capital inflows
3. Strengthen exports and domestic manufacturing
4. Maintain inflation and fiscal discipline
5. Reduce oil import dependence through renewable energy expansion

Conclusion

Currency stability ultimately depends on strong economic fundamentals. India must focus on productivity growth, export competitiveness, and macroeconomic resilience rather than relying solely on short-term currency interventions.

Source - **https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/rupee-external-shock-optimal-response-policymakers-west-asia-rbi-fiscal-monetary-policy-11779568064372.html**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 26.05.2026

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1. From black to grey - on the Sample Registration System – Statistical Report, 2024 (TH)

GS Paper - GS Paper I

Subject - Indian Society

Topic - Population and associated issues; Poverty and developmental issues; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States.

Sub-Topic - Demographic Transition, Total Fertility Rate (TFR), Aging Population Governance, Demographic Dividend Windows, and Regional Health Asymmetries.

1. Introduction

The release of India's Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2024 marks a significant milestone in the country's demographic history. The data confirms that India's rapid population expansion is slowing down, moving the country away from historical "population explosion" fears toward a phase of population stabilization and societal aging.

While India continues to benefit from a substantial demographic dividend in 2026, dropping birth rates below the natural replacement level highlight deep structural challenges. These include a shrinking long-term workforce, mounting pressure on social security systems, and widening development gaps between northern and southern states.

2. The Quantitative Shift - Declining Population Growth Metrics

The 2024 SRS report outlines several key demographic changes across India's population framework -

The TFR Threshold Deficit - India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9. This sits below the critical 2.1 replacement level—the threshold required for a population to replace itself from one generation to the next without migration.

The Birth Rate Contraction - The national birth rate dropped from 21 births per 1,000 population in 2014 to 18.3 in 2024.

Diverging Mortality Paths - Reflecting broader improvements in public health, the national death rate decreased slightly from 6.7 to 6.4 deaths per 1,000 population.

Better Child Survival Rates - The national Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) showed steady improvement, dropping to 24 deaths per 1,000 live births, pointing to better child survival and expanded neonatal healthcare access.

3. The Double-Edged Sword - Maximizing the Demographic Dividend

Even with slowing population growth, India remains one of the youngest major nations globally -

The Median Age Baseline - India's median age is 29.2 years, significantly younger than aging industrial economies like China, Japan, and multiple European nations.

The Workforce Window - As of 2026, India is home to an estimated 370 to 380 million youth within the vital 15–29 age bracket.

The Youth Aggregate - More than 65% of the total domestic population is under 35 years of age, providing India with a valuable window of economic productivity, innovation, and global labor competitiveness.

4. Structural Drivers Behind Falling Fertility

The drop in India's fertility rate is driven by structural socioeconomic shifts rather than coercive state interventions -

Rapid Urbanization - Urban migration has reshaped domestic structures, encouraging smaller family norms due to living space constraints and shifting lifestyle patterns.

Female Educational Empowerment - Better access to higher education, particularly for women, has delayed marriage ages and altered reproductive choices.

Access to Reproductive Healthcare - Expanded access to modern contraception options and family planning services has helped reduce unintended pregnancies.

Rising Costs of Living - Higher costs associated with child-rearing, quality education, and urban healthcare have changed economic considerations, making smaller families a preferred choice.

5. Emerging Challenges of a Greying Society

As birth rates slow, extended life expectancies (now averaging approximately 72 years) introduce new structural vulnerabilities -

Workforce Contraction Risks - A long-term decline in fertility will eventually shrink the active working-age population, potentially impacting industrial productivity and GDP growth.

Fiscal Pressure on Safety Nets - A rising dependency ratio means a smaller base of active workers will support a growing senior population, straining formal pension frameworks and public finances.

Geriatric Care Deficits - The public healthcare system remains primarily set up for infectious diseases and maternal-child health, leaving it underprepared for the rise in chronic, age-related conditions.

6. Regional and Rural-Urban Development Disparities

The macro-level statistics mask deep inequalities between geographic regions and urban-rural divides

The North-South Asymmetry - Southern states have consistently lowered their fertility rates well below replacement levels, accelerating their transition toward older populations. Conversely, several high-burden northern states maintain higher birth rates and slower demographic transitions.

The IMR Distribution Gap - Although the national IMR has improved to 24, high-burden northern districts continue to report elevated infant mortality numbers.

Unequal Infrastructure Access - Persistent gaps in quality healthcare infrastructure, literacy rates, and social awareness between rural areas and urban centres prevent uniform demographic development.

7. Way Forward

Investing in Youth Capabilities - Capitalizing on the remaining demographic dividend window by upgrading public education systems, expanding vocational skill programs, and creating jobs matched with emerging technologies.

Building a Silver Economy Infrastructure - Developing age-friendly public infrastructure, introducing portable pension plans for informal sector workers, and building dedicated geriatric wards across primary and secondary healthcare networks.

Adopting Lifelong Productive Aging Policies - Raising retirement ages gradually and creating part-time, flexible employment opportunities to keep healthy seniors active in the workforce.

Deploying Targeted Regional Healthcare Allocations - Focusing public health funding and maternal-care interventions on lagging northern states to reduce infant mortality rates and balance demographic development.

Conclusion

India's current demographic transition is shifting the country's population profile "from black to grey," bringing both developmental opportunities and structural challenges. While the nation retains a valuable competitive edge through its youthful population in 2026, dropping fertility rates require early long-term planning. By prioritizing investments in youth skills, reforming elder welfare systems, and narrowing regional development gaps, India can manage this demographic transition effectively, securing a sustainable and inclusive economic future.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/from-black-to-grey-on-the-sample-registration-system-statistical-report-2024/article71021273.ece

Question

"India's contemporary demographic transition presents a complex dual challenge - maximizing a closing window of youth productivity while preparing for the structural demands of an aging society. Elucidate this statement in light of the SRS Statistical Report 2024, and suggest policy measures to navigate this transition." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India's SRS Statistical Report 2024 highlights a key shift in the country's population dynamics, with the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) dropping to 1.9, below the 2.1 replacement level. This drop indicates that India is moving away from past population growth anxieties toward a dual-track demographic phase - managing a valuable but time-limited youth dividend while preparing for a greying population.

2. Elucidating the Dual Challenge

A. Maximizing the Closing Window of Youth Productivity

1. With a median age of 29.2 years and over 65% of citizens under 35, India possesses a substantial working-age population in 2026.
2. However, this demographic dividend is time-limited. As dropping fertility rates gradually reduce the number of youth entering the workforce over the coming decades, India must quickly convert this demographic advantage into economic growth before the population window closes.

B. Managing the Structural Demands of an Aging Society

1. Improved public health measures have raised national life expectancy to around 72 years, while infant mortality has dropped to 24.
2. This combination of lower fertility and longer life spans means India will soon face the pressures of a greying society. A rising dependency ratio will put strain on public finances, formal pension systems, and healthcare networks that are under-equipped for chronic geriatric care.
3. This challenge is further complicated by regional imbalances - southern states are aging faster due to rapid fertility declines, while parts of the north continue to experience high child mortality and slower demographic transitions.

3. Proposed Policy Measures

Navigating this demographic transition requires a balanced policy approach addressing both youth capability and elder welfare -

Upgrading Youth Skills and Employment - Moving beyond standard education to provide targeted technical training and employment support, ensuring the current youth population can drive higher economic productivity.

Strengthening Social Security Nets - Introducing flexible, portable pension models for informal sector workers to prevent elderly poverty as family structures shift.

Reforming the Healthcare Matrix - Upgrading primary health centres to include specialized geriatric care services, alongside localized maternal health interventions in high-burden northern states to achieve more balanced demographic indicators.

Conclusion

The 2024 SRS report shows that population metrics are dynamic, shifting from growth concerns toward aging trends. True demographic resilience requires looking ahead. By pairing human capital investments for the youth with structured social security and health reforms for seniors, India can successfully manage this transition, transforming its changing population profile into a foundation for stable, long-term economic growth.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/from-black-to-grey-on-the-sample-registration-system-statistical-report-2024/article71021273.ece**

2. Delhi's Dust Pollution Problem Is Easy to Solve. Government Must Get Its Act Together (IE)

GS Paper III - Environment and Ecology

Topic - Environmental pollution and degradation; Infrastructure; Conservation.

Sub-Topic - Particulate Matter (PM_ {10} and PM_ {2.5}) Management, Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSM), Urban Environmental Governance, and Inter-Agency Coordination.

1. Introduction

The toxic particulate matter (PM) burden in National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi constitutes a chronic public health and urban crisis. While controlling systemic emissions from the industrial, transport, and agricultural sectors demands structurally complex and economically disruptive policy interventions, managing dust pollution offers a unique advantage. It can be significantly reduced through non-disruptive, operationally straightforward, and localized municipal tasks. However, as an investigation highlighted in Delhi's dedicated dust-mitigation infrastructure—particularly its fleet of Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSM)—remains severely underutilized due to a lack of coordinated administrative intent.

2. Quantitative Scale and Sources of Dust Pollution

Urban dust is a year-round pollutant whose atmospheric concentration peaks during specific seasonal changes -

The Contribution Metrics - Road dust and construction debris constitute a major share of Delhi's air pollution matrix. It accounts for nearly 41% of PM_ {10} pollutants and 38% of the finer PM_{2.5} particles during the dry summer months.

Primary Origins - The crisis is driven by -

1. Unenforced safety measures at construction and demolition sites.

2. Unpaved roadsides and loose soil accumulation along pavements.
3. Silt resuspension triggered by the continuous movement of heavy commercial vehicles.

The Aridity Multiplier - Dry meteorological conditions during the summer act as a force multiplier, drying out soil and accelerating the suspension of particulate matter into the lower atmosphere.

3. Operational Bottlenecks in Dust Infrastructure (The MRSM Crisis)

The persistent high levels of dust pollution point directly to operational failures within municipal bodies -

Severe Underutilization - The city's primary dust-cleaning assets, the Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSMs), consistently operate far below their rated operational capacity for much of the year.

Uneven Spatial Deployment - MRSM allocation is highly skewed and confined to a few premium zones. Better-funded municipal wards receive regular mechanical sweeping, while poorer, high-pollution peri-urban pockets are neglected.

The Atmospheric Diffusion Paradox - Because air pollution does not respect arbitrary municipal or administrative boundaries, cleaning one zone while leaving an adjacent ward uncleaned defeats the purpose. Wind patterns and traffic movement instantly redistribute loose particulate matter from dirty zones across the entire city.

4. The Reactive Governance Syndrome

The Seasonal Fallacy - Delhi's urban local bodies have historically treated poor air quality as a temporary winter phenomenon, ignoring scientific studies that demonstrate heavy pollution levels year-round.

Public-Apathy Response Matrix - MRSM deployment peaks only during winter, when visual smog draws intense public attention and judicial scrutiny. This reactive approach leaves summer dust emissions unchecked, even though dust levels naturally peak during dry, warm seasons.

The Illusion of Helplessness - Unlike agricultural crop-residue burning (stubbliness) or cross-border geographical winds—which depend on neighboring states—road dust is entirely within the jurisdiction of local urban bodies. The text notes that governments cannot claim helplessness over an issue that relies on local municipal execution.

5. Comparative Best Practices - The Indore Model

Technological and Financial Viability - The text highlights the successful solid waste and dust management model implemented by Indore, the cleanest city in India.

The Key Lesson - Indore's experience proves that mechanical dust control is neither technologically complex nor financially prohibitive. It requires systematic tracking, performance audits, and basic municipal discipline.

6. Institutional Reforms and the Way Forward

A Unified Dust-Management Strategy - Establishing an integrated platform coordinating civic municipal bodies, the Public Works Department (PWD), and pollution-control agencies to break down institutional silos.

Real-Time Digital Audits - Deploying GPS-tracking and real-time telemetry on all MRSM units to monitor route coverage, sweeping hours, and waste collection amounts, introducing transparency into municipal tasks.

Judicial Intervention - Just as previous landmark judicial interventions pushed forward clean fuel transitions (such as CNG adoption), tighter emission standards, and green belt protections, the judiciary must now prod Delhi's local authorities to execute mandatory, year-round dust mitigation protocols.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/delhis-dust-pollution-problem-is-easy-to-solve-government-must-get-its-act-together-10707686/

Question

Unlike industrial or transboundary emissions, urban dust pollution can be mitigated through operationally non-disruptive local interventions. Elaborate on the structural and administrative bottlenecks that hinder effective dust management in Indian metropolitan cities, and suggest institutional measures to overcome them." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Urban dust pollution, originating from construction activities, unpaved roadsides, and silt resuspension, constitutes a significant share of the particulate matter burden in metropolitan cities like Delhi, accounting for nearly 41% of summer PM_{10} loads. While controlling industrial or cross-border agricultural emissions requires complex economic trade-offs, dust control offers a localized, low-cost path to improving air quality that is currently hindered by administrative bottlenecks.

2. Structural and Administrative Bottlenecks

The Seasonal Bias and Reactive Governance - municipal authorities frequently treat air pollution as a winter-centric crisis. This reactive approach concentrates dust-mitigation infrastructure, like Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSM), in winter while neglecting dry summer periods when aridity naturally increases dust suspension.

Institutional Silos and Fragmented Accountability - Road ownership and maintenance are split across multiple overlapping agencies, including Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), the Public Works Department (PWD), and development authorities. This fragmentation leads to a buck-passing culture regarding roadside paving, vacuum sweeping, and water sprinkling.

Spatial Disparity in Resource Allocation - MRSM deployment is often unevenly skewed toward premium, well-funded municipal zones. Because air pollution does not respect administrative boundaries, ignoring high-burden peri-urban pockets allows traffic and shifting wind patterns to quickly recirculate dust across the entire city.

Lack of Performance Monitoring - The absence of real-time monitoring and independent operational audits allows civic infrastructure to remain underutilized, creating a gap between capacity and field execution.

3. Proposed Institutional Measures

Adopting a Unified Command Structure - Establishing a single, well-coordinated dust-management task force that integrates ULBs, the PWD, and state pollution control boards to remove jurisdictional overlaps.

Mandating Real-Time Performance Audits - Integrating GPS tracking, digital telemetry, and automated performance logs onto all municipal sweeping and water-sprinkling fleets to ensure transparent, multi-shift operations.

Replicating Proven National Models - Scaling up the Indore Model across Indian metro areas, demonstrating that systematic route mapping, localized public safety zoning, and regular municipal maintenance can manage dust without high costs.

Judicial and Regulatory Accountability - Transitioning from broad guidelines to legally binding, year-round municipal performance standards, backed by strict penalties for administrative negligence.

Conclusion

Managing road and construction dust is one of the most accessible goals in urban environmental governance. Overcoming the current crisis requires moving past reactive winter responses toward consistent, year-round municipal management. By fixing inter-agency silos, standardizing machine deployment across all urban wards, and enforcing real-time performance tracking, Indian cities can clean their air and protect public health through sustainable, local governance.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/delhis-dust-pollution-problem-is-easy-to-solve-government-must-get-its-act-together-10707686/**

3. SSE - A Vital Cog in The CSR Chain (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Social Justice

Topic - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Sub-Topic - Public-Private Partnerships in Development

Introduction

India mandates certain companies to spend 2% of their average net profits on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. While substantial CSR funds are available annually, effective deployment remains a challenge due to limited transparency, monitoring issues, and weak last-mile implementation. The Social Stock Exchange (SSE) offers an innovative mechanism to channel CSR resources towards credible social impact projects in a transparent and accountable manner.

1. Understanding the Social Stock Exchange (SSE)

What is SSE?

1. Social Stock Exchange is a platform established under SEBI.
2. It connects social enterprises and non-profit organisations with donors, investors, and CSR contributors.
3. It aims to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in social financing.

Objectives

1. Mobilise greater resources for social development.
2. Improve credibility of non-profit organisations.
3. Enable impact-oriented funding.
4. Promote outcome-based social investments.

2. Importance of CSR in India

Large Pool of Funds

1. India generates significant CSR resources annually through mandatory corporate contributions.
2. These funds can support education, healthcare, skill development, environmental protection, and livelihood projects.

Bridging Development Gaps

1. CSR complements government welfare programmes.
2. Helps address local developmental challenges.
3. Encourages private sector participation in nation-building.

3. Why SSE Can Strengthen CSR Delivery

Enhanced Transparency

1. Funding flows can be tracked more effectively.

2. Donors can monitor project implementation and outcomes.
3. Reduces risks of fund diversion and misuse.

Improved Accountability

1. Social enterprises are required to meet disclosure and reporting standards.
2. Regular monitoring increases public trust.

Better Resource Allocation

1. CSR funds can reach verified and impact-oriented organisations.
2. Resources can be directed towards underserved regions and sectors.

Outcome-Based Financing

1. Focus shifts from expenditure to measurable outcomes.
2. Encourages evidence-based social interventions.

4. Challenges in the Existing CSR Ecosystem

Fragmented NGO Sector

1. Large number of NGOs with varying levels of capacity and governance.
2. Difficulty in identifying credible implementation partners.

