



## 7 PM COMPILATION

**1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Week August, 2025**

### Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic
- ❖ Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer
- ❖ Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world
- ❖ Written in lucid language and point format
- ❖ Wide use of charts, diagrams and info graphics
- ❖ Best-in class coverage, critically acclaimed by aspirants
- ❖ Out of the box thinking for value edition
- ❖ Best cost-benefit ratio according to successful aspirants

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## Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

**‘Lottery of birth’** refers to the acknowledgement about how, when, where & to whom you are born, grow up and live. It plays such a profound role in shaping one’s future & dramatically alters the access to resources like nutrition, healthcare, education, and safe living environments. A child born in India has a one-in-five chance of being born into poverty, affecting their health, nutrition, learning and earning potential. However, there are ways to beat this matter of luck – one of which is Early Childhood Education (ECE).

### What is the SIGNIFICANCE of Early Childhood Education?

**1. Brain Development:** Early childhood refers to the period between birth and 8 years of age, wherein a child’s brain is highly sensitive to the environment around them. This time of “remarkable growth” requires a specialized educational approach to ensure that children learn key skills and foundational concepts to prepare them for later life.

**2. School Readiness:** Children who attend quality ECE programs are significantly better prepared for formal schooling. They enter with foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, self-regulation, and social interaction, which helps them transition smoothly and succeed academically.

**3. Improved Academic Outcomes:** Research consistently shows that children with a strong ECE background perform better academically in later years, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to pursue higher education.

**4. Social, Emotional & Physical Development:** ECE helps children develop vital social skills like sharing, cooperation, and communication, and emotional resilience to cope with challenges. These skills are crucial for building healthy relationships throughout life. ECE helps children in developing skills through free and planned play, engaging activities like building, painting, playing instruments, etc., and coordinated games where children practice running, pulling, pushing, hopping, and working together while having fun.

**5. Lifelong Love of Learning:** A positive early learning experience can instill a lifelong curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.

**6. Reduced Disparities:** High-quality ECE is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, helping to mitigate the effects of poverty and provide them with a better start in life. It can reduce developmental vulnerabilities and improve long-term outcomes. For e.g. children who receive quality early education are four times more likely to have higher earnings and three times more likely to own a home as adults.

**7. Economic Benefits:** Investing in ECE yields high returns. It can lead to higher earning potential, better adult health, reduced involvement in the criminal justice system, and a more productive workforce as parents are better able to participate in employment. High-quality early childhood care and education is considered by the OECD to be a key economic indicator when assessing the health and future positioning of a nation. For e.g. according to Nobel Laureate Prof. James Heckman, every dollar invested in early childhood education yields a return that ranges from \$7 to \$12.

**8. Good Habits:** Daily routines and structured environments in ECE settings help children develop good habits related to hygiene, self-care, and routines.

**9. SDG:** UNESCO supports high-quality early childhood education as one of its sustainable development goals.

### What are the CHALLENGES faced by Early Childhood Education in India?

**1. Uneven Distribution:** While programs like Anganwadi Centers exist, access to quality ECE is highly uneven. Urban areas often have a mix of private and public options, but rural and remote areas, and particularly marginalized communities, suffer from limited or no access to structured ECE.

**2. Bypassing of ECE:** While the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) through Anganwadis cater to children under six, many children in the crucial 3-6 age group still do not enroll in any ECE service, whether public or private. Many children in India are bypassing essential ECE entirely. 2% of three-year-olds, 5.1% of four-year-olds, and nearly one-fourth of five-year-olds are enrolled directly in Class one.

**3. Poor quality ECE:** Children getting ECE in India are not receiving sufficient instructional time. Nearly 5.5 crore children between ages three to six are enrolled in 14 lakh operational Anganwadis and 56,000 government pre-primary schools. However, Anganwadi workers spend only 38 minutes per day on preschool instruction, which is far short of the scheduled two hours, and only 9% of pre-primary schools have a dedicated ECE teacher.

The effects are reflected in learning outcomes. The **India Early Childhood Education Impact Study** found that only 15% of pre-primary children could match basic objects, a skill essential for letter recognition in Class one. Similarly, only 30% could identify larger and smaller numbers, which are foundational for arithmetic. As a result, children often start formal schooling without the skills they need.