Monitoring Difficulties

1. Measuring social impact remains complex.
2. Lack of standardised evaluation mechanisms.

Limited Awareness

1. Many corporates and NGOs have limited understanding of SSE mechanisms.
2. Adoption remains relatively low.

Regulatory Compliance Burden

1. Smaller organisations may struggle to meet reporting and compliance requirements.

5. Potential Benefits of Scaling Up SSE

Strengthening Social Capital

1. Creates a structured ecosystem for social investments.
2. Encourages long-term development partnerships.

Encouraging Impact Investing

1. Attracts investors interested in measurable social outcomes.
2. Promotes innovative financing models.

Supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. Enhances financing for poverty reduction, education, healthcare, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

Improving Regional Development

1. Helps direct resources to geographically underserved districts and communities.

6. International Experience

Global Examples

Several countries have experimented with mechanisms that connect social enterprises and impact investors -

1. United Kingdom
2. Canada
3. Singapore
4. South Africa

Key Lessons

1. Strong regulatory oversight is essential.
2. Transparency builds investor confidence.
3. Effective impact measurement frameworks are critical for success.

7. Challenges Before SSE Expansion

Building Trust

1. Investors and corporates require confidence in impact assessment systems.

Capacity Constraints

1. Many grassroots organisations need technical support to comply with SSE requirements.

Standardisation Issues

1. Need for common frameworks to measure social impact across sectors.

Risk of Exclusion

1. Smaller NGOs may be left out if compliance requirements become excessively complex.

Way Forward

Strengthen Impact Assessment

1. Develop standardised social impact measurement frameworks.
2. Encourage third-party audits and independent verification.

Build NGO Capacity

1. Provide training on governance, reporting, and compliance requirements.
2. Support smaller organisations in meeting SSE standards.

Increase Awareness

1. Promote SSE among corporates, philanthropies, and social enterprises.
2. Encourage wider participation through outreach programmes.

Leverage Technology

1. Use digital platforms for real-time monitoring and transparency.
2. Improve accessibility and reporting efficiency.

Encourage CSR-SSE Integration

1. Facilitate seamless routing of CSR funds through verified SSE mechanisms.
2. Promote outcome-oriented social investments.

Conclusion

The Social Stock Exchange represents an important innovation in India's development finance ecosystem. By improving transparency, accountability, and impact measurement, SSE can enhance the effectiveness of CSR spending and strengthen social sector outcomes. With appropriate regulatory support and institutional capacity building, SSE can become a powerful instrument for inclusive and sustainable development.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/social-stock-exchange-a-vital-cog-in-the-csr-chain/article71026275.ece**

Question

Q. Examine the role of the Social Stock Exchange (SSE) in improving the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending in India. Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with its implementation. (250 Words)

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as an important source of development finance in India. The Social Stock Exchange (SSE), introduced under SEBI, seeks to channel resources towards credible social enterprises and non-profit organisations while ensuring transparency and accountability.

Role of SSE in Strengthening CSR

Improving Transparency

1. Enables tracking of fund utilisation and project outcomes.
2. Enhances donor confidence through disclosure requirements.

Strengthening Accountability

1. Promotes standardised reporting and impact assessment.
2. Reduces risks of fund diversion and misuse.

Facilitating Efficient Resource Allocation

1. Connects CSR contributors with verified social enterprises.
2. Supports funding for underserved sectors and regions.

Encouraging Outcome-Based Financing

1. Focuses on measurable developmental outcomes rather than mere expenditure.

Challenges

1. Limited awareness among corporates and NGOs.
2. Capacity constraints of smaller organisations.
3. Difficulties in measuring social impact.
4. Compliance burdens and regulatory complexities.

Conclusion

The Social Stock Exchange has the potential to transform India's social financing ecosystem by improving transparency, accountability, and impact orientation. Strengthening institutional capacity, awareness, and impact assessment frameworks will be crucial for realising its full potential in advancing inclusive development.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/social-stock-exchange-a-vital-cog-in-the-csr-chain/article71026275.ece**

4. India's Strategic Autonomy in A Changing Global Order (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Social J III – Security, Globalisation and Strategic Affairsustice

Topic - Non-Alignment and Multi-Alignment

Sub-Topic - Great Power Competition

Introduction

Strategic autonomy refers to a nation's ability to make independent foreign policy and security decisions based on its national interests without excessive dependence on any external power. As geopolitical competition intensifies among major powers, India faces the challenge of preserving its autonomy while safeguarding its economic, security, and developmental interests.

1. Evolution of India's Strategic Autonomy

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Era

1. India pursued an independent foreign policy during the Cold War.

2. Avoided formal alignment with either the US-led or Soviet-led blocs.
3. Emphasised sovereignty, anti-colonialism, and peaceful coexistence.

Post-Cold War Adaptation

1. End of bipolarity reduced relevance of traditional non-alignment.
2. India diversified strategic partnerships.
3. Greater emphasis on economic integration and national interests.

Multi-Alignment Strategy

1. Simultaneously engages with multiple power centres.
2. Maintains relations with the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan, ASEAN, and the Global South.
3. Seeks flexibility rather than rigid alliances.

2. Emerging Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

Intensifying Great Power Rivalry

1. Growing competition between the United States and China.
2. Increasing pressure on countries to align with competing blocs.
3. Shrinking diplomatic space for neutral positioning.

Geoeconomic Fragmentation

1. Trade restrictions, sanctions, and technology controls are becoming common.
2. Economic interdependence is increasingly linked to geopolitical considerations.

Regional Security Concerns

1. Border tensions and maritime security challenges require stronger partnerships.
2. National security imperatives sometimes constrain diplomatic flexibility.

Weaponisation of Economic Tools

1. Use of sanctions, export controls, and financial restrictions.
2. Dependence on external supply chains can create vulnerabilities.

3. Limitations of Traditional Strategic Autonomy

Ambiguity in Crisis Situations

1. Balancing multiple partners becomes difficult during major conflicts.
2. Strategic neutrality may be interpreted as indecision.

Reduced Influence

1. Excessive caution can limit India's ability to shape regional and global outcomes.
2. Major powers increasingly expect clearer positions on critical issues.

Economic Vulnerabilities

1. Dependence on foreign technology, energy, and capital can restrict policy choices.

4. Why India Needs a Refined Approach

From Passive Balance to Active Engagement

1. Strategic autonomy should not mean strategic silence.
2. India must actively shape outcomes rather than merely react to events.

Leadership of the Global South

1. India can act as a bridge between developed and developing nations.
2. Promote equitable global governance reforms.

Issue-Based Partnerships

1. Collaborate with different countries on specific issues.
2. Security, technology, trade, energy, and climate partnerships can vary according to national interest.

5. Pillars of a Modern Strategic Autonomy Framework

Economic Strength

1. Strong domestic economy enhances diplomatic flexibility.
2. Reduces vulnerability to external shocks.

Technological Self-Reliance

1. Investments in semiconductors, AI, cyber security, and critical technologies.
2. Reduces dependence on foreign technology ecosystems.

Defence Capability

1. Strengthening indigenous defence production.
2. Diversifying defence procurement sources.

Supply Chain Resilience

1. Securing access to critical minerals, energy resources, and strategic technologies.
2. Building trusted supply chain networks.

Diplomatic Agility

1. Maintaining constructive relations with competing powers.
2. Enhancing engagement in multilateral and monoliteral forums.

6. Opportunities for India

Multipolar World Order

1. Emergence of multiple power centres creates greater strategic space.
2. India can leverage its position as a major balancing power.

Global South Leadership

1. Growing recognition of India as a voice of developing countries.
2. Opportunity to influence global governance reforms.

Strategic Partnerships

1. Expanding cooperation through platforms such as Quad, BRICS, SCO, G20, and I2U2.
2. Enhances India's international influence without formal alliances.

Way Forward

Strengthen Domestic Capabilities

1. Enhance economic competitiveness and technological innovation.
2. Reduce external dependencies in critical sectors.

Pursue Flexible Diplomacy

1. Maintain issue-based partnerships rather than bloc politics.
2. Preserve decision-making independence.

Build Regional Leadership

1. Strengthen neighbourhood engagement.
2. Promote regional connectivity and economic integration.

Enhance Strategic Communication

1. Clearly articulate India's interests and positions.
2. Increase predictability and credibility in foreign policy.

Conclusion

In an increasingly fragmented and competitive international system, strategic autonomy remains vital for India's national interests. However, it must evolve from a policy of balancing powers to one of shaping outcomes. By combining economic strength, technological capability, military

preparedness, and diplomatic agility, India can preserve its autonomy while emerging as a leading power in the evolving multipolar world.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/indias-strategic-autonomy-needs-a-reset

Question

Q. Strategic autonomy remains a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. Examine the challenges to India's strategic autonomy in the emerging multipolar world order and suggest measures to strengthen it. (250 Words)

Introduction

Strategic autonomy refers to a nation's ability to pursue independent foreign and security policies guided by national interests. In a rapidly changing global order characterised by great power competition and geopolitical fragmentation, India faces new challenges in maintaining its strategic autonomy.

Challenges

Great Power Rivalry

1. Intensifying competition between major powers narrows diplomatic space.
2. Growing expectations for countries to align with competing blocs.

Economic Dependencies

1. Dependence on foreign technology, capital, energy, and supply chains can constrain policy choices.

Security Pressures

1. Regional security challenges necessitate deeper strategic partnerships.
2. Balancing security cooperation with policy independence becomes difficult.

Geoeconomic Coercion

1. Sanctions, export controls, and technology restrictions increasingly influence international relations.

Measures to Strengthen Strategic Autonomy

Build Economic and Technological Strength

1. Promote innovation, manufacturing, and critical technology development.
2. Enhance resilience against external economic shocks.

Strengthen Defence Self-Reliance

1. Expand indigenous defence production and diversify procurement sources.

Adopt Issue-Based Partnerships

1. Cooperate selectively across sectors while preserving independent decision-making.

Enhance Diplomatic Engagement

1. Strengthen leadership in multilateral forums and deepen ties with the Global South.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy remains essential for safeguarding India's sovereignty and national interests. Its success increasingly depends on domestic capabilities, economic resilience, technological advancement, and proactive diplomacy rather than mere non-alignment.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/indias-strategic-autonomy-needs-a-reset

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EDITORIAL OF THE DAY-27.05.2026

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1. India's Energy Strategy Needs Price Correction (TH)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and Infrastructure

Topic - Infrastructure - Energy; Government budgeting; Mobilization of resources; Inflation.

Sub-Topic - Energy Security, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) Under-Recoveries, Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR), Fiscal Deficit Pressures, and Fuel Price Rationalization.

1. Introduction

The geopolitical crisis in West Asia has transformed the Strait of Hormuz from a traditional flashpoint into a major fault line within the global energy economy. With the maritime trade corridor experiencing continuous disruptions, energy security has become deeply tied to international geopolitics. For an economy like India, which imports the overwhelming majority of its crude oil needs, this prolonged disruption serves as a significant test. It highlights both the strength of recent diversification efforts and the fiscal limits of shielding domestic consumers indefinitely from rising international market realities.

2. Direct Shock Manifestations in Global Energy Markets

The maritime disruptions in West Asia have triggered immediate cascading effects across international supply chains -

Surging Commodity and Logistics Costs - Brent crude benchmarks have jumped sharply, while ocean freight rates and marine insurance premiums have climbed to multi-year highs.

The African Diversion Route - Maritime freight is being rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, extending standard delivery timelines by weeks and inflating transportation expenses.

Gas Infrastructure Constraints - Global natural gas networks face strong upward pressure following infrastructure shutdowns linked to liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facilities in Qatar.

International Price Divergence - While advanced economies experienced steep fuel price increases of roughly 25% on average—pushing petrol prices above the equivalent of ₹220/litre in Germany and ₹204/litre in the UK—retail prices at Indian pumps remained stable, hovering near ₹95 per litre.

3. India's Strategic Insulation & Energy Architecture Initiatives

To mitigate this disruption, the government has used a combination of supply diversification, diplomatic agreements, and internal resource management -

Sourcing Basket Diversification - India expanded its crude procurement matrix beyond the Persian Gulf, building trade relationships with non-Gulf suppliers across Russia, the United States, West Africa, and the Atlantic basin to keep refinery throughput high.

The SPR Storage Compact - Leveraging the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) exit from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), India signed a strategic agreement with the UAE to store 30 million barrels of crude oil within India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) infrastructure.

The Ujjwala Supply Response - To safeguard the massive expansion of domestic cooking gas access—which grew from 14.5 crore connections in 2014 to over 33 crores—refineries were directed to increase domestic LPG production by nearly 50% during peak crisis phases.

Essential Sector Gas Allocation - Natural gas routing was explicitly prioritized to shield critical industrial value chains. All 25 domestic fertilizer plants continued to receive approximately 70% of their gas allocations to preserve agricultural output.

Diplomatic and Naval Escorts - The state deployed naval assets to the Gulf of Oman alongside active diplomatic engagements to secure alternative shipping options.

4. Financial Pressures on Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)

The strategy of domestic price insulation has shifted the financial burden onto public entities, creating significant fiscal vulnerabilities -

Rising Under-Recoveries - State-run Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are absorbing the difference by selling retail fuel below market-linked costs, generating under-recoveries.

Severe Daily Financial Drain - During peak market volatility, daily operational under-recovery losses for OMCs reached estimated ranges of ₹700 crore to ₹800 crore per day.

Fiscal Defense Measures - The government reduced domestic excise duties and imposed temporary export restrictions on refined fuels to preserve inventory within the domestic market.

The Subsidy Strain - While politically prudent over short horizons, subcontinental energy subsidies of this scale weaken the balance sheets of public energy firms, strain state finances, and distort pricing signals that encourage conservation.

5. Deconstructing the Macro-Economic Adjustment Opportunity

The context in early 2026 provides a workable window for a calibrated, structural price correction -

Moderate Domestic Inflation Baseline - Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation remained stable between 3.2% and 3.5% through the first four months of 2026. This moderate inflation profile creates the economic room needed for partial price rationalization without risking runaway retail inflation.

The Limits of Incomplete Revisions - The government initially implemented piecemeal increases that raised petroleum prices cumulatively by about 7%. However, this piecemeal approach has proven insufficient to match global crude trends or meaningfully reduce the daily losses of OMCs.

The Policy Alternative (One-Time Price Alignment) - Moving away from frequent market price revisions—which cause budgeting uncertainty for households and businesses—the situation supports a one-time retail price increase of at least 13% on petroleum products, including petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF). This structural correction would directly eliminate OMC losses, settle market uncertainty, and stabilize state finances until global energy markets find a new equilibrium.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-energy-strategy-needs-price-correction/article71026084.ece

Question

Administered insulation of domestic fuel prices during global energy crises shields consumers from immediate inflationary shocks but creates structural imbalances across public finance and energy markets. Discuss this statement in the context of India's current vulnerabilities to energy

chokepoints, and evaluate the feasibility of transitioning to a structural price correction." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Geopolitical tensions in the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted global energy trade, driving up freight rates, insurance premiums, and Brent crude prices. While advanced economies have let retail prices rise with the market, India has utilized strategic state intervention, supply diversification, and financial absorption to maintain retail fuel prices near ₹95/litre. This insulation protects consumers in the short term but transfers significant financial stress onto state-run entities.

2. The Double-Edged Impact of Domestic Fuel Price Insulation

Short-Term Inflation Protection - By keeping retail fuel stable, the government prevents immediate supply-chain shocks from raising domestic costs. This helped keep Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at a moderate 3.2% to 3.5% in early 2026, protecting consumer purchasing power.

Severe Under-Recoveries for OMCs - To absorb global price spikes, state-run Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have sold fuel below market-linked costs. This has resulted in under-recovery losses of ₹700 crore to ₹800 crore per day during peak volatility, weakening corporate balance sheets and limiting capital for energy infrastructure.

Fiscal Deficit Risks - Sustaining subsidies of this scale strains public finances and forces trade-offs with capital expenditure. Furthermore, shielding consumers removes the pricing signals that encourage energy conservation and fuel efficiency.

3. Evaluating the Feasibility of a Structural Price Correction

Transitioning toward a market-linked pricing model is supported by current economic indicators, but requires careful execution -

The Macroeconomic Window - The prevailing low inflation environment (3.2%–3.5%) creates the fiscal room for a calibrated pass-through of global energy costs without triggering runaway domestic inflation.

Limitations of Piecemeal Adjustment - Recent incremental increases of roughly 7% have proved insufficient to close the under-recovery gap for OMCs. Additionally, frequent, small adjustments create ongoing uncertainty for household and corporate budgets.

The Case for a Structured One-Time Hike - To restore balance, a one-time retail price correction of at least 13% across petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) is a practical alternative. While politically sensitive, a single adjustment would immediately eliminate daily OMC losses, clear up consumer uncertainty, and preserve the fiscal space needed to manage long-term energy volatility.

Conclusion

India's tactical management of the West Asian energy crisis has successfully prevented domestic supply panics. However, long-term resilience requires a shift toward economic realism. By combining structural supply diversification—such as the 30-million-barrel SPR agreement with the UAE—with a measured pass-through of global costs, India can protect its public finances and ensure sustainable energy security in an unstable geopolitical environment.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-energy-strategy-needs-price-correction/article71026084.ece

2. Delhi's Dust Pollution Needs Science, Not Seasonal Optics (IE)

GS Paper III - Environment, Ecology, and Disaster Management

Topic - Environmental pollution and degradation; Conservation; Science and Technology- developments and their applications in everyday life.

Sub-Topic - Air Quality Governance, Transboundary Airshed Dynamics, Particulate Matter (PM) Dispersion, and Super El Niño Meteorological Shocks.

1. Introduction

Dust pollution has emerged as a major, year-round public health hazard in Delhi. While public and political discussions usually treat air quality as a local, city-specific issue, a scientific assessment reveals that atmospheric pollution must be managed across an integrated airshed rather than arbitrary city boundaries. The author highlights a governance paradox - administrative focus and mitigation efforts, like intensive water sprinkling, peak during the calm winter months when natural dust lifting is actually lowest. In contrast, summer dust storms—driven by regional climate patterns and intense heating—receive far less systematic policy response.

2. The Scientific Typology of Dust Pollution

To design evidence-based solutions, dust pollution must be categorized into three distinct types, each behaving differently across seasons -

Natural Dust - This type depends directly on broader landscape characteristics, soil conditions, land use, and regional vegetation cover. It is highly vulnerable to wind-driven lifting when surface temperatures rise.

Re-Suspended Dust - Generated from paved and unpaved roads as vehicles move over them. This source is worsened by high traffic volumes, faster vehicle speeds, and poor road maintenance. During winter, calm winds limit natural dispersion, while continuous vehicle movement keeps these particles suspended in the breathing zone.

Construction Dust - Produced when prescribed safety norms are ignored during building and demolition activities. Although it contributes the least among the three categories, it often receives the closest administrative attention through regulatory enforcement like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) guidelines.

3. The 2026 Climate Multiplier - The Super El Niño Shock

The extreme severity of Delhi's summer dust crisis in 2026 is directly linked to large-scale, climate-amplified meteorological anomalies -

The Super El Niño Factor - The Indian subcontinent has entered a disruptive phase of Super El Niño conditions, driven by pronounced warming in the Pacific Ocean.

Intense Regional Heating - This climate pattern has triggered extreme heating across South Asia, placing several Indian cities among the hottest locations globally.

Desiccation of the Indo-Gangetic Plain - Intense heat has dried out surface moisture across the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain, leaving topsoil loose, dry, and highly vulnerable to wind-driven lifting.

The Multi-Corridor Dust Trap - While severe summer dust storms are traditionally limited to western India and the Thar desert, the 2026 weather pattern has lifted dust across the entire Indo-Gangetic stretch. High-velocity transport winds and strong summer winds (*loo*) carry this dust from both the Indo-Gangetic basin and adjoining desert areas, trapping Delhi within multiple regional dust corridors.

4. Deconstructing Seasonal Policy Misalignments

The text criticizes the current ad-hoc, seasonal approach to urban environmental planning -

Winter Optics vs. Summer Science - Public discussions and mitigation measures, such as water-sprinkling, regularly intensify during the winter to reduce visible smog. However, because winter features lower wind speeds and minimal natural dust lifting, this deployment is scientifically misaligned.

The Summer Blind Spot - In reality, active dust suppression via water sprinkling is far more critical during the dry, windy summer months, when natural dust suspension is at its highest.

The Limitation of Clean Transport - While transitioning to Electric Vehicles (EVs) helps lower tailpipe fossil-fuel emissions, it cannot eliminate re-suspended road dust. Addressing this source requires structural transport management and regular road infrastructure maintenance.

5. Science-Based Structural Solutions

To manage the changing geography of air pollution, policymakers must transition from temporary fixes to science-based, long-term interventions -

Evidence-Led Airshed Governance - Designing environmental policies around the science of pollution sources and the meteorological factors that influence them across the wider airshed region.

Advanced Source-Sweeping Technologies - Expanding the use of Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSMs) while developing integrated systems that combine efficient mechanical sweeping with targeted, optimized water-sprinkling to suppress dust at the source.

Sustained Transport Management - Implementing proactive traffic flow measures and regular road surface repairs to reduce the mechanical friction that triggers re-suspended road dust.

Balanced Construction Enforcement - Maintaining strict enforcement of green covering rules at construction sites, while ensuring these measures do not overshadow larger sources like natural and road dust.

Ecological Soil Stabilization - Significantly expanding urban green cover and restoring local water bodies to increase surface moisture and stabilize loose soil profiles against wind-driven lifting.

Source - https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/delhi-dust-pollution-science-optics-climate-change-10708919/

Question

"Managing urban air quality through local administrative boundaries fails to address the transboundary and climate-linked nature of particulate pollution. Elucidate this statement in the context of regional airshed dynamics, and suggest a scientifically validated framework for dust mitigation in the Indo-Gangetic Plain." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Delhi's persistent air quality crisis highlights the limitations of using city-specific, administrative boundaries to manage environmental pollution. Air pollution is fundamentally a regional airshed problem. Its behaviour is shaped by interconnected landscape features, shifting wind patterns, and large-scale climate variables that extend far beyond any single municipal jurisdiction.

2. Regional Airshed Dynamics and Climate Interdependence

The limitations of localized, city-boundary interventions become particularly evident when evaluating natural and re-suspended dust pollution -

The Transboundary Corridor - Under severe meteorological conditions—such as the Super El Niño phase of 2026—extreme regional heating dries out surface moisture across the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain. High-velocity transport winds and summer winds lift this dry, loose topsoil on a large scale, carrying it from western desert regions and the broader agricultural basin directly into urban centers. Consequently, city-level restrictions fail because the pollution is driven by transboundary corridors.

Seasonal Misalignment of Policy - Current policies often focus on temporary winter responses to manage visible smog. However, winter features lower wind speeds and minimal natural dust lifting. Conversely, dust suspension naturally peaks during the dry, windy summer months, making active suppression measures far more critical during the warmer season.

The Resuspension Paradox - Local solutions like transitioning to Electric Vehicles (EVs) help lower tailpipe emissions, but they cannot eliminate re-suspended road dust, which is continually kicked up by traffic volume and poor road maintenance.

3. A Scientifically Validated Framework for Mitigation

Transitioning to an effective, long-term framework requires a shift toward science-based regional strategy -

Establishing Inter-State Airshed Authorities - Moving past localized city management to create unified regional air quality boards that coordinate land cover and forestry policies across the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain.

Deploying Advanced Dual-Action Infrastructure - Upgrading municipal fleets with Mechanical Road Sweeping Machines (MRSMs) that combine mechanical sweeping with targeted water-sprinkling to suppress fine particles directly at the source.

Ecological Soil Stabilization - Launching widespread regional afforestation initiatives, expanding urban green belts, and restoring local wetlands to increase surface moisture and lock vulnerable topsoil in place.

Proactive Traffic and Road Design - Maintaining smooth traffic flows, enforcing strict speed limits, and ensuring regular road surface repairs to minimize the mechanical friction that triggers re-suspended dust.

Conclusion

As climate change intensifies weather extremes, relying on short-term seasonal responses will no longer suffice. Protecting urban health requires aligning environmental policy with regional climate science. By shifting from localized, city-boundary interventions to coordinated, airshed-level solutions, India can address the root causes of particulate pollution and build lasting climate resilience along its frontier regions.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/delhi-dust-pollution-science-optics-climate-change-10708919/**

3. China–West Economic Interdependence - Understanding the Reality (BL)

GENERAL STUDIES PAPER - GENERAL STUDIES PAPER II – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC - RISE OF CHINA AND GLOBAL POWER TRANSITION

SUB-TOPIC - INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

Introduction

China's rise as the world's second-largest economy has transformed global economic and geopolitical dynamics. However, despite its growing economic strength, China remains deeply integrated with Western markets, technology networks, capital flows, and consumer demand. This highlights the continuing importance of economic interdependence in the contemporary global order.

1. China's Dependence on Western Markets

Export-Led Growth Model

1. China's economic expansion has been driven largely by manufacturing exports.

2. The United States and the European Union remain major destinations for Chinese goods.
3. Export earnings continue to contribute significantly to China's industrial growth.

Dependence on External Demand

1. Western consumer markets absorb a substantial share of Chinese production.
2. A slowdown in developed economies can directly affect Chinese exports and employment.
3. Domestic consumption alone has not yet fully replaced export demand.

2. Dependence on Western Technology

Advanced Semiconductor Ecosystem

1. China still relies on foreign suppliers for advanced semiconductor equipment and chip technologies.
2. Restrictions imposed by developed countries have highlighted technological vulnerabilities.

Innovation Networks

1. Global research ecosystems remain concentrated in advanced economies.
2. Access to technology, patents, and high-end industrial machinery remains important for Chinese industries.

3. Structural Strengths of the West

Financial Dominance

1. The US dollar remains the world's primary reserve currency.
2. Western financial institutions continue to influence global capital flows.

Innovation Leadership

1. The United States and Europe host leading universities, research institutions, and technology firms.
2. Advanced economies retain advantages in cutting-edge research and innovation.

Consumer Power

1. Developed economies continue to possess high purchasing power and large consumer markets.
2. This sustains demand for global exports, including those from China.

4. Internal Challenges Facing China

Demographic Transition

1. Ageing population and declining birth rates are reducing workforce growth.
2. Rising dependency ratios may increase fiscal burdens.

Real Estate Slowdown

1. Property sector weaknesses have affected investment and economic confidence.
2. Local government finances have also come under pressure.

Rising Debt Levels

1. Corporate and local government debt remain significant concerns.
2. Excessive leverage can constrain long-term growth.

5. Why the West Also Needs China

Manufacturing Hub

1. China remains a critical node in global supply chains.
2. Many industries depend on Chinese manufacturing capacity.

Strategic Minerals and Components

1. China dominates processing of several critical minerals.
2. Global industries rely on Chinese intermediate goods and components.

Cost Competitiveness

1. Large-scale production and efficient infrastructure provide cost advantages.

2. Sudden disengagement would increase costs globally.

6. Limits of Economic Decoupling

Deep Interdependence

1. Trade, investment, and technology link China and Western economies.
2. Complete separation would impose costs on both sides.

Supply Chain Risks

1. Abrupt decoupling can disrupt manufacturing networks.
2. Businesses increasingly prefer diversification rather than complete disengagement.

7. Implications for India

Opportunities

China+1 Strategy

1. Global firms are diversifying supply chains beyond China.
2. India can attract manufacturing investments.

Strategic Partnerships

1. India can strengthen economic ties with the US, EU, Japan, and other advanced economies.

Technology Development

1. Investments in semiconductors, electronics, and innovation ecosystems can enhance competitiveness.

Challenges

Competition from China

1. China's manufacturing ecosystem remains highly efficient.
2. India must improve infrastructure and ease of doing business.

Technology Gap

1. Greater investment in research and development is required.

Way Forward

Strengthen Domestic Manufacturing

1. Expand Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes.
2. Develop globally competitive industrial clusters.

Invest in Innovation

1. Increase spending on R&D and emerging technologies.
2. Promote collaboration between academia and industry.

Enhance Supply Chain Resilience

1. Diversify sources of critical imports.
2. Build strategic reserves of key materials.

Deepen Economic Diplomacy

1. Leverage FTAs and strategic partnerships.
2. Integrate with global value chains.

Conclusion

The global economy is not witnessing a complete replacement of the West by China, but rather a complex pattern of economic interdependence. While China's influence continues to grow, its prosperity remains closely linked to Western markets, technology, and capital. The future global order is likely to be shaped by competition as well as cooperation among major economic powers.

Source – https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/its-china-that-needs-the-west-not-the-reverse/article71022140.ece

Question

"China's economic rise has been built on deep integration with Western markets and technology." Critically examine the extent to which China remains dependent on the West despite its emergence as a global power. (250 words)

Introduction

China's rise as the world's second-largest economy has transformed global economic and geopolitical dynamics. However, despite its growing influence, China continues to remain interconnected with Western markets, technology, and finance.

Body

Areas of dependence

1. Export-oriented growth model relies heavily on US and EU markets.
2. Dependence on advanced semiconductor technologies and equipment.
3. Significant role of foreign investment in China's industrialization.
4. Integration with global financial and trading systems.

Areas of growing self-reliance

1. Strong domestic manufacturing ecosystem.
2. Leadership in several green technologies and EV sectors.
3. Expanding domestic consumer market.
4. Dominance in rare earth processing and strategic supply chains.

Limitations of the dependence argument

1. China has diversified trade partners.
2. Technological capabilities are improving rapidly.
3. Belt and Road Initiative expands China's economic influence.

Conclusion

China remains dependent on Western demand, technology, and capital in important sectors, but it is simultaneously building indigenous capabilities and alternative networks. The future is likely to witness strategic competition alongside continued economic interdependence rather than complete separation.

Source – https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/its-china-that-needs-the-west-not-the-reverse/article71022140.ece

4. AI Adoption in School Education - The Need for Social Architects (MT)

General Studies Paper II – Governance and Social Justice

Topic - Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emerging Technologies

Sub-Topic – Ethical Issues in Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming education by offering personalised learning, automated assessments, and improved access to knowledge. However, successful AI integration in classrooms depends not only on technology but also on thoughtful educational design, teacher empowerment, and human-centred implementation. The future of learning will be shaped by how effectively societies balance technology with pedagogy.

1. Growing Role of AI in Education

Personalised Learning

1. AI can adapt lessons according to individual learning needs and pace.
2. Students receive customised learning pathways based on strengths and weaknesses.
3. Helps address diverse learning requirements within classrooms.

Enhanced Learning Support

1. AI-powered tutors provide instant feedback and guidance.
2. Learning resources become more accessible and interactive.
3. Supports continuous learning beyond traditional classroom hours.

Administrative Efficiency

1. Automates routine tasks such as grading and attendance management.
2. Reduces administrative burden on teachers.
3. Allows educators to focus more on teaching and mentoring.

2. Importance of Human-Centred AI Integration

Technology Cannot Replace Teachers

1. Teachers provide emotional support, mentorship, and moral guidance.
2. Human interaction remains essential for holistic development.
3. AI should function as an assistive tool rather than a substitute for educators.

Preserving Critical Thinking

1. Education aims to develop reasoning, creativity, and problem-solving skills.
2. Excessive dependence on AI may weaken independent thinking.
3. Students must learn how to evaluate and question AI-generated outputs.

Social and Emotional Learning

1. Collaboration, empathy, communication, and ethical reasoning cannot be fully automated.
2. Human teachers play a central role in nurturing these competencies.

3. Need for "Social Architects" in Education

Designing Human-AI Interaction

1. Educational experts must determine how AI is integrated into learning processes.
2. Technology should align with pedagogical objectives rather than dictate them.

Context-Sensitive Implementation

1. AI solutions must reflect local languages, cultures, and learning environments.
2. Educational policies should account for socio-economic diversity.

Building Trust and Acceptance

1. Teachers, parents, and students need confidence in AI systems.
2. Transparent and accountable AI use is essential for widespread adoption.

4. Challenges in AI Adoption

Digital Divide

1. Unequal access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital infrastructure.
2. Risk of widening educational inequalities.

Teacher Preparedness

1. Many educators lack training in AI-enabled teaching methods.
2. Limited digital literacy may hinder effective implementation.

Data Privacy and Security

1. Student data requires strong protection mechanisms.
2. Concerns over surveillance and misuse of educational data.

Algorithmic Bias

1. AI systems may reflect biases present in training data.
2. Can affect fairness in assessments and learning recommendations.

5. Implications for India

Opportunity to Improve Learning Outcomes

1. AI can support foundational literacy and numeracy.
2. Useful for addressing teacher shortages and learning gaps.

Supporting Multilingual Education

1. AI tools can facilitate content delivery in multiple Indian languages.
2. Enhances inclusivity and accessibility.

Strengthening Educational Equity

1. Digital public infrastructure can democratise access to quality education.
2. AI can help reach remote and underserved regions.

6. Ethical Considerations

Responsible AI Use

1. AI deployment should follow principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability.
2. Human oversight must remain central to decision-making.

Avoiding Over-Reliance

1. Students should learn with AI, not become dependent on it.
2. Education should continue to emphasise creativity and independent reasoning.

Way Forward

Teacher Capacity Building

1. Introduce large-scale AI literacy and training programmes for educators.
2. Equip teachers to effectively integrate AI into classroom instruction.

Develop Inclusive AI Tools

1. Create AI solutions tailored to local contexts and languages.
2. Ensure accessibility for diverse socio-economic groups.

Strengthen Digital Infrastructure

1. Expand internet connectivity and device availability.
2. Improve digital infrastructure in rural and remote areas.

Establish Ethical Frameworks

1. Develop clear guidelines on data protection, privacy, and responsible AI use.
2. Ensure transparency in educational AI systems.

Promote Human-AI Collaboration

1. Use AI to augment teaching rather than replace educators.
2. Encourage balanced integration of technology and pedagogy.

Conclusion

AI has immense potential to transform education, but technology alone cannot improve learning outcomes. Effective implementation requires thoughtful educational design, empowered teachers, ethical

safeguards, and inclusive policies. A human-centred approach to AI adoption can help create a more equitable, effective, and future-ready education system.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-teachers-social-architects-ai-adoption-classrooms-artificial-intelligence-schools-education-11779652050293.html

Question

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to transform education, but its success depends on human-centred implementation rather than technological adoption alone. Discuss. (250 Words)

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is emerging as a transformative force in education through personalised learning, automated assessment, and improved access to knowledge. However, meaningful educational outcomes depend on integrating AI within a human-centred pedagogical framework.