**4. Poor optimization of resources:** The Government of India spends only Rs 1,263 a child annually on ECE compared to Rs 37,000 a student on school education — largely on producing teaching-learning materials that are often underused. There simply are not enough teachers to implement these resources, and there is a lack of oversight — one supervisor is responsible for monitoring 282 Anganwadis.

**5. Limited Parental Awareness:** Many parents, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, may not fully understand the long-term benefits of quality ECE, often viewing it as mere childcare rather than a crucial educational foundation. Most parents care deeply about their children's education but may lack guidance on supporting early learning. Factors like parents' education levels, work commitments, and financial difficulties can hinder their active involvement in their child's early education.

#### What have been the GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES in this regard?

**1. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:** Launched in 1975, ICDS is one of the world's largest flagship programs under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It's the primary platform for ECE delivery in India, especially in rural areas, through Anganwadi Centers. ICDS provides a package of six services, three of which are directly related to ECE:

- **Pre-school Non-formal Education:** This is the core ECE component, focusing on the development of children aged 3-6 years through play-based activities, storytelling, and group interactions.
- **Nutrition & Health Education:** For women (15-45 years) to improve their health and nutrition knowledge, indirectly benefiting young children.
- **Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP):** Addresses malnutrition in children (6 months to 6 years), pregnant women, and lactating mothers, ensuring better health and cognitive development

**2. National Education Policy 2020:** The NEP 2020 marks a paradigm shift in India's education policy by formally integrating ECE into the mainstream education system. Its core tenets for ECE include:

- **New 5+3+3+4 Curricular Structure:** The previous 10+2 structure is replaced with a new pedagogical and curricular framework, where the first five years (ages 3-8) constitute the "Foundational Stage." This explicitly brings ECE (3 years of pre-school/Anganwadi education) under the formal education

umbrella, followed by Grades 1 and 2. Opening of pre-school classes for 3-6 year olds in government schools – previously catered only by the Anganwadis in public sector – the NEP has initiated a long-overdue structural transformation towards equity.

- **Universal Access to Quality ECCE by 2030:** The policy aims to ensure that all children entering Grade 1 are school-ready by providing universal access to high-quality ECCE. Special focus is given to socio-economically disadvantaged districts.

**3. National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE):** Developed by NCERT, this framework provides guidelines for a comprehensive curriculum for children up to age 8, ensuring a seamless continuum from pre-primary to primary school.

**4. “Balavatika” or Preparatory Class:** Under NEP, 3 pre-schools classes (Balvatikas-1,2,3) have been started in the government schools. Before age 5, every child will move to a ‘Preparatory Class’ or ‘Balavatika’ (before Class 1) within an Anganwadi or primary school, taught by an ECCE-qualified teacher. Odisha government has launched its own **Shishu Vatikas** in all government schools for ECE to make children in the age group 5 to 6 school ready.

#### **5. Professional Development for ECCE (Early Childhood Care & Education) Educators:**

- **Training for Anganwadi Workers:** Anganwadi workers (AWWs) with 10+2 qualification and above will receive a 6-month certificate program in ECCE, while those with lower qualifications will undergo a one-year diploma program.
- **Cadre of Qualified Educators:** NEP envisions creating professionally qualified cadres of ECCE educators through stage-specific professional training, mentoring, and career mapping.
- UP government has also decided to hire 11,000 dedicated early childhood care & education educators for Balvatikas in all the districts. The State also organised a six-day residential training programme for 50 master trainers from 13 districts to train them on ECE pedagogy.

**6. Parental Engagement:** In Madhya Pradesh, the monthly **Bal Choupal Programme** engages with parents directly by showing them the importance of play-based learning.

#### **What can be the WAY FORWARD?**

**1. Significant Budgetary Allocation:** ECE needs to be recognized as a high-priority public good. The government must drastically increase its financial allocation to the ECE sector, moving towards the recommended 1.5-2.2% of GDP for universal quality ECE.

**2. Infrastructure Upgradation:** Invest significantly in upgrading infrastructure at Anganwadi Centers and pre-primary sections of schools, ensuring safe, child-friendly, well-ventilated, and adequately spaced learning environments with proper sanitation and hygiene facilities.

**3. Comprehensive Teacher Training:** Develop and implement a standardized, high-quality, and practical training curriculum for all ECE educators (Anganwadi Workers, pre-primary teachers in schools), focusing on child development, play-based pedagogy, socio-emotional learning, and inclusive education. Provide specialized training for educators working with children with special needs or those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**4. Active Parental Engagement:** Empowering parents with simple, effective ECE practices can make a significant difference. For instance, providing worksheets or encouraging their participation in ECE centre



activities can deepen their involvement. Parental engagement can be further strengthened through WhatsApp or EdTech apps, allowing parents to support their children's development.