Benefits of AI in Education

Improved Learning Outcomes

1. Personalised learning pathways based on student needs.
2. Instant feedback and adaptive assessments.

Enhanced Accessibility

1. Supports multilingual education.
2. Extends quality learning resources to remote areas.

Administrative Efficiency

1. Reduces teacher workload through automation of routine tasks.

Challenges

Digital Divide

1. Unequal access to digital infrastructure and devices.

Teacher Readiness

1. Limited AI literacy among educators.

Ethical Concerns

1. Data privacy risks and algorithmic bias.

Risk of Overdependence

1. Excessive reliance on AI may undermine critical thinking and creativity.

Measures Required

1. Invest in teacher training and digital literacy.
2. Develop inclusive and locally relevant AI tools.
3. Establish strong ethical and regulatory frameworks.
4. Promote AI as a complement rather than a replacement for teachers.

Conclusion

The future of education lies in effective collaboration between human educators and intelligent technologies. A balanced, inclusive, and ethical approach to AI adoption can enhance learning outcomes while preserving the essential human dimensions of education.

Source - https -//www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-teachers-social-architects-ai-adoption-classrooms-artificial-intelligence-schools-education-11779652050293.html

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

EDITORIAL OF THE DAY-28.05.2026

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1. Tariffs To Carbon, The New Rules Shaping India's Trade (TH)

GS Paper - GS Paper III / GS Paper II

Subject - Indian Economy / International Relations / Environment

Topic - Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation.

Sub-Topic - Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Carbon Leakage, Green Protectionism, Price Transmission Shocks, and Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs).

1. Introduction

Proposed in July 2021, the European Union's (EU) Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) officially entered its definitive operational phase on January 1, 2026. Designed as an advanced climate policy tool, CBAM aims to eliminate "carbon leakage"—a phenomenon where EU-based companies move carbon-intensive manufacturing to countries with weaker environmental laws.

By levying a carbon-linked financial charge on imports based on their embedded emissions, CBAM targets six foundational sectors - steel, cement, aluminium, fertilizers, electricity, and hydrogen. While the framework is intended to accelerate global carbon-pricing compliance and reduce worldwide emissions, it introduces severe non-tariff trade barriers for developing nations like India, fundamentally altering the nature of global market access.

2. Directly Impacted Export Sectors - The Industrial Squeeze

India's manufacturing sector faces an immediate threat to its trade competitiveness, particularly across key industrial metals -

The Vulnerability Core - India's steel and aluminium industries are the most vulnerable due to their heavy dependence on European export markets and their reliance on carbon-intensive, coal-heavy manufacturing processes.

Shifting Contractual Burdens - Although EU importers are legally responsible for paying the carbon levy, European buyers are increasingly tightening contracts and using stricter supplier criteria to favour low-emission producers. This shifts the financial and operational burden directly onto Indian exporters.

Margin Compression - To preserve their market share in Europe, Indian firms must either absorb the high compliance costs—which will shrink profit margins—or make immediate investments in cleaner, low-carbon manufacturing technologies.

The Limit of FTAs - The text notes that these compliance costs will weaken India's export competitiveness in the short run, even if ongoing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the EU are successful.

3. Indirect Agrarian Shocks - Global Price Transmission

The macro-economic fallout of CBAM reaches beyond direct trade with Europe, creating an indirect threat to India's agricultural economy -

The Fertilizer Link - India is a major net importer of chemical fertilizers. The primary global exporters of fertilizers to the EU include Egypt, Russia, Morocco, and China—which also happen to be India's primary fertilizer suppliers.

The Passed-On Cost Shock - As these global manufacturers face steep carbon-compliance costs when selling to Europe, they are highly likely to pass those additional operational expenses onto their other international buyers.

Threat to Food Security - This price transmission will increase India's national fertilizer import bill, creating a cascading risk that threatens farm profitability, increases domestic food inflation, and strains the agricultural safety net.

4. The CBAM Framework vs. Traditional Non-Tariff Measures

CBAM represents a structural transformation in how international trade is regulated, differing fundamentally from past protectionist tools -

Price-Based and Quantifiable - Traditional Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs), such as standard product quality guidelines, are largely qualitative and open to administrative interpretation. In contrast, CBAM is an explicit, price-based, and highly quantifiable mechanism that directly links market entry to verified carbon emissions per unit of production.

A New Concept of Comparative Advantage - Historically, a nation's comparative advantage relied entirely on production efficiency, cheap labour, and competitive pricing. Under this carbon-constrained trade regime, comparative advantage is increasingly determined by the carbon efficiency of production processes.

The Premium on Clean Capital - Meeting product quality standards is relatively straightforward, but transitioning entire factories to carbon-neutral energy sources requires massive capital investments, significantly raising export costs in the short term.

5. Structural Shift in Global Trade Architecture

The Domino Effect - CBAM is not an isolated European policy; it signals a broader structural shift where other developed nations are actively planning to implement similar carbon-tariff compliance frameworks.

Systemic Market Exclusion - If left unaddressed, the gradual adoption of these policies across the developed world risks permanently shrinking market access for developing economies that lack the immediate capital to rapidly decarbonize their industrial base.

6. Strategic Solutions and Way Forward

To safeguard its economic growth without abandoning climate commitments, India must adopt a coordinated, two-pronged approach -

A. Domestic Industrial and Agricultural Reforms

Clean Energy Capitalization - Accelerating direct public and private investments in renewable energy infrastructure to improve the carbon efficiency of domestic manufacturing firms.

Agricultural Import Substitution - Lowering national reliance on volatile foreign fertilizer markets by expanding domestic output and accelerating eco-friendly farming alternatives.

Precision Nutrient Management - Strengthening the field-level execution of the Soil Health Cards Scheme to encourage balanced, need-based fertilizer application, minimizing waste and input costs.

B. International Trade Negotiations

Demanding Equitable Phased Transitions - Using bilateral and multilateral trade forums to negotiate for equitable treatment, ensuring that developing economies receive extended, phased transition timelines to absorb compliance costs.

Securing Technology Transfers - Insisting on explicit clauses for transitional financial support and technology transfers in all trade agreements with developed countries to level the competitive playing field.

Conclusion

The implementation of the EU's CBAM marks the beginning of a new era in global trade, one where carbon efficiency matters as much as pricing or manufacturing skill. For India, adapting to this regime involves managing a delicate balance. By treating CBAM not merely as a trade threat but as a catalyst for domestic clean energy transition, precision agriculture, and strategic international diplomacy, India can insulate its key export industries, lower its fiscal import vulnerabilities, and secure sustainable macroeconomic growth.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/tariffs-to-carbon-the-new-rules-shaping-indias-trade/article71030246.ece

Question

"The transition of the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) into its definitive phase signals a paradigm shift where carbon efficiency, rather than traditional pricing, dictates global comparative advantage. Elucidate how this framework impacts India's industrial and agrarian sectors, and suggest a strategic path forward." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The entry of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) into its definitive phase on January 1, 2026, represents a structural transformation in international trade governance. By imposing a carbon-linked financial charge on emission-intensive imports, CBAM effectively redefines global comparative advantage. It shifts the focus from conventional metrics like labour costs and production efficiency to the carbon efficiency of production processes, creating significant challenges for developing nations like India.

2. Multi-Sectoral Impacts on India

A. The Industrial Squeeze (Direct Export Transmission)

1. India's steel and aluminium sectors face immediate trade barriers, given their high carbon intensity and reliance on European buyers.
2. Even though European importers pay the levy, the economic burden shifts to Indian exporters through stricter contracts and a preference for low-emission suppliers.
3. This leaves Indian firms with two challenging options - absorb the compliance costs and suffer margin compression, or make immediate capital investments in clean technologies to retain European market access.

B. The Agrarian Stress (Indirect Price Transmission)

1. Beyond metal exports, CBAM creates an indirect price shock within India's agricultural economy.

2. Major fertilizer suppliers to the EU—including Egypt, Russia, China, and Morocco—are also India's primary sources for fertilizer imports.
3. As these international manufacturers face rising carbon-compliance costs when exporting to Europe, part of that financial burden will be passed on to secondary buyers. This dynamics risks inflating India's national fertilizer import bill, straining farm profitability, and driving up domestic food prices.

3. Proposed Strategic Path Forward

To manage this transition without compromising economic growth, India must deploy a dual-track strategy combining domestic reform with international diplomacy -

Domestic Carbon Modernization - Increasing public and private capital deployment into green hydrogen and renewable energy to lower the carbon footprint of heavy manufacturing.

Agrarian Resilience and Input Optimization - Reducing fertilizer import vulnerabilities by scaling up local production and effectively implementing the Soil Health Cards Scheme to promote balanced, precision-based nutrient use.

Assertive Climate Diplomacy - Negotiating for equitable treatment, extended, phased transition timelines, and mandatory technology transfers in trade agreements with developed countries to ensure a fair and level playing field.

Conclusion

CBAM marks a structural shift toward a carbon-constrained global trading architecture. India's policy response must look beyond short-term protectionist measures. By treating this transition as an opportunity to modernize its heavy industries, optimize agricultural inputs, and assert its rights in climate diplomacy, India can safeguard its economic growth while building long-term sustainable development.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/tariffs-to-carbon-the-new-rules-shaping-indias-trade/article71030246.ece

2. Ashok Lavasa writes - Supreme Court order hands EC a clean chit. SIRs deleted still await justice (IE)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance

Topic - Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Salient features of the Representation of the People Act.

Sub-Topic - Election Commission of India (ECI), Special Intensive Revision (SIR), Electoral Roll Integrity, Judicial Review of Constitutional Bodies, Citizenship vs. Franchise, and the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment validating the constitutionality of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls (ER) undertaken by the Election Commission of India. The petition, initially heard in July of the previous year after the ECI launched the SIR in Bihar ahead of state assembly elections, later extended to 12 other states and Union Territories. While the verdict grants a "clean chit" to the ECI, the analysis points out significant concerns regarding the fate of millions of voters deleted from the rolls during the process—such as the 27 lakh deleted voters in West Bengal. The case highlights the complex constitutional balance between maintaining clean electoral rolls and preventing arbitrary disenfranchisement.

2. Four Core Constitutional Issues Framed by the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court structured its examination of the ECI's legislative and executive competence around four central pillars -

Constitutional Power - Whether the ECI possesses the explicit constitutional authority to conduct an overarching, impugned SIR under its mandate.

Legitimacy and Proportionality - Whether the intensive revision is based on a legitimate public purpose, and whether the targeted measures adopted are strictly proportionate to the objective sought to be achieved.

Statutory Compliance - Whether the chosen procedure violates the statutory provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RPA) and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

Scrutiny of Citizenship Status - Whether the ECI, while exercising its mandate to prepare and maintain electoral rolls, is empowered to examine the citizenship status of individuals seeking inclusion or continuation in the ER.

3. The Judgement Framework - Validation of the ECI's Mandate

The Supreme Court's ruling heavily favours the functional autonomy of the Election Commission -

The Intersection of Rights - The Court viewed the SIR as operating at the intersection of two constitutional concerns - the mandate to include all eligible citizens, and the requirement that the electoral roll reflects the true composition of the political community.

A Nexus to Free and Fair Elections - The SC ruled that the SIR has a direct connection to the constitutional goal of free and fair elections, which depends on the "integrity, accuracy, and purity" of the electoral roll.

Rejection of Piecemeal Solutions - The Court accepted the ECI's argument that systemic inaccuracies built up over an extended period could not be resolved through standard, piecemeal electoral roll updates, making a comprehensive SIR necessary.

Judicial Deference to Institutional Expertise - In a significant endorsement of institutional autonomy, the SC observed that it is *"not open to this Court to supplant its own judgment in matters that concern the implementation of an exercise"* for which the ECI holds specialized institutional expertise.

Proportionality and Statutory Alignment - The Court concluded that the exercise satisfies the requirements of proportionality, holds sufficient safeguards against arbitrary exclusion, and does not conflict with the RPA or the 1960 Rules.

4. Systemic Anomalies and the Plight of Deleted Voters

Despite the legal clearance, the practical execution of the SIR reveals serious administrative gaps and human costs -

The Scale of Disenfranchisement - The author highlights that while the SC stated the post-exercise data did not show systemic flaws leading to widespread disenfranchisement, it remains unclear whether the Court fully accounted for the immense scale of deletions, including over 27 lakh voters excluded in West Bengal.

Administrative and Transparency Deficits - The SC noted that the process, as initially designed, raised valid concerns regarding documentation, transparency, and public access.

Uneven Safeguards Across States - While the SC introduced safeguards during hearings—such as adding a generic government identification card as an additional identity document and directing the publication of Bihar's 65 lakh excluded draft electors along with their reasons for exclusion—these protections were applied unevenly across the other 12 affected states.

Rebuttable Presumption of Validity - The Court noted that while inclusion in an electoral roll carries a "presumption of validity," this presumption is legally rebuttable, confirming the ECI's power to review and delete names.

5. The Legal Paradox - Franchise Eligibility vs. Sovereignty Determination

The judgment creates a distinct separation between an individual's right to vote and their legal citizenship -

Limited In-Quiry Power - The SC affirmed that the ECI is constitutionally empowered to undertake a limited inquiry into citizenship solely to determine eligibility for inclusion in the electoral roll.

Not Strict Determination - Crucially, the Court held that this electoral inquiry does not amount to a formal "determination of citizenship in the strict sense".

Preservation of Claims - While an adverse finding affects an individual's immediate entitlement to vote, it does not strip them of their citizenship claims, nor does it block a final determination by a competent authority under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

6. Institutional Obligations and the Way Forward

To ensure accountability following the clean chit, the author outlines an immediate path forward for the ECI -

Publishing the Core Evidence - The ECI is now obligated to share the material and data that prompted the intensive revision with the public, offering a comprehensive report card on the health of India's electoral rolls.

Mandatory Referral to Competent Authorities - For individuals excluded from the rolls due to eligibility questions, the ECI must disclose their exact numbers and refer their cases to competent authorities under the Citizenship Act, 1955, for formal adjudication.

Strict Timelines Ahead of Elections - This referral process must be executed within a strict four-week **deadline** to ensure affected individuals have their citizenship adjudicated before the next Parliamentary, Assembly, or Local Body elections.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ashok-lavasa-supreme-court-eci-electoral-rolls-sir-verdict-opinion-10711090/**

Question

"The power of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct special intensive revisions of electoral rolls is vital for the purity of elections, yet it risks creating a fine line between administrative cleanup and citizen disenfranchisement. Critically examine this statement in light of recent judicial validations of the ECI's revision processes." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court's validation of the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls reinforces the commission's constitutional independence under Article 324. While the judiciary recognized that maintaining the "integrity, accuracy, and purity" of electoral rolls is necessary for free and fair elections, the deletion of millions of electors across multiple states brings attention to the delicate balance between administrative accuracy and democratic disenfranchisement.

2. Purity of Elections vs. Risks of Disenfranchisement

A. The Case for Purity and Institutional Deference

Correcting Long-Term Inaccuracies - Standard, piecemeal revisions often fail to address deep, systemic errors that compound over time. The Supreme Court noted that comprehensive interventions like the SIR hold a direct connection to ensuring the true composition of the electorate.

Judicial Non-Interference - By ruling that courts should not easily supplant the institutional expertise of the ECI, the judiciary protected the commission's operational freedom to clean up corrupt, duplicate, or invalid entries without administrative delays.

Proportionality Confirmed - The court held that the SIR met proportionality requirements, functioning as a legitimate constitutional exercise to protect the democratic framework.

B. The Risks of Arbitrary Exclusion and Lack of Transparency

Mass Deletions without Adequate Redress - The deletion of lakhs of voters—exemplified by the exclusion of over 27 lakh individuals in West Bengal—highlights the massive human impact of these clean-ups.

Procedural and Access Barriers - As the author notes, these exercises can suffer from significant gaps in documentation, transparency, and public access. While judicial steps helped introduce additional identity documents, the lack of uniform procedural protections across all states leaves many vulnerable voters without clear avenues for appeal.

The Citizenship Dilemma - Granting a constitutional body the power to conduct a "limited inquiry" into citizenship to verify voting eligibility can create a confusing legal situation. Even though this check does not equal a formal citizenship determination under the Citizenship Act, 1955, its immediate practical effect is the loss of a citizen's political voice.

3. The Way Forward

To prevent electoral clean-ups from turning into systemic exclusion, the ECI must implement strict operational guidelines -

The Transparency Mandate - The ECI must publicly share the data and material that justify an intensive revision, ensuring its processes are open to public scrutiny.

Enforcing Time-Bound Adjudication - The commission must strictly follow the directive to refer all disputed cases to competent statutory authorities within a rigid four-week window. This ensures that individuals facing deletion can have their status resolved before upcoming legislative or local body elections.

Standardizing Safeguards - Ensuring that protections—such as publishing comprehensive exclusion lists with clear, written justifications—are applied uniformly across all states during a revision.

Conclusion

A clean electoral roll is a prerequisite for a healthy democracy, but its accuracy cannot come at the cost of arbitrary exclusion. The judiciary's validation of the ECI's authority must be accompanied by strong administrative transparency. By coupling its powers of revision with open reporting and fast, reliable appeal processes, the Election Commission can maintain the purity of India's elections while protecting the franchise of every eligible citizen.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ashok-lavasa-supreme-court-eci-electoral-rolls-sir-verdict-opinion-10711090/**

3. IBC Needs an Institutional Boost (BL)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper II – Governance and Institutional Reforms

Topic - Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016

Sub-Topic - Financial Sector Stability

Introduction

A well-functioning insolvency system is essential for economic growth, efficient capital allocation, and financial stability. India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 transformed the insolvency

resolution process by shifting from a debtor-centric regime to a creditor-driven framework. While the IBC has significantly improved credit discipline and resolution outcomes, institutional bottlenecks continue to affect its effectiveness, necessitating further reforms.

1. Significance of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

Time-Bound Resolution Mechanism

1. Provides a structured framework for resolving stressed assets.
2. Prevents prolonged delays in insolvency proceedings.

Improved Credit Culture

1. Encourages timely repayment of loans.
2. Enhances borrower accountability and financial discipline.

Maximisation of Asset Value

1. Facilitates quicker resolution of distressed firms.
2. Prevents erosion of enterprise value.

Strengthening Financial Stability

1. Helps banks recover stressed assets.
2. Reduces accumulation of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

2. Paradigm Shift Introduced by IBC

From Debtor-in-Possession to Creditor-in-Control

1. Creditors gain greater control over resolution decisions.
2. Promoters lose automatic control after default.

From Rehabilitation to Resolution

1. Focus shifts from protecting defaulting firms to preserving economic value.
2. Encourages market-based solutions.

From Judicial Delays to Structured Timelines

1. Establishes clear procedures and timelines for insolvency resolution.

3. Major Achievements of IBC

Enhanced Recovery Rates

1. Improved recovery compared to earlier debt recovery mechanisms.
2. Greater confidence among lenders.

Better Credit Allocation

1. Banks increasingly evaluate risks more carefully.
2. Improves overall financial sector efficiency.

Improved Ease of Doing Business

1. Creates a predictable insolvency framework.
2. Enhances investor confidence.

Deterrence Against Strategic Defaults

1. Promoters are incentivised to avoid insolvency proceedings.
2. Strengthens overall corporate governance.

4. Key Challenges Facing the IBC Framework

Delays in Resolution

1. Many cases exceed prescribed timelines.
2. Judicial and procedural delays reduce efficiency.

Capacity Constraints

1. Overburdened National Company Law Tribunals (NCLTs).
2. Shortage of insolvency professionals and judicial infrastructure.

Declining Recovery Values

1. Delayed resolutions often reduce asset values.
2. Creditors may receive lower recoveries than expected.

Frequent Litigation

1. Excessive legal challenges prolong insolvency proceedings.
2. Creates uncertainty for investors and creditors.

Operational Issues

1. Difficulty in resolving complex corporate structures.
2. Coordination challenges among stakeholders.

5. Need for Institutional Strengthening

Strengthening NCLTs

1. Increase number of benches and judicial members.
2. Improve case management systems.

Enhancing Professional Capacity

1. Expand the pool of insolvency professionals.
2. Strengthen training and certification mechanisms.

Improving Information Systems

1. Better access to financial and operational data.
2. Enhanced transparency in insolvency processes.

Reducing Litigation

1. Promote pre-packaged insolvency and out-of-court settlements.
2. Encourage faster dispute resolution mechanisms.

6. Economic Benefits of an Effective Insolvency System

Faster Recycling of Capital

1. Capital locked in failed businesses can be redeployed productively.

Increased Investment

1. Predictable insolvency mechanisms improve investor confidence.

Stronger Banking Sector

1. Better recovery improves bank balance sheets.
2. Supports greater credit availability.

Higher Economic Efficiency

1. Resources move from inefficient firms to productive enterprises.

Way Forward

Expand Institutional Capacity

1. Strengthen NCLTs, appellate bodies, and insolvency infrastructure.

Improve Resolution Timelines

1. Strict adherence to statutory deadlines.
2. Greater use of technology and digital case management.

Promote Market-Based Resolutions

1. Encourage distressed asset markets and professional turnaround specialists.

Strengthen Regulatory Coordination

1. Improve coordination among regulators, courts, creditors, and insolvency professionals.

Enhance Predictability

1. Reduce regulatory uncertainty and excessive litigation.

Conclusion

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has fundamentally transformed India's insolvency ecosystem by promoting credit discipline, improving recoveries, and strengthening financial stability. However, achieving its full potential requires stronger institutions, faster resolution mechanisms, and greater procedural efficiency. A robust insolvency framework is critical for sustaining investment, financial stability, and long-term economic growth.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ibc-needs-an-institutional-boost/article71030219.ece**

Question

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 marked a paradigm shift in India's approach to insolvency resolution. Examine its achievements and discuss the institutional reforms required to improve its effectiveness. (250 Words)

Introduction

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 established a unified framework for insolvency resolution in India. It shifted the focus from debtor protection to creditor-led, time-bound resolution of stressed assets, thereby strengthening financial discipline and improving the business environment.

Achievements of IBC

Improved Credit Discipline

1. Increased accountability among borrowers.
2. Reduced incentives for wilful defaults.

Better Recovery Mechanism

1. Enhanced recovery rates compared to earlier frameworks.
2. Improved confidence of lenders and investors.

Strengthened Banking Sector

1. Facilitated resolution of stressed assets and NPAs.
2. Improved bank balance sheets.

Ease of Doing Business

1. Created a predictable and transparent insolvency regime.
2. Enhanced investor confidence.

Challenges

1. Delays in resolution beyond statutory timelines.
2. Capacity constraints in NCLTs and insolvency institutions.
3. Frequent litigation and procedural bottlenecks.
4. Declining asset values due to prolonged proceedings.

Reforms Needed

1. Strengthen NCLT infrastructure and human resources.
2. Expand the pool of insolvency professionals.
3. Promote pre-pack insolvency and out-of-court settlements.
4. Improve digital case management and information systems.
5. Reduce unnecessary litigation through regulatory clarity.

Conclusion

The IBC has emerged as a cornerstone of India's financial sector reforms. Strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring timely resolution will be essential for enhancing its effectiveness and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ibc-needs-an-institutional-boost/article71030219.ece**

4. Liberate Indian Schooling from Its Information-Overload Legacy (MT)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper IV – Ethics and Human Values (Critical Thinking and Learning)

Topic - National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Sub-Topic - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

Transforming Indian School Education from Information-Centric to Learning-Centric

Introduction

The rapid expansion of human knowledge has created unprecedented access to information. However, school education systems often remain focused on memorisation and content-heavy curricula rather than developing understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. To prepare students for the 21st century, India's education system must shift from information accumulation to competency-based learning.

1. The Problem of Information Overload in Education

Content-Heavy Curriculum

1. School syllabi often prioritise extensive factual knowledge.
2. Excessive content leaves limited space for conceptual understanding.
3. Students focus on completing portions rather than meaningful learning.

Rote Learning Culture

1. Learning is frequently driven by memorisation.
2. Examinations often reward recall rather than analytical abilities.
3. Curiosity and creativity receive inadequate attention.

Cognitive Overburden

1. Excessive information can overwhelm learners.
2. Students struggle to connect concepts and apply knowledge in real-life situations.
3. Learning becomes mechanical rather than meaningful.

2. Why Information Alone Is Insufficient

Knowledge vs Understanding

1. Possessing information does not necessarily lead to understanding.
2. Deep learning requires analysis, interpretation, and application.

Need for Higher-Order Skills

Modern societies demand -

1. Critical thinking
2. Problem-solving
3. Creativity
4. Communication skills
5. Adaptability
6. Decision-making abilities

Changing Nature of Work

1. Automation increasingly replaces routine tasks.
2. Future employment requires innovation and continuous learning.

3. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 Vision

Shift Towards Competency-Based Learning

1. Focus on learning outcomes rather than content coverage.
2. Emphasis on conceptual understanding.

Experiential Learning

1. Learning through activities, projects, and real-world experiences.
2. Encourages application of knowledge.

Holistic Development

1. Equal importance to cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical development.
2. Moves beyond examination-centric education.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

1. Strengthening basic learning competencies at early stages.
2. Builds a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

4. Importance of Competency-Based Education

Development of Critical Thinking

1. Encourages questioning and inquiry.
2. Helps students evaluate information independently.

Better Problem-Solving Skills

1. Learners apply concepts to practical situations.
2. Promotes innovation and adaptability.

Improved Learning Outcomes

1. Enhances retention through conceptual understanding.
2. Reduces dependence on rote memorisation.

Lifelong Learning

1. Equips students to continuously acquire new knowledge and skills.

5. Challenges in Implementation

Teacher Preparedness

1. Many teachers are trained in traditional teaching methods.
2. Transition to competency-based pedagogy requires capacity building.

Examination Reforms

1. Existing assessments often emphasise factual recall.
2. Evaluation systems need alignment with learning outcomes.

Curriculum Redesign

1. Balancing content reduction with academic rigour remains challenging.
2. Requires systematic revision of textbooks and learning materials.

Parental Expectations

1. Many stakeholders continue to equate education with marks and examinations.
2. Cultural acceptance of new learning models may take time.

6. Role of Teachers in Educational Transformation

Facilitators Rather than Information Providers

1. Guide students in exploration and inquiry.
2. Encourage independent learning.

Promoting Curiosity

1. Create classroom environments that reward questioning.
2. Foster creativity and innovation.

Continuous Assessment

1. Monitor learning through projects, discussions, and activities.
2. Focus on competency development.

7. Benefits for India's Human Capital

Enhanced Employability

1. Students develop industry-relevant skills.
2. Better alignment with future labour market demands.

Innovation-Driven Economy

1. Encourages scientific temper and entrepreneurship.
2. Supports knowledge-based economic growth.

Stronger Democratic Citizenship

1. Promotes informed decision-making and civic responsibility.
2. Encourages rational and evidence-based thinking.

Way Forward

Reduce Curriculum Overload

1. Focus on essential concepts and competencies.
2. Remove redundant and repetitive content.

Reform Assessment Systems

1. Shift from memory-based testing to competency-based evaluation.
2. Encourage analytical and application-oriented questions.

Invest in Teacher Training

1. Equip teachers with modern pedagogical methods.
2. Strengthen continuous professional development.

Promote Experiential Learning

1. Increase project-based, inquiry-based, and interdisciplinary learning.
2. Integrate real-world problem-solving into classrooms.

Strengthen NEP Implementation

1. Ensure effective curriculum, textbook, and examination reforms.
2. Align institutional practices with competency-based education goals.

Conclusion

The future of education lies not in the accumulation of information but in the development of understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. By successfully implementing competency-based learning envisioned under NEP 2020, India can transform its education system into one that nurtures curious, capable, and future-ready citizens.

Source - https -//www.magzter.com/stories/newspaper/Mint-Kolkata/LIBERATE-INDIAN-SCHOOLING-FROM-ITS-INFORMATIONOVERLOAD-LEGACY?srsltid=AfmBOorxsGADnIVVrcbhJ1M16kTPJZzGFUFoFCVtFmTE-91y8GrykCZx

Question

Excessive focus on information acquisition often undermines meaningful learning in schools. Examine the need for shifting from content-heavy education to competency-based learning in India. (250 Words)

Introduction

Traditional education systems have often prioritised memorisation and information accumulation. However, in a rapidly changing knowledge economy, the ability to understand, analyse, and apply knowledge has become more important than mere information recall.

Need for Competency-Based Learning

Limitations of Information-Centric Education

1. Encourages rote learning and examination-oriented preparation.
2. Reduces opportunities for critical thinking and creativity.
3. Creates cognitive overload without ensuring understanding.

Importance of Competencies

1. Develops problem-solving and analytical abilities.
2. Enhances adaptability in a rapidly changing world.
3. Supports lifelong learning and innovation.

Alignment with Future Needs

1. Modern economies require skills rather than mere factual knowledge.
2. Employers increasingly value creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Challenges

1. Teacher preparedness and capacity constraints.
2. Examination systems focused on memorisation.
3. Resistance to change among stakeholders.
4. Need for curriculum and textbook reforms.

Conclusion

A shift from information-heavy education to competency-based learning is essential for building a future-ready workforce and informed citizenry. Effective implementation of NEP 2020, supported by teacher training and assessment reforms, can help realise this transformation.

Source **- https -//www.magzter.com/stories/newspaper/Mint-Kolkata/LIBERATE-INDIAN-SCHOOLING-FROM-ITS-INFORMATIONOVERLOAD-LEGACY?srsltid=AfmBOorxsGADnIVVrcbhJ1M16kTPJZzGFUFoFCVtFmTE-91y8GrykCZx**

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1. Contradictions Within India's Cow Protection Regime (TH)

GS Paper II & III - Indian Polity and Governance / Indian Economy and Agriculture

Topic - Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs); Economics of animal rearing and rural livelihoods.

Sub-Topic - Article 48 (DPSPs), Article 21 (Right to Privacy), Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Test, Livestock Census Data Analysis, and Agrosilvopastoral Economics.

1. Introduction

The animal welfare landscape in India remains heavily politicized, highlighted by recent public outrages over cow carcass discoveries in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, and starvation deaths in Chhattisgarh. On May 13, 2026, the newly formed government in West Bengal issued a stringent notification under the *West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act, 1950*, mandating a government-issued "certificate of fitness" for the culling of any cow, bull, bullock, or buffalo.

While the Calcutta High Court recently upheld the notice based on a 2018 precedent, the policy has sparked debate by permitting the culling of cattle older than 14 years. This tension highlights a broader conflict in Indian governance - balancing cultural and religious reverence with constitutional rights to privacy and the economic realities of the rural agrosilvopastoral economy.

2. The Legal Landscape and Constitutional Underpinnings

The Legislative Spread - More than 20 Indian states have enacted statutes prohibiting cow slaughter. The only states currently without such prohibitions are Kerala, Goa, and a cluster of North-eastern states - Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram.

Directive Principles Baseline - During the framing of the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar placed cow protection under Article 48 within the non-justiciable Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), directing the state to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern, scientific lines.

Increasing Statutory Severity - When political shifts occur, states frequently amend these laws to increase penalties. This includes criminalizing the possession of beef and heavily restricting the transport of cattle.

Extreme Penal Measures - The *Gujarat Animal Preservation (Amendment) Act of 2017* introduced life imprisonment for cow slaughter. In 2025, courts sentenced three individuals to this maximum punishment—a penalty typically reserved for heinous offenses like murder or terrorism.

3. Socio-Religious Context and Judicial Tests

The text evaluates the socio-religious status of cow protection through historical, theological, and legal frameworks -

The "Essential Religious Practice" (ERP) Test - To be deemed an ERP, a religious practice must be mandatory from the inception of the faith. Scriptural reviews by historians like D.N. Jha challenge this, citing *Dharmashastric* texts where sages like Yajnavalkya discuss the consumption of beef, and noting that early prescriptive texts classified cow slaughter as a minor sin (*upapataka*) rather than a major sin (*mahapataka*).

Savarkar's Perspective - Prominent Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar held views on cow reverence that differed significantly from those of many present-day activists, focusing on scientific utility over theological worship.

The Islamic Precedent - In the landmark Mohd. Hanif Quareshi vs. State of Bihar (1958) ruling, the Supreme Court held that cow slaughter on Bakr-Eid is not an essential Islamic practice.

Historical Muslim Restrictions - Multiple Muslim rulers historically restricted cow culling out of respect for Hindu and Jain sentiments, including Babur's will to Humayun and Jahangir's Edict No. 10. This is matched by modern fatwas from the Deoband seminary and statements from constituent assembly members like Z.H. Lari.

4. Livestock Census Data - The Policy Deficit Paradox

An analysis of long-term cattle census data shows that strict statutory prohibitions have not achieved the goal of preserving and growing the cattle population -

The Macro Disparity - Since 1951, India's overall cow population has grown by only 49.63%, whereas the population of unprotected buffaloes has increased by 153.8%, and female buffaloes by 161.9%.

The West Bengal Anomaly - West Bengal, which historically lacked total culling bans, saw a decline in its male cattle population of only 22.8%. In contrast, states with strict prohibitions experienced much sharper declines in male cattle between 2012 and 2019 - 38.3% in Gujarat, 31.4% in Maharashtra, and 58.27% in Uttar Pradesh.

The Shift to Buffalo Rearing - Stringent laws appear to be pushing farmers away from cows toward buffalo rearing due to the commercial viability of the latter. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, the cattle-to-buffalo ratio dropped from 105 -100 in 1997 to 56 -100 in 2019. Conversely, in West Bengal, the cattle-to-buffalo ratio rose from 144 -1 in 1997 to 295 -10 in 2019.

5. Demographic Growth Models vs. Resource Scarcity

The Compounded Growth Reality - Cattle populations naturally grow at a rapid rate because a cow typically produces its first calf around age three and can calve every 14 to 16 months thereafter.

The Simulation Paradox - Standard population forecasting models show that if no cattle were culled and all calves survived except for natural deaths, the cattle population would expand 2.5 to 3 times within five years.

Fodder Scarcity Constraints - Such a high rate of unmanaged growth is economically and ecologically unsustainable. Farmers cannot maintain these numbers due to widespread fodder shortages, which can lead to mass abandonment and starvation.

6. Rural Livelihoods and Economic Impacts

The Safety Valve of Lawful Sales - Allowing farmers to exercise their judgment in culling unproductive cattle provides an important economic buffer to fund household needs like weddings, education, and healthcare. Simulation models show that West Bengal farmers earned nearly ₹35,000 crore from lawful cattle sales between 2012 and 2019.

The Illegality Premium - Farmers in prohibition states still sell aging cattle due to economic pressures but receive much lower returns because the illicit nature of the market involves middlemen and bribery.

In practice, these laws create an unintended financial penalty for the farmers themselves rather than consumers.

The Agrosilvopastoral Dynamic - Livestock serves as a vital pillar of rural livelihoods, acting as an insurance asset that requires flexible, market-linked management.