**5. Develop Contextualized Resources:** Create and distribute a rich variety of culturally relevant, low-cost, and easily accessible teaching-learning materials (TLMs), including storybooks, puppets, puzzles, and outdoor play equipment, that support the play-based curriculum in local languages.

**6. Leverage NGOs and Civil Society:** Partner with experienced NGOs and civil society organizations who have a proven track record in ECE, particularly in reaching marginalized communities and implementing innovative models.

### **CONCLUSION:**

By 2047, over a billion Indians will enter the global workforce, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to reshape India's role in the world economy. Strategic investments in ECE and engaging parents in their children's learning journey could help 200 million Indians escape the '**lottery of birth**' and give today's young learners the chance to become tomorrow's leaders. This is a critical pathway to realising India's vision of becoming a true Vishwa Guru, empowering generations to come.

**Read More: [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu](#)**  
**UPSC Syllabus GS-2: Education**

## **Mangrove Ecosystem – Importance & Threats – Explained Pointwise**

As world grapples with extreme weather events & rising sea levels, blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves are critical to climate & economic resilience. However, historically, mangroves have been on the margins of planning & policy priorities in spite of their vital role in anchoring coastal economies & protecting millions from climate extremes.

### **What are Mangroves?**

- Mangrove forests are a unique type of coastal rainforest found in tropical and subtropical regions. They are characterized by trees and shrubs that thrive in saline and waterlogged conditions, typically along estuaries, deltas, and sheltered coastlines.
- Key features of Mangrove forests:
  - **Adaptation to Saline Water:** Mangrove trees have developed special adaptations, such as salt-filtering roots and salt-excreting leaves, to survive in saltwater environments.
  - **Pneumatophores:** Aerial roots that grow upwards from the soil, allowing the roots to breathe (e.g., *Avicennia* species).
  - **Prop Roots/Stilt Roots:** Roots that grow from the trunk and branches, providing stability in soft, muddy substrates (e.g., *Rhizophora* species).
  - **Vivipary:** Seeds germinate while still attached to the parent tree, increasing their chances of survival in the harsh environment.
- Some important mangrove forests in India are:
  - **Sundarbans, West Bengal:** This is the largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's famous for its unique biodiversity, including the Royal Bengal Tiger, and is formed by the confluence of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers.
  - **Bhitarkanika, Odisha:** The second-largest mangrove ecosystem in India, known for its rich biodiversity, including saltwater crocodiles. It's a Ramsar site and a National Park.

- **Pichavaram, Tamil Nadu:** One of the largest mangrove forests in Tamil Nadu, known for its unique backwater system and eco-tourism.
- The **Sundarbans are located in the delta** of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers. They get both fresh water from rivers and salty water from the Bay of Bengal.

#### SUNDARBANS:

- Sundarbans is a vast mangrove region in the **Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta** in the Bay of Bengal.
- It stretches from **West Bengal (India) to Bangladesh**, covering **4,200 sq. km** in India, which accounts for **60% of the country's mangrove forests**.
- It acts as a natural barrier against coastal erosion and storms, supports diverse wildlife, and provides livelihoods through fishing, honey collection, and eco-tourism.
- The Indian Sundarbans is **home to 428 bird species**, including rare ones like the Masked Finfoot, Buffy Fish Owl, Goliath Heron, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper.
- It also hosts nine out of **12 kingfisher species found in India**. The region is famous for its Royal Bengal tigers, with around 96 tigers in the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve.
- The Indian Sundarbans is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Ramsar Site**, emphasizing its global ecological significance.

#### What is the importance of Mangroves?

1. **Biodiversity Hotspots:** They are rich in diverse flora and fauna, supporting unique species adapted to the intertidal zone.
2. **Coastal Protection:** Mangroves act as natural barriers, protecting coastlines from erosion, storm surges, tsunamis, and high winds, thereby reducing the impact of natural disasters.
3. **Nurseries for Marine Life:** Their intricate root systems provide sheltered breeding and nursery grounds for a wide array of fish, crabs, shrimp, and other invertebrates, which in turn supports coastal fisheries.
4. **Carbon Sinks:** These ecosystems are highly effective at sequestering large amounts of "blue carbon" (carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems) in their biomass and sediments, contributing to climate change mitigation.
5. **Livelihood Support:** Mangroves directly support the livelihoods of millions of coastal communities through activities like fisheries, honey collection, and sustainable forestry products.