7. The Right to Privacy and Social Harmony

The Constitutional Privacy Standard - In the landmark K.S. Puttaswamy (2017) privacy judgment, the Supreme Court explicitly protected personal autonomy. Justice J. Chelameswar noted that the state should not dictate personal choices like diet or dress, while Justice Chandrachud affirmed that dietary choices are a matter of personal privacy under Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).

Pragmatic Choices and Social Harmony - In response to shifting political dynamics, Muslim communities in Bengal have voluntarily reduced cow culling during Eid. This pragmatic choice helps reduce communal friction and supports social harmony.

The Call for Consensus - Leaders like Maulana Arshad Madani have called for the cow to be declared the national animal. The text concludes that to build long-term consensus, a unified approach could involve a central law that addresses cow culling while protecting rural livelihoods from exploitation.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/contradictions-within-indias-cow-protection-regime/article71034259.ece**

Question

"While cow protection laws in India are rooted in the Directive Principles of State Policy, their rigid execution often conflicts with the economic realities of the rural agrosilvopastoral economy and individual rights. Critically analyse the efficacy of stringent cattle slaughter prohibitions using demographic and economic indicators." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Article 48 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) directs the state to protect and improve livestock breeds and prohibit the culling of cows and calves. However, as more states introduce strict penalties—such as life imprisonment in Gujarat—the gap between legislative intent and rural economic realities has widened, as shown by long-term livestock census data.

2. Critical Analysis of Stringent Cattle Prohibitions

A. The Demographic Mismatch and Fodder Constraints

Unintended Population Decline - Strict culling bans can be counterproductive to preserving cattle. Between 2012 and 2019, states with strict prohibitions saw significant declines in their male cattle populations, including a 58.27% drop in Uttar Pradesh and a 31.4% drop in Maharashtra. Conversely, West Bengal, which permitted regulated culling, experienced a much lower decline of 22.8%.

The Shift to Alternative Livestock - Stringent laws have inadvertently driven farmers away from cattle toward buffalo rearing. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the cattle-to-buffalo ratio fell from 105 -100 in 1997 to 56 -100 in 2019. This shift occurs because buffaloes lack strict culling restrictions, making them a more stable investment for farmers.

The Ecological Imbalance - Without managed culling, cattle populations would grow by 2.5 to 3 times every five years, which is unsustainable given India's acute fodder scarcity. This often leads to cattle abandonment, resulting in mass starvation and public safety issues.

B. Economic Stress on Rural Livelihoods

Loss of Financial Buffers - In India's agrosilvopastoral economy, livestock serves as an insurance asset during crop failures or emergencies. Regulated sales allowed West Bengal farmers to earn nearly ₹35,000 crore between 2012 and 2019.

The Illegality Burden - In states with strict bans, farmers are often forced to sell unproductive cattle through informal, illicit channels. This leaves them vulnerable to lower prices, exploitation by middlemen, and bribery, turning a protective policy into a financial penalty for the farmers themselves.

C. The Constitutional Conflict

The Issue Intersects With – Fundamental rights under Article 21. In the *K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)* ruling, the Supreme Court affirmed that dietary choices are a matter of personal privacy and autonomy, creating a constitutional tension with state-enforced dietary restrictions.

Way Forward

To resolve these tensions, India must transition toward an evidence-based approach to animal husbandry –

Promoting Gau-Shala Infrastructure - Backing legislative culling bans with state-funded, working shelters to prevent abandonment and starvation.

Value-Added Asset Growth - Creating secondary revenue models for aging cattle, such as processing organic dung fertilizer and bio-gas generation, to help farmers cover maintenance costs.

Encouraging Social Consensus - Supporting voluntary steps by communities to reduce friction, alongside clear, uniform federal guidelines that protect both cultural sentiments and the economic security of rural households.

Conclusion

The data shows that strict legal prohibitions alone cannot protect livestock if they work against the underlying economics of farming. Achieving the constitutional goals of Article 48 requires a balanced approach. By combining cultural respect with strong infrastructure for non-productive cattle and financial support for smallholders, India can preserve its livestock assets while safeguarding rural livelihoods.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/contradictions-within-indias-cow-protection-regime/article71034259.ece**

2. Former CEC on SIR judgment - It gets the law right, the ground reality almost entirely wrong (IE)

GS Paper II - Indian Polity and Governance

Topic - Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Salient features of the Representation of the People Act.

Sub-Topic - Election Commission of India (ECI), Special Intensive Revision (SIR), Representation of the People Act (Section 21), Vulnerable Sections and Disenfranchisement, and Judicial Remedies.

1. Introduction

The 124-page Supreme Court judgment authored by CJI Surya Kant in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs. Election Commission of India* stands as one of the most consequential electoral rulings in recent memory. The text balances its assessment of the verdict, stating that while the Court successfully *"gets the constitutional law largely right,"* it fundamentally *"mistakes a demolition for a renovation"* by getting the underlying ground realities wrong. The analysis unpacks the legal validation of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) alongside the operational disruptions and large-scale exclusions it has caused within India's marginalized voter base.

2. The Legal and Constitutional Strengths (The Credit Due)

The author acknowledges several key aspects where the Supreme Court established solid legal baselines and necessary guardrails -

Foundation of Democratic Legitimacy - The Court correctly affirmed that maintaining a clean electoral roll is not a mere administrative option but the bedrock of democratic legitimacy. Over two decades had passed since Bihar's last SIR, during which rapid urbanization and internal migration created rolls filled with duplicate entries, deceased voters, and multiple registrations of migrant workers.

Statutory Validity - The ruling correctly established that the SIR is traceable to Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), read alongside Article 324 of the Constitution, and aligns with the mandate to conduct free and fair elections.

The Line Between Franchise and Citizenship - The Court drew an intelligent, necessary line regarding sovereignty - the ECI can examine citizenship status *solely* for the limited purpose of determining eligibility for inclusion or exclusion from the electoral roll. Deletion from a voter list does not equal a formal declaration of non-citizenship. Final adjudication remains with competent statutory authorities under the *Citizenship Act*, preventing the SIR from turning into a backdoor National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The Four-Week Adjudication Guardrail - The Court directed the ECI to refer all individuals deleted from the 2003 Bihar rolls on citizenship grounds to the competent statutory authority within four weeks, mandating their restoration if found to be citizens.

3. Core Technical Flaws - Demolition vs. Annual Summary Revisions

The text identifies a serious silence in the judgment regarding the ECI's data methodology -

A De Novo Collection Rather than Revision - What the ECI conducted was not a standard revision, but a *de novo* collection of data—discarding decades of cumulative work built up through painstaking Annual Summary Revisions.

The Accuracy Paradox - Through regular summary updates, the ECI had already achieved approximately 99% accuracy in the electoral rolls, under which major historic milestones like the 2024 general election were successfully conducted without challenge.

The Scale of Wastage - The judgment did not address the wisdom of throwing this massive baseline of work into the dustbin and inconveniencing 1 billion voters simply to correct a marginal, residual statistical inaccuracy. The text argues this exercise falls outside the intended meaning of Section 21 of the RPA.

4. The Reference Baseline Trap and Marginalized Exclusion

The Court's approval of using the 2003 electoral roll as the reference baseline introduces significant real-world challenges for specific voter segments -

The Re-Verification Burden - By locking 2003 as the baseline, every single voter enrolled *after* 2003 is forced to undergo re-verification.

Vulnerable Targets - This re-verification requirement disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations brought into the democratic fold over years of state outreach -

1. Young, first-time voters.
2. Highly mobile migrant laborers.
3. Marginalized women newly enrolled under the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program.

The Documentation Gap - While the Court validated the ECI's rigid document framework, a large portion of India's poor do not possess neat, formal documentary proof of identity and residence. Crucially, the one universally reliable proof that did exist—the ECI's own Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC)—was effectively dismissed as sufficient proof of rolling continuity in one stroke.

5. Illusory Remedies and the Legal Access Divide

The remedies prescribed by the Court for citizens facing wrongful deletion reveal a gap between legal theory and practical reality -

The "Judicial Review" Fallacy - For citizens erroneously deleted, the Court suggests they *"assail the decision of the Commission by way of judicial review."* The author notes that judicial review is an expensive remedy designed for citizens with resources and time.

The Reality of the Poor - For a daily wage labourer in Sitamarhi or Murshidabad who has been removed from the draft rolls without their knowledge, lacks legal literacy, and cannot afford a lawyer, judicial review is an impossible hurdle. It effectively closes the door of the law while appearing to open it.

The Strategic Failure of Timelines - The judgment directs that the citizenship referral process be completed before *"the next Parliamentary, Assembly, or Local Body election, whichever is earlier."* This represents an impossibly compressed timeline for a citizenship infrastructure that currently has no established system to handle millions of individual cases. Crucially, the Court specified no penalty for non-compliance, leaving voters vulnerable to being told to wait until the "next election" if authorities fail to decide in time.

6. Mass Exclusions and Corporate Litigation Spill over

The Scale of Deletions - The threat of wrongful exclusion is already visible in the raw numbers - over 90 lakh names were deleted from the draft rolls in West Bengal alone, and nearly 74 lakh in Tamil Nadu. The Court's procedural safeguards arrive after the structural damage has already occurred.

The Litigation Bounty - By directing millions of wrongfully deleted voters toward judicial review, the judgment unwittingly creates a massive market for litigation. This risks overwhelming courts with briefs and creating a burden for poor voters whose only real power was their vote.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/former-cec-sy-quraishi-on-sir-judgment-supreme-court-10712200/**

Question

"While clean electoral rolls are fundamental to democratic legitimacy, the mechanisms used to achieve statistical purity must not inadvertently disenfranchise the most vulnerable voters. Critically analyse this statement in light of the recent Supreme Court judgment on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In its recent 124-page judgment in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs. ECI*, the Supreme Court affirmed that cleaning electoral rolls under Section 21(3) of the RPA and Article 324 is essential to eliminate duplicates and maintain democratic legitimacy. However, by validating a *de novo* data collection process that discards years of summary updates and uses the 2003 roll as a reference baseline, the ruling creates a tension between administrative accuracy and actual voter inclusion.

2. Critical Analysis of the SIR Framework

A. Legal Guardrails and Sound Determinations

Protecting Voting Rights from Citizenship Disputes - The Court successfully separated voting eligibility from formal sovereignty. It ruled that while the ECI can verify citizenship to determine immediate eligibility for the voter list, it cannot issue a final declaration on an individual's citizenship status. This prevents the revision process from functioning as an unregulated, backdoor NRC.

Time-Bound Referrals - Mandating a strict four-week window to refer disputed deletions to competent statutory authorities under the *Citizenship Act* provides an important procedural check on paper.

B. Ground Realities and Operational Vulnerabilities

The Burden of the 2003 Baseline - Requiring every voter enrolled after 2003 to re-verify their status places an unfair burden on marginalized groups. This disproportionately impacts young voters, highly mobile migrant laborers, and women recently registered through state outreach programs like SVEEP.

Dismissal of the EPIC Standard - The administrative framework often rejects the ECI's own Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC) as sufficient proof of rolling continuity, forcing reliance on complex documentary proof of residence that many low-income citizens do not possess. This contributed to mass draft deletions, including 90 lakh names in West Bengal and 74 lakh in Tamil Nadu.

The Illusion of Judicial Review - Advising a daily wage earner facing erroneous deletion to seek "judicial review" reflects a lack of connection with practical realities. High costs and low legal literacy make formal courts inaccessible for poor citizens, effectively removing their political voice.

Unrealistic Adjudication Windows - Expecting an underfunded citizenship adjudication infrastructure to process millions of individual cases before upcoming local or state elections—without explicit penalties for administrative non-compliance—risks turning these safeguards into a empty formality.

3. Proposed Way Forward

To ensure that cleaning voter lists does not result in systemic exclusion, the electoral framework must implement several core adjustments -

Restoring EPIC Primacy - Re-establishing the Elector's Photo Identity Card as a strong baseline proof of continuity, putting the burden of proof on the state to justify a deletion rather than on the citizen to prove enrollment.

Establishing Localized, Free Grievance Tribunals - Replacing expensive judicial review routes with free, mobile municipal and block-level electoral tribunals to handle disputes quickly.

Strengthening Vulnerable Voter Protection - Enforcing strict penalties for administrative delays, ensuring that any citizen whose status is unadjudicated before an election is permitted to cast a provisional ballot.

Conclusion

A voter roll is more than a simple database; it serves as a citizen's basic certificate of democratic belonging. While the Supreme Court correctly resolved the underlying legal questions, its remedy under-estimates the practical hurdles faced by poor voters. True democratic resilience requires balancing statistical purity with procedural empathy, ensuring that the clean-up of India's voter rolls does not come at the cost of its poorest citizens' voices.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/former-cec-sy-quraishi-on-sir-judgment-supreme-court-10712200/**

3. Poverty, A Persistent Concern (BL)

General Studies Paper - II – Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections

Topic - Poverty and Inequality in India

Sub-Topic - Regional Development Imbalances

Introduction

Despite rapid economic growth and significant reductions in poverty over recent decades, poverty remains a major developmental challenge in India. While overall poverty levels have declined, regional disparities, low productivity, inadequate human capital, and structural economic constraints continue to trap millions of people in deprivation. Sustainable poverty reduction requires a combination of economic growth, social protection, and human development interventions.

1. Understanding Poverty in India

Meaning of Poverty

1. Poverty refers to the inability of individuals or households to meet basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities.
2. It encompasses both income deprivation and multidimensional deprivation.

Nature of Poverty

1. Poverty is increasingly concentrated in specific regions and vulnerable groups.
2. Rural poverty remains higher than urban poverty.
3. Poverty often overlaps with low levels of education, health, and employment opportunities.

2. Major Causes of Persistent Poverty

Low Agricultural Productivity

1. Dependence on subsistence agriculture limits income generation.
2. Small and fragmented landholdings reduce farm profitability.
3. Vulnerability to climate shocks aggravates rural distress.

Regional Development Imbalances

1. Certain states and districts continue to lag in economic development.
2. Limited industrialisation and infrastructure constrain growth opportunities.

Lack of Quality Employment

1. Large sections of the workforce remain engaged in informal and low-productivity jobs.
2. Underemployment and disguised unemployment remain widespread.

Human Capital Deficits

1. Poor access to quality education and healthcare restricts income mobility.
2. Malnutrition and inadequate skills reduce productivity.

Social and Structural Barriers

1. Marginalised communities often face exclusion from economic opportunities.
2. Gender disparities further contribute to persistent poverty.

3. Emerging Dimensions of Poverty

Multidimensional Poverty

Poverty extends beyond income and includes -

1. Poor nutrition
2. Inadequate housing
3. Lack of sanitation
4. Limited access to education
5. Poor healthcare access

Urban Poverty

1. Rapid urbanisation has led to the growth of informal settlements.
2. Many urban workers face insecure employment and inadequate social protection.

4. Impact of Poverty

Economic Consequences

1. Low productivity and reduced economic output.
2. Weak domestic demand and consumption.

Social Consequences

1. Malnutrition and poor health outcomes.

2. Low educational attainment.
3. Intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Developmental Consequences

1. Slower human development.
2. Increased regional and social inequalities.

5. Government Efforts to Reduce Poverty

Employment Generation

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
2. Skill development and livelihood programmes.

Food Security Measures

1. Public Distribution System (PDS).
2. National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Financial Inclusion

1. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).
2. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

Human Development Initiatives

1. Ayushman Bharat.
2. Samagra Shiksha.
3. Poshan Abhiyaan.

Rural Development Programmes

1. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).
2. Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY).

6. Key Challenges in Poverty Eradication

Uneven Regional Progress

1. Poverty remains concentrated in economically weaker regions.
2. Benefits of growth are not evenly distributed.

Informalisation of Employment

1. Majority of workers lack stable incomes and social security.

Climate Vulnerability

1. Droughts, floods, and environmental degradation disproportionately affect poor households.

Limited Access to Productive Assets

1. Poor households often lack land, credit, technology, and market access.

7. Strategies for Sustainable Poverty Reduction

Promote Inclusive Economic Growth

1. Encourage labour-intensive manufacturing and services.
2. Expand productive employment opportunities.

Strengthen Human Capital

1. Improve quality of education and healthcare.
2. Enhance nutrition and skill development.

Agricultural Transformation

1. Increase farm productivity through technology and irrigation.
2. Promote diversification and value addition.

Regional Development

1. Focus on backward districts through targeted investments.

2. Improve infrastructure and connectivity.

Strengthen Social Protection

1. Expand social security coverage.
2. Improve targeting and efficiency of welfare programmes.

Way Forward

Focus on Productive Livelihoods

1. Shift from welfare alone to income-generating opportunities.
2. Promote entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Improve Governance and Delivery

1. Strengthen implementation of welfare programmes.
2. Enhance transparency through digital platforms.

Invest in Human Development

1. Prioritise education, healthcare, nutrition, and skills.
2. Build capabilities for long-term poverty reduction.

Encourage Localised Solutions

1. Design interventions based on regional needs and socio-economic conditions.

Conclusion

India has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty, but significant challenges remain. Sustainable poverty reduction requires moving beyond income support towards creating productive employment, strengthening human capital, improving agricultural productivity, and ensuring inclusive growth. A multidimensional and region-specific approach is essential to eliminate poverty and achieve equitable development.

Source - https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/incoming/poverty-a-persistent-concern/article71034490.ece

Question

Despite significant progress in poverty reduction, poverty continues to remain a persistent challenge in India. Examine the structural causes of poverty and suggest measures for achieving sustainable poverty eradication. (250 Words)

Introduction

Poverty in India has declined substantially over the past decades due to economic growth and welfare interventions. However, poverty remains concentrated in certain regions and among vulnerable sections of society, reflecting deep structural challenges.

Structural Causes of Poverty

Low Agricultural Productivity

1. Dependence on subsistence farming and fragmented landholdings.
2. Limited access to irrigation, technology, and markets.

Regional Disparities

1. Uneven economic development across states and districts.
2. Concentration of poverty in backward regions.

Employment Challenges

1. High dependence on informal and low-productivity occupations.
2. Underemployment and disguised unemployment.

Human Capital Deficits

1. Inadequate access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition.
2. Low skill levels reduce income-generating opportunities.

Measures for Sustainable Poverty Reduction

Promote Inclusive Growth

1. Expand labour-intensive industries and employment opportunities.

Strengthen Human Development

1. Improve education, healthcare, nutrition, and skill development.

Agricultural Reforms

1. Enhance productivity through irrigation, diversification, and market access.

Strengthen Social Protection

1. Improve effectiveness of welfare schemes and financial inclusion.

Conclusion

Sustainable poverty eradication requires a multidimensional strategy that combines economic growth with human development, social protection, and regional development. Addressing structural constraints is essential for achieving inclusive and equitable growth.

Source - **https -//www.thehindubusinessline.com/incoming/poverty-a-persistent-concern/article71034490.ece**

4. Growth Strategy Amid War (FE)

General Studies Paper - III – Indian Economy and Globalisation

Topic - Economic Growth and Development Strategy

Sub-Topic - Supply Chain Resilience

Introduction

The global economy is undergoing significant transformation due to geopolitical conflicts, supply chain disruptions, rising protectionism, and technological competition. These developments challenge traditional growth models based on global trade integration. For India to achieve its long-term development goals and emerge as a developed nation by 2047, it must adopt a resilient growth strategy that balances global integration with strategic self-reliance.

1. Emerging Global Economic Challenges

Geopolitical Conflicts

1. Ongoing regional conflicts have increased uncertainty in global markets.
2. Trade routes, energy supplies, and investment flows face disruptions.

Rise of Protectionism

1. Countries are increasingly adopting tariffs, export controls, and industrial subsidies.
2. Global trade expansion is slowing compared to previous decades.

Supply Chain Vulnerabilities

1. Excessive dependence on a few countries for critical goods creates risks.
2. Disruptions affect manufacturing, exports, and economic growth.

Commodity Price Volatility

1. Fluctuations in oil, gas, and food prices affect inflation and macroeconomic stability.

2. Why India Needs a Recalibrated Growth Strategy

Changing Global Environment

1. Export-led growth alone may not be sufficient in an increasingly fragmented world.

2. Greater emphasis is needed on domestic capabilities and resilience.

Strategic Economic Security

1. Dependence on imports of critical goods can create vulnerabilities.
2. Economic growth must be aligned with national security considerations.

Sustaining Long-Term Growth

1. India requires high and sustained growth rates to achieve developed-country status.
2. Growth strategy must adapt to evolving global realities.

3. Key Pillars of India's Future Growth Strategy

Technological Leadership

Focus on emerging sectors such as -

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI)
2. Semiconductors
3. Biotechnology
4. Advanced manufacturing
5. Robotics
6. Quantum technologies
7. Space technologies

Industrial Deepening

1. Strengthen domestic manufacturing capabilities.
2. Promote value addition and innovation.
3. Reduce dependence on imported intermediate goods.

Green Growth

1. Expand renewable energy capacity.
2. Promote green hydrogen and clean technologies.
3. Support sustainable industrialisation.

Infrastructure Development

1. Improve logistics, connectivity, ports, and transport networks.
2. Reduce transaction costs and improve competitiveness.

4. Importance of Energy Security

Strategic Significance

1. Energy imports constitute a major component of India's import bill.
2. Supply disruptions can affect growth and inflation.

Diversification of Energy Sources

1. Expand renewable energy.
2. Increase domestic energy production.
3. Diversify import sources.

Strategic Reserves

1. Build adequate reserves of crude oil and critical fuels.
2. Strengthen preparedness against external shocks.

5. Need for Supply Chain Resilience

Critical Sectors

India must secure supply chains for -

1. Semiconductors
2. Critical minerals

3. Pharmaceuticals
4. Electronics
5. Defence equipment
6. Energy technologies

Diversification Strategy

1. Reduce excessive concentration of imports.
2. Develop trusted trade and investment partnerships.

6. Role of Foreign Exchange Reserves

Economic Stability

1. Provide protection against external sector shocks.
2. Support currency stability during periods of volatility.

Limitations

1. Reserves alone cannot guarantee economic security.
2. Physical availability of essential goods remains critical during disruptions.

Complementary Measures

1. Strengthen domestic production capabilities.
2. Improve export competitiveness.

7. Challenges Before India

Import Dependence

1. Significant dependence on imported energy and critical technologies.

Technological Gaps

1. Need for greater investment in research and development.

Industrial Competitiveness

1. Improving productivity remains essential for global competitiveness.

Resource Constraints

1. Large-scale investments are required in infrastructure and innovation.

Way Forward

Promote Strategic Self-Reliance

1. Build domestic capabilities in critical sectors.
2. Encourage innovation-led industrial growth.

Invest in Future Technologies

1. Strengthen research ecosystems.
2. Support start-ups and advanced manufacturing.

Enhance Energy Security

1. Expand renewable energy and strategic reserves.
2. Diversify energy sources and suppliers.

Build Resilient Supply Chains

1. Reduce concentration risks.
2. Strengthen domestic manufacturing ecosystems.

Maintain Global Engagement

1. Continue integration with global markets while protecting strategic interests.
2. Pursue diversified trade and investment partnerships.

Conclusion

India's development strategy must evolve in response to an increasingly uncertain and fragmented global environment. Economic resilience, technological capability, energy security, and supply chain diversification will be as important as economic growth itself. By combining strategic self-reliance with global engagement, India can build a sustainable pathway towards becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Source - **https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/growth-strategy-amid-war/4253802/**

Question

In an era of geopolitical conflicts, supply chain disruptions, and rising protectionism, India needs to recalibrate its development strategy. Discuss the key elements of a resilient growth strategy for India. (250 Words)

Introduction

The global economic environment is witnessing increasing geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, and protectionist tendencies. These developments require India to adapt its development strategy to ensure sustainable growth and economic resilience.

Key Elements of a Resilient Growth Strategy

Technological Self-Reliance

1. Invest in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing.
2. Strengthen domestic innovation ecosystems.

Industrial Development

1. Promote manufacturing competitiveness and value addition.
2. Reduce dependence on imported critical inputs.

Energy Security

1. Diversify energy sources and suppliers.
2. Expand renewable energy and strategic reserves.

Supply Chain Resilience

1. Secure access to critical minerals, electronics, and strategic technologies.
2. Develop diversified and trusted supply networks.

Infrastructure and Logistics

1. Improve transport, connectivity, and logistics efficiency.
2. Reduce production and transaction costs.

Challenges

1. High import dependence in critical sectors.
2. Technological and infrastructure gaps.
3. Resource and investment constraints.

Conclusion

India's growth strategy must balance global integration with strategic self-reliance. Strengthening technological capabilities, energy security, industrial competitiveness, and supply chain resilience will be crucial for sustaining high growth and achieving the goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047.

Source - **https -//www.financialexpress.com/opinion/growth-strategy-amid-war/4253802/**

P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Editorial of the Day – 30.05.2026

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1. Concrete Fever - On India and Heat Management (TH)

GS Paper III - Environment, Climate Change, and Disaster Management / Urbanization and Society

Topic - Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Disaster and disaster management; Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Sub-Topic - Urban Heat Islands (UHIs), Anthropogenic Heat Emissions, Microclimate Modifications, Climate-Resilient Building Codes, and Informal Sector Labor Protection.

1. Introduction

India's climate vulnerability has been starkly highlighted as temperatures in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, reached 48°C, making it the hottest recorded location in the country for the year so far. While high temperatures before a delayed monsoon are a known seasonal pattern in the subcontinent, the intersection of global climate change with unplanned urbanization has turned these heatwaves into a severe public health and economic crisis. The impact is felt most acutely by informal sector laborers, outdoor workers, and street vendors who lack protected working environments and must face extreme heat directly.

2. Quantitative Meteorological Trends and Climate Links

Long-term climate data highlights a steady increase in the severity, frequency, and duration of heatwaves across the subcontinent -

Core Heatwave Zone Expansion - India Meteorological Department (IMD) data shows that over India's Core Heatwave Zone—which covers central, northwestern, and eastern coastal regions (comprising about 30% of India's total land area)—the frequency of heatwave spells has risen by 0.1 days per decade since 1961.

Prolonged Exposure - The maximum duration of these extreme heatwave events has lengthened by 0.55 days per decade over the same period.

Historical Baselines - According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the 2015–2025 interval stands as the warmest 11-year stretch since global climate record-keeping began.

3. The Microclimatic Problem - Urban Heat Islands (UHIs)

The text emphasizes that atmospheric climate change is only the proximate driver of extreme heat; the lethal nature of modern Indian heatwaves is heavily manufactured by urban design -

The Rural-Urban Temperature Divide - Urban Heat Islands (UHIs) across major Indian cities now run 2°C to 10°C hotter than their surrounding rural areas.

Structural Causes of UHIs - This severe temperature difference is driven by human activity and urban construction, including -

1. The widespread use of heat-retaining concrete and asphalt surfaces.
2. The extensive loss of urban tree cover and green spaces.
3. The continuous release of waste heat from thousands of air-conditioning units cooling indoor offices.

The Urban Humidity Surge - In Delhi, average humidity levels rose by eight percentage points when comparing the 2015–2019 baseline to the 2020–2024 period. This microclimatic shift is directly linked to increasingly sealed urban surfaces that trap moisture and prevent natural land cooling, moving beyond the effects of global warming alone.

4. The Technological Fix Fallacy and Socio-Economic Disparities

The reliance on short-term technological solutions threatens to worsen the underlying climate crisis -

The Thermodynamic Paradox - Reaching for more, better, and cheaper air conditioners creates a dangerous feedback loop. In a thermodynamic sense, these machines cool indoor spaces by pumping waste heat directly into the outside air, worsening the surrounding urban heat island effect.

Socio-Economic Divided Protection - This technological fix protects a privileged minority of indoor office workers while shifting the environmental cost onto the outdoor workforce, informal laborers, and street vendors who cannot escape the amplified outdoor heat.

5. Regulatory Frameworks and Existing Labor Protections

Enforcement Gaps - India possesses labour laws designed to mitigate extreme heat exposure, but these regulations are currently honoured largely in the breach.

The Heat Index Mandate - Existing statutes require employers to halt all outdoor physical labor when the local heat index crosses safety thresholds that human physiology cannot absorb. However, a lack of active enforcement leaves informal workers exposed to dangerous conditions.

Fiscal Blind Spots - Nationally, India has not yet had a serious conversation regarding dedicated budget allocations for urban heat management and cooling adaptation programs.

6. Way Forward

Cool Infrastructure Interventions - Transitioning urban design to mandate the use of reflective, high-albedo materials on roofs and pavements alongside a systematic expansion of urban green cover.

Climate-Calibrated Building Codes - Rewriting municipal building guidelines and construction codes to account for modern temperature baselines, prioritizing natural ventilation and passive cooling strategies.

Strict Labor Law Enforcement - Actively enforcing existing labour statutes to mandate mandatory rest breaks, provide shaded areas, and stop outdoor work during peak heat index hours.

Dedicated Heat Budget Heads - Establishing specific budget allocations at municipal, state, and national levels to fund public cooling centres, urban forestry initiatives, and heat action plans.

Source - **https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/concrete-fever-on-india-and-heat-management/article71038035.ece**

Question

"Urban Heat Islands (UHIs) have transformed seasonal heatwaves into a severe structural hazard in Indian cities, disproportionately affecting the vulnerable informal workforce. Critically analyse the efficacy of technological fixes versus structural urban design interventions in mitigating this crisis." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Recent data showing temperatures reaching 48°C in parts of Rajasthan highlights the growing severity of India's heatwave profile. While the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) identified 2015–

2025 as the warmest 11-year stretch on record, the lethal nature of modern Indian heatwaves is increasingly driven by localized Urban Heat Islands (UHIs), which run 2°C to 10°C hotter than adjoining rural areas.

2. Critical Analysis of Mitigation Strategies

A. The Fallacy of Technological Fixes (The Air-Conditioning Paradox)

Thermodynamic Repercussions - The common response to rising temperatures is a reliance on indoor air conditioning. However, this creates an environmental paradox - these machines cool indoor spaces by releasing waste heat into the outside atmosphere, directly worsening the surrounding UHI effect.

Socio-Economic Divide - This technological approach protects a privileged minority of indoor workers while transferring the heat burden onto informal sector outdoor workers and street vendors who must labour under the sun without protection.

Microclimatic Alterations - The expansion of sealed urban surfaces and anthropogenic emissions has driven an eight-percentage-point increase in humidity in cities like Delhi, making outdoor conditions increasingly dangerous for human physiology.

B. Structural Urban Design and Policy Interventions

Passive Cooling Infrastructure - Moving past ad-hoc fixes requires structural solutions, including rewriting building codes to mandate reflective roofing materials and expanding urban green cover to lower surface temperatures naturally.

Enforcing Existing Legal Safeguards - India possesses labour laws that require employers to halt outdoor physical work when heat indexes cross safety thresholds. However, these rules are frequently ignored, leaving informal workers unprotected.

The Fiscal Gap - A major barrier to long-term adaptation is the lack of dedicated budget allocations at national and state levels specifically for heat management and public cooling infrastructure.

3. Way Forward

To build comprehensive heat resilience, India must move from individual cooling strategies toward public, structural interventions -

Enforcing Municipal and Labor Standards - Implementing strict labour inspections to ensure mandatory rest periods and work stoppages during peak heat hours, alongside updating building guidelines for natural ventilation.

Investing in Green Infrastructure - Investing in cool roofs, urban forestry corridors, and restoring local water bodies to lower the urban baseline temperature.

Integrating Heat Action Budgets - Establishing dedicated funding streams within urban local bodies to finance heat adaptation plans, public hydration points, and emergency medical support for heat-related illnesses.

Conclusion

Relying solely on air conditioning to handle extreme heat addresses the symptoms rather than the root causes of the crisis, while widening socio-economic inequalities. Long-term climate resilience in India's cities requires a structural shift. By combining sustainable urban design and green infrastructure with strict enforcement of labour laws, India can protect its vulnerable workforce and adapt its cities to a warming climate.

Source - https -//www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/concrete-fever-on-india-and-heat-management/article71038035.ece

2. On Fertiliser, Centre and States Must Align Policy (IE)

GS Paper III - Indian Economy and Agriculture

Topic - Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Cooperative federalism.

Sub-Topic - Nutrient Disconnect and State Bans, Fertilizer Control Order (FCO), Import Vulnerabilities, and Transitioning to Direct Benefit Transfers (PM-Kisan 2.0).

1. Introduction

The Union government has established a clear directive to cut the national consumption of conventional chemical fertilizers by 25% to 50%. This dual-track policy is intended to conserve precious foreign exchange reserves and protect the long-term biological fertility of Indian soils from chemical degradation. However, large agricultural states are implementing contrary measures. Local actions are working at cross-purposes with national directives, reversing ease-of-doing-business gains and slowing down corporate investments in next-generation, high-efficiency agricultural inputs.

2. The Policy Disconnect - State-Level Bans on Advanced Nutrients

A major disconnect has emerged between central policy objectives and state-level execution -

The State Injunctions - The state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra have passed decrees that restrict market choices for fertilizer companies.

The Restriction Mandate - These states have banned manufacturers and suppliers of heavily subsidized fertilizers—such as conventional urea and Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP)—from selling any non-subsidized specialty nutrient products.

The Banned Spectrum - This ban covers an array of advanced, non-subsidized nutrient categories, including -

1. Bio-fertilizers and bio-stimulants.
2. Nano-fertilizers and liquid specialty nutrients.
3. Water-soluble fertilizers and vital micronutrients.

The Institutional Paradox - In practice, chemical companies are legally permitted to sell *only* those conventional products (urea/DAP) whose usage the Union government is actively trying to discourage.

3. Consequences for Agricultural Efficiency and R&D Innovation

The state-level bans create a challenging environment for agricultural technology providers and farming efficiency -

Targeted High-Value Delivery - Most non-subsidized specialty nutrients developed by major firms (e.g., IFFCO, Coromandel International, Yara Fertilisers) are applied in precise, low doses. These are essential for improving the yields and quality of high-value horticultural crops like grapes, apples, and pomegranates.

Scientific Approval Bypassed - These specialty products are formally notified under the Centre's **Fertilizer Control Order (FCO)**. This notification follows extensive field trials evaluating bio-efficacy and toxicology conducted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), which are effectively neutralized by local state bans.

Disincentivizing Innovation - Restricting these sales removes the commercial incentive for private and cooperative entities to innovate and introduce high-efficiency delivery mechanisms. These include precision root-zone delivery via drip irrigation or foliar application onto leaves.