#### What are the threats that they are facing?

1. **Anthropogenic Pressures:**
  - **Encroachment and Conversion:** For aquaculture (shrimp farms), agriculture, urban development, and industrial expansion.
  - **Pollution:** Discharge of industrial effluents, domestic sewage, and agricultural runoff.
  - **Over-exploitation:** Unsustainable harvesting of timber, fuelwood, and non-timber forest products.
2. **Climate Change:**
  - **Sea-Level Rise:** Mangroves are highly sensitive to sea-level rise, which can inundate them beyond their tolerance levels.

- **Increased Frequency of Extreme Weather Events:** Cyclones and storms can severely damage mangrove forests.
- 3. **Reduced Freshwater Flow:** Diversion of river water for irrigation and other uses reduces freshwater flow to deltas, increasing salinity and stressing mangroves.
- 4. **Invasive Species:** Non-native species may outcompete or disrupt native mangrove species, reducing biodiversity and changing ecosystem dynamics.

#### What have been the various initiatives for the conservation of mangrove ecosystem?

1. **MISHTI Scheme (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes):** Launched in June 2023, this flagship program aims to restore and reforest approximately 540 km<sup>2</sup> of mangroves across 9 states and 3 Union Territories over five years. It promotes best management practices and seeks to make local communities stakeholders in conservation and income generation.
2. **National Coastal Mission Programme:** Through its 'Conservation and Management of Mangroves and Coral Reefs' initiative, the government provides guidance and financial assistance to states for preparing and implementing Management Action Plans (MAPs) focusing on survey, demarcation, afforestation, and awareness.
3. **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification (2019):** Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, this regulation strictly regulates development activities in mangrove-adjacent coastal zones.
4. **Co-Management Committees:** In states like Maharashtra, co-management approaches involving local communities, gram panchayats, and women's self-help groups have successfully restored mangroves while improving climate resilience and livelihoods.
5. **NGO and Public Engagement:** Projects led by organizations like WWF India and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme actively involve locals in restoration and stewardship, promoting education and sustainable aquaculture within mangrove ecosystems.
6. **Mangrove Alliance for Climate:** India became a member of the Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC) in 2022, enhancing international knowledge-sharing and scaling up best conservation practices.

#### What can be the way forward?

1. **Enhance and enforce national and state-level policies:** Update and rigorously enforce laws (like India's CRZ Notification, Forest Acts, and EIA norms) to prohibit destructive activities, enable restoration, and define clear frameworks for ownership and access rights.
2. **Integrate mangroves into climate and disaster adaptation plans:** Recognize mangroves as "natural coastal infrastructure" and prioritize their protection in all national and local planning.
3. **Empower local communities, women's groups, and indigenous peoples:** Communities that possess deep knowledge of mangrove ecosystems & rely on them for their livelihoods – engage them in co-management, benefit-sharing, stewardship, and policy decisions. Capacity-building and community-led restoration have repeatedly proven effective.
4. **Emphasize natural regeneration:** Move beyond monoculture mass-planting towards methods that facilitate the natural recovery of mangrove ecosystems, with targeted planting only where necessary.
5. **Innovate restoration techniques:** Employ methods like the "trenched hydrology" approach for better survival and ecosystem function of restored mangroves.
6. **Integrated ownership models like Eco-development Communities & Joint Forest Management Committees must be mobilized for conservation of urban mangroves.** Engagement platforms like 'Mangrove Mitras' can open avenues for urban citizens & local communities to engage constructively in the conservation of mangroves.



**Conclusion:**

Policymakers & businesses must recognise mangroves as vital climate & economic infrastructure rather than mere biodiversity zones. Protecting & restoring these ecosystems demands a coalition where science, business & community voices work in harmony & tandem – each bringing their unique strengths to secure their future.

**Read More:** [The Hindu](#)  
**UPSC GS-3: Environment**

### India's Act East Policy : Issues and Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The Indian Railways has recently commissioned the new 51km track to Sairang, which is present close to the Mizoram's capital Aizwal. It raises hopes for India's ambitious Act East Policy which envisages rail & road links with South-East Asia.