Environmental Risk Extrapolation - By forcing a return to bulk chemical urea and DAP, states increase nutrient waste. Conventional fertilizers are highly prone to chemical volatilization into the atmosphere,

leaching into local groundwater tables, or becoming chemically locked in the soil instead of being absorbed by crops.

4. Macro-Fiscal Vulnerabilities and Import Reliance

India possesses sufficient land, water, and sunshine for crop cultivation, but faces a major structural deficit in fertilizer raw materials -

The Import Bill - India's agriculture sector remains heavily dependent on foreign imports. For the 2025–26 fiscal year, national imports of fertilizer inputs and finished products reached an estimated value of $27.2 billion.

The Geopolitical Multiplier - Ongoing conflicts in West Asia and shipping threats along the Strait of Hormuz risk driving the national import bill passed the historic $33.4 billion record observed in 2022–23 following the invasion of Ukraine. This vulnerability makes reducing chemical use an urgent economic priority.

5. Proposed Policy Reset - Shifting to PM-Kisan 2.0

The current geopolitical and fiscal challenges present an opportunity to restructure India's agricultural support mechanisms -

De-Coupling the Subsidy - Transitioning away from the traditional, product-specific fertilizer subsidy regime—which distorts market prices and encourages chemical overuse—toward an expanded PM-Kisan 2.0 direct income support programme.

Market-Determined Rationalization - Allowing fertilizer retail prices to be determined freely by market forces. When faced with real market pricing, farmers have a clear incentive to optimize application rates and select more efficient nutrients tailored to their specific soil profiles.

Guaranteed Income Safeguards - This price rationalization should be paired with a guaranteed minimum income support allocation calculated per acre and per crop. This direct financial support ensures smallholder profitability while decoupling state assistance from chemical overuse.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/on-fertiliser-centre-and-states-must-align-policy-10714873/**

Question

"The structural misalignment between Union sustainability goals and state-level regulatory mandates in the fertilizer sector distorts agricultural input markets and increases macro-fiscal vulnerabilities. Analyse this statement and evaluate the feasibility of transitioning from product-specific input subsidies to direct income support mechanisms." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Union government's goal to reduce chemical fertilizer consumption by 25% to 50% is intended to limit soil degradation and manage an import bill that reached $27.2 billion in 2025–26. However, recent state-level regulatory interventions have created a policy disconnect, where regional mandates work at cross-purposes with national fiscal and environmental objectives.

2. Analysis of the Policy Disconnect and Market Distortions

several large agricultural states, including Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, have banned companies from selling advanced, non-subsidized nutrient products if they also distribute subsidized urea or DAP. This creates serious structural issues -

Distorting Input Choices - These rules create a situation where chemical companies are legally restricted to marketing only conventional, subsidized fertilizers like urea and DAP—the very products the centre seeks to phase down.

Stifling Corporate Innovation - Banning bio, nano, and water-soluble specialty fertilizers remove the commercial incentive for agricultural technology firms to invest in research and development. This blocks the deployment of highly efficient nutrients designed for precise delivery via foliar application or drip irrigation.

Worsening Environmental and Fiscal Pressures - Forcing a reliance on bulk chemical fertilizers leads to nutrient waste through volatilization and leaching. Furthermore, amid shipping disruptions along the Strait of Hormuz, this continuous demand leaves India's budget highly exposed to international energy shocks.

3. Feasibility of Transitioning to Direct Income Support (PM-Kisan 2.0)

Shifting from product-specific subsidies to a direct income transfer mechanism like PM-Kisan 2.0 offers a viable alternative -

Restoring Efficient Pricing Signals - Letting retail fertilizer prices adjust to global market realities encourages farmers to reduce waste and select input blends based on actual soil needs rather than artificially low prices.

Protecting Smallholder Incomes - Replacing indirect subsidies with guaranteed, per-acre direct cash transfers protects farm profitability against price volatility without distorting input choices.

Administrative Challenges - A successful transition requires addressing key operational hurdles, including updating land tenancy registries to ensure cash transfers reach actual tenant cultivators rather than non-farming landlords, and building a reliable domestic supply chain for specialty bio-nutrients.

Conclusion

Achieving long-term environmental sustainability and reducing import dependencies requires strong coordination within India's agricultural policy. The Union government should address regional state mandates that restrict input markets. By combining market-linked pricing with direct income support under a PM-Kisan 2.0 framework, India can align its federal policies, encourage corporate innovation, and build a more resilient agricultural sector.

Source - **https -//indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/on-fertiliser-centre-and-states-must-align-policy-10714873/**

3. The Social Erasure of Domestic Violence Victims (TP)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper IV – Ethics, Human Values and Gender Sensitisation

Topic - Women and Vulnerable Sections

Sub-Topic - Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

Introduction

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence worldwide. Beyond physical harm, survivors often face social stigma, victim-blaming, disbelief, and psychological trauma. Instead of receiving support, many victims are judged based on their emotional responses, leading to their experiences being dismissed or ignored. Addressing domestic violence requires legal protection, social awareness, and a shift in societal attitudes towards survivors.

1. Understanding Domestic Violence

Meaning

Domestic violence refers to any form of abuse occurring within a domestic or intimate relationship, including -

1. Physical abuse
2. Emotional abuse
3. Psychological abuse
4. Sexual abuse
5. Economic abuse
6. Verbal abuse

Nature of the Problem

1. Often occurs behind closed doors.
2. Frequently underreported due to fear, stigma, and dependence.
3. Affects women disproportionately, though other groups may also be affected.

2. The Problem of Victim-Blaming

Misinterpretation of Behaviour

Victims often display -

1. Fear and anxiety
2. Emotional distress
3. Withdrawal from social interactions
4. Anger or frustration
5. Depression and low self-esteem

These responses are sometimes wrongly interpreted as -

1. Overreaction
2. Unreliability
3. Emotional instability
4. Personal weakness

Shift of Focus

1. Attention moves from the perpetrator's actions to the victim's behaviour.
2. Society often questions the victim's credibility instead of addressing the abuse.

3. Psychological Impact of Domestic Violence

Trauma and Mental Health Consequences

Victims may experience -

1. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
2. Anxiety disorders
3. Depression
4. Chronic stress
5. Sleep disturbances
6. Reduced self-confidence

Survival Responses

1. Emotional outbursts or withdrawal are often coping mechanisms.
2. These reactions reflect trauma rather than character flaws.

4. Social and Cultural Factors

Patriarchal Norms

1. Traditional gender roles may normalise abusive behaviour.
2. Women are often expected to preserve family honour and relationships.

Social Stigma

1. Victims fear social isolation and community judgment.

2. Concerns about marriage, reputation, and family status discourage reporting.

Economic Dependence

1. Financial dependence on abusers limits escape options.
2. Lack of independent income increases vulnerability.

5. Consequences of Ignoring Domestic Violence

Impact on Individuals

1. Physical injuries and long-term health issues.
2. Psychological trauma and reduced quality of life.

Impact on Families

1. Children exposed to violence face developmental and emotional challenges.
2. Intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour may occur.

Impact on Society

1. Weakens social cohesion and gender equality.
2. Increases healthcare and social welfare burdens.

6. Legal and Institutional Framework in India

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

Provides protection against -

1. Physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Verbal and emotional abuse
4. Economic abuse

Other Supporting Mechanisms

1. One Stop Centres (OSCs)
2. Women Helplines (181)
3. National Commission for Women (NCW)
4. Legal aid services
5. Shelter homes and counselling services

7. Challenges in Addressing Domestic Violence

Underreporting

1. Fear of retaliation and social stigma.
2. Lack of awareness regarding legal rights.

Weak Support Systems

1. Limited access to counselling and rehabilitation services.
2. Inadequate institutional capacity in some regions.

Social Attitudes

1. Persistence of victim-blaming narratives.
2. Normalisation of domestic abuse within households.

Delayed Justice

1. Lengthy legal procedures discourage survivors from seeking remedies.

8. Need for a Survivor-Centric Approach

Shift Focus to the Perpetrator

1. Accountability must rest on abusive behaviour.
2. Victims should not be judged based on trauma responses.

Trauma-Informed Support

1. Police, judiciary, healthcare workers, and counsellors should be trained in trauma-sensitive approaches.

Strengthen Community Support

1. Encourage community awareness and intervention.
2. Promote gender-sensitive social norms.

Economic Empowerment

1. Enhance women's access to education, employment, and financial resources.

Way Forward

Promote Gender Sensitisation

1. Integrate gender equality education in schools and communities.
2. Challenge harmful stereotypes and social norms.

Strengthen Support Services

1. Expand counselling centres, shelters, and legal assistance.
2. Improve accessibility in rural and remote areas.

Improve Institutional Response

1. Fast-track domestic violence cases.
2. Strengthen coordination among police, courts, and social welfare agencies.

Encourage Reporting

1. Create safe and confidential reporting mechanisms.
2. Protect survivors from retaliation and social exclusion.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is not merely a private family matter but a serious social and human rights issue. Effective responses require moving beyond victim-blaming towards survivor-centred support, accountability for perpetrators, and broader social transformation. A society committed to gender justice must recognise, believe, and support survivors while creating conditions that prevent violence from occurring in the first place.

Source - https -//dailypioneer.com/news/the-social-erasure-of-domestic-violence-victims

Question

Q. Domestic violence persists not only because of abusive behaviour but also due to societal attitudes that silence and stigmatise victims. Examine the socio-cultural factors contributing to domestic violence in India and suggest measures to address them. (250 Words)

Introduction

Domestic violence is a widespread form of gender-based violence that affects the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of individuals. Despite legal safeguards, social stigma and patriarchal attitudes continue to hinder effective prevention and reporting.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Patriarchal Social Structure

1. Traditional gender norms often legitimise male dominance.
2. Women are expected to tolerate abuse to preserve family unity.

Victim-Blaming

1. Survivors are frequently held responsible for violence inflicted upon them.
2. Emotional reactions are often misinterpreted as personal instability.

Economic Dependence

1. Financial insecurity limits the ability of victims to leave abusive relationships.

Social Stigma

1. Fear of social isolation and reputational damage discourages reporting.

Measures Needed

Strengthen Legal and Institutional Support

1. Improve implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
2. Expand access to legal aid, shelters, and counselling services.

Promote Gender Sensitisation

1. Challenge patriarchal attitudes through education and awareness campaigns.

Economic Empowerment

1. Enhance women's access to education, employment, and financial independence.

Community Participation

1. Encourage community-based support systems and early intervention mechanisms.

Conclusion

Addressing domestic violence requires both legal enforcement and social transformation. Creating a survivor-centric environment that promotes gender equality, dignity, and accountability is essential for reducing domestic violence and ensuring justice for victims.

Source - **https -//dailypioneer.com/news/the-social-erasure-of-domestic-violence-victims**

4. Fractured Healthcare (TS)

General Studies Paper - General Studies Paper III – Human Development and Inclusive Growth

Topic - Public Health Infrastructure

Sub-Topic - Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being)

Introduction

Healthcare is a fundamental component of human development and social justice. Despite significant progress in medical technology and healthcare services, access to quality healthcare remains highly unequal across India. Stark disparities between urban and rural regions, public and private healthcare systems, and socio-economic groups continue to affect health outcomes and overall development.

1. Nature of Healthcare Inequality in India

Urban–Rural Divide

1. Urban areas possess better hospitals, specialist doctors, and diagnostic facilities.
2. Rural regions often face shortages of healthcare infrastructure and trained personnel.
3. Access to emergency and critical care services remains limited in many villages.

Public–Private Imbalance

1. Private healthcare facilities are concentrated in urban centres.
2. Public healthcare institutions remain overburdened in many areas.
3. High out-of-pocket expenditure limits access for poor households.

Regional Disparities

1. Health indicators vary significantly across states and districts.
2. Backward and remote regions often suffer from inadequate healthcare services.

2. Major Causes of Healthcare Inequality

Inadequate Health Infrastructure

1. Shortage of hospitals, primary health centres, and diagnostic facilities.
2. Uneven distribution of healthcare institutions across regions.

Human Resource Deficit

1. Insufficient availability of doctors, nurses, specialists, and paramedical staff.
2. Reluctance of healthcare professionals to serve in remote areas.

Financial Barriers

1. High treatment costs discourage timely healthcare seeking.
2. Many households face catastrophic health expenditure.

Weak Preventive Healthcare

1. Greater focus on treatment rather than prevention.
2. Limited awareness regarding nutrition, sanitation, and healthy lifestyles.

Social Determinants

1. Poverty, illiteracy, poor sanitation, and malnutrition worsen health outcomes.
2. Vulnerable groups face multiple disadvantages simultaneously.

3. Consequences of Healthcare Inequality

Poor Health Outcomes

1. Higher maternal and infant mortality rates in underserved areas.
2. Greater burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Economic Impact

1. Ill health reduces labour productivity and workforce participation.
2. Increased healthcare expenditure pushes families into poverty.

Human Capital Loss

1. Poor health affects educational attainment and skill development.
2. Weakens long-term economic growth potential.

Social Exclusion

1. Marginalised communities remain deprived of essential healthcare services.

4. Importance of Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Ensuring Equity

1. All individuals should receive quality healthcare irrespective of income or location.
2. Reduces disparities in health outcomes.

Financial Protection

1. Prevents households from suffering catastrophic health expenditures.
2. Improves access to essential healthcare services.

Better Population Health

1. Strengthens disease prevention and early diagnosis.
2. Enhances overall quality of life.

5. Government Initiatives to Improve Healthcare Access

Ayushman Bharat

1. Provides financial protection for vulnerable households.
2. Strengthens healthcare access through health insurance coverage.

National Health Mission (NHM)

1. Focuses on improving healthcare delivery, particularly in rural areas.

Health and Wellness Centres

1. Promote comprehensive primary healthcare.
2. Strengthen preventive and promotive health services.

Digital Health Initiatives

1. National Digital Health Mission.
2. Expansion of telemedicine and digital health records.

6. Key Challenges in Health Sector Reforms

Funding Constraints

1. Public health expenditure remains relatively low.
2. Resource limitations affect service quality.

Infrastructure Gaps

1. Need for expansion of healthcare facilities in underserved regions.

Workforce Shortages

1. Inadequate doctor-patient and nurse-patient ratios.

Governance and Accountability Issues

1. Variations in service quality and implementation effectiveness.

7. Measures for Reducing Healthcare Inequality

Strengthen Primary Healthcare

1. Expand Health and Wellness Centres.
2. Improve accessibility of preventive and basic healthcare services.

Increase Public Health Expenditure

1. Invest in infrastructure, equipment, and human resources.
2. Improve quality of public healthcare facilities.

Address Human Resource Gaps

1. Incentivise healthcare professionals to serve in rural and remote regions.
2. Expand medical and nursing education capacity.

Promote Preventive Healthcare

1. Focus on nutrition, sanitation, vaccination, and health awareness.
2. Encourage healthy lifestyles to reduce disease burden.

Leverage Technology

1. Expand telemedicine services.
2. Improve digital healthcare delivery systems.

Way Forward

Adopt a Health-in-All Policies Approach

1. Integrate health considerations into education, sanitation, nutrition, and urban planning.

Reduce Out-of-Pocket Expenditure

1. Expand financial protection mechanisms.
2. Improve affordability of essential medicines and diagnostics.

Strengthen Rural Health Systems

1. Upgrade healthcare infrastructure and emergency services.
2. Improve last-mile healthcare delivery.

Enhance Community Participation

1. Promote local health awareness and community-based monitoring.

Conclusion

Healthcare inequality remains a major obstacle to inclusive development in India. Ensuring universal, affordable, and quality healthcare requires stronger public investment, improved infrastructure, adequate human resources, and a greater focus on preventive healthcare. Bridging these disparities is essential not only for better health outcomes but also for achieving social justice, human development, and sustainable economic growth.

Source - **https -//www.thestatesman.com/opinion/fractured-healthcare-1503599814.html**

Question

Q. Healthcare inequality in India is shaped by disparities in access, affordability, and quality of healthcare services. Examine the causes and consequences of healthcare inequality and suggest measures to achieve universal health coverage. (250 Words)

Introduction

Healthcare inequality refers to unequal access to healthcare services and health outcomes across different regions and socio-economic groups. Despite improvements in healthcare delivery, significant disparities persist between urban and rural areas, as well as between public and private healthcare systems.

Causes of Healthcare Inequality

Infrastructure Deficits

1. Uneven distribution of hospitals, primary health centres, and diagnostic facilities.
2. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure in rural and remote areas.

Human Resource Shortages

1. Shortage of doctors, specialists, nurses, and paramedical staff.
2. Concentration of healthcare professionals in urban centres.

Financial Constraints

1. High out-of-pocket expenditure.
2. Limited affordability of quality healthcare services.

Social Determinants

1. Poverty, poor sanitation, malnutrition, and low educational attainment.

Consequences

1. Higher disease burden and mortality rates among vulnerable populations.
2. Reduced productivity and economic losses.
3. Increased risk of households falling into poverty due to medical expenses.
4. Persistent social and regional inequalities.

Measures Needed

1. Increase public health expenditure.
2. Strengthen primary healthcare systems and rural infrastructure.
3. Expand Ayushman Bharat and financial protection mechanisms.
4. Promote preventive healthcare and health awareness.
5. Leverage digital health technologies and telemedicine.

Conclusion

Achieving universal health coverage requires addressing structural inequalities in healthcare access and quality. A strong public health system supported by adequate funding, infrastructure, and human resources is essential for ensuring equitable health outcomes and inclusive development.

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