After the end of the Cold War, the majority of countries made changes to their economic and strategic policies. It was to align themselves to the changing geopolitical realities. India also realized the importance of Southeast Asia in 1992, so it launched a '**Look East Policy**'. The policy aimed at better integration with the region and other US allies after the end of the Cold War era. This policy was upgraded to '**Act East Policy**' in 2014 for cultivating extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia.

The policy has helped in encouraging cooperation on various projects like Kaladan Multi-Modal Project, Trilateral Highway, etc. However, there are many factors that are acting as hurdles in smooth cooperation.

**About India's Act East Policy:**

- It was launched at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in 2014 held in Myanmar. The policy is **based on 4 C's** – Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, and Capacity Building.
- It is an effort of India to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia and further strengthen its relationship with Indo-Pacific.
- India's focus under Act East remains on:
  - Enhancing economic relations with ASEAN.
  - Ensuring greater infrastructural connectivity & foreign direct investment.
  - Augmenting regional development in North-East India.
- Act East Policy envisages rail & road connectivity to improve trade with ASEAN & other East Asian countries like Japan & South Korea, deepen diplomatic engagements, and build stronger security cooperation.
- It is the successor & more ambitious version of 1992 Look East Policy – which was initiated in 1991.

**Comparing Look East with Act East:**

LOOK EAST POLICY	ACT EAST POLICY
Scope of Look East Policy was narrower. It mainly focused on boosting economic cooperation.	<b>Scope of Act East policy is wider.</b> It focuses on boosting economic co-operation, building infrastructure for greater connectivity, improving strategic & security ties.

<p><b>Look East</b> mainly aimed to boost trade and investment relations with Southeast Asian countries. The fall of the USSR has induced India to look for alternate options for sustaining its economic growth.</p>	<p><b>Act East policy</b> was launched to <b>tackle the changing Geo-political scenario</b>. The aim was curtailing Chinese dominance in the South China Sea and its rising influence over the Indian Ocean Region.</p>
<p>Development of North-East India was neglected in India's plans of forging deeper ties with East Asia under the Look East policy.</p>	<p><b>Heavy focus is being given to the development of the North East region</b> under Act East policy.</p>
<p>People-to-people ties &amp; other factors were absent under the Look East policy.</p>	<p>Act East Policy focuses more on historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious ties through more people-to-people exchanges.</p>

#### Progress made under the Act East Policy:

1. **Engagement with ASEAN:** ASEAN-India engagement has become deeper and has scaled new heights. **India is now the 4th largest trading partner of ASEAN.** Southeast Asian countries favor India's increased involvement to counter China's expansionist policies in the region. India has allocated \$1 billion for promoting connectivity at the India-ASEAN Summit.
2. **Cooperation on Regional Initiatives:** India is steering a number of sub-regional programmes and projects such as the BBIN corridor, Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan multimodal project etc.
3. **North-East development:** One of the key objectives of the Act East Policy is the transformation of the Northeast region – which is seen as India's gateway to the ASEAN bloc. Various initiatives under AEP have been undertaken for the development of North East such as:
  - Centre has increased its budgetary allocations for the region by 300% in the period from 2014-15 to 2024-25.
  - More than 10,000km of highways & 800km of railway tracks were built, 8 new airports have been established in the region.
  - The Government of Japan has decided to invest around Rs 13,000 Crore in several ongoing, as well as new projects in different states of India's North-Eastern region. **India-Japan Act East Forum** was established in 2017. It focuses on specific projects for economic modernization of India's North-East region.
  - The recently inaugurated Sairang railhead in Mizoram is strategic vis-a-vis the Act East Policy. It is expected to be vital for transshipment of goods from India-funded Sitwe Port in Myanmar.
4. **Security Engagement:** Defence cooperation has increased with East Asian countries. In 2014, India and Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that opened up a line of credit for Vietnam to purchase defense equipment from India. Since 2015, India has carried out joint maritime-law enforcement patrols and military exercises with ASEAN countries.
5. **Far East involvement:** India has also reached out to Far East economies especially Russia. India has announced to extend a \$1 billion line of credit towards the development of the Russian Far East. This is important as it is an energy-rich region and would help India's economic growth.

#### Factors inhibiting the success of Act East Policy:

1. **China Factor:** There has been a growth in China's influence combined with ongoing India-China tensions. Both China's direct influence and that of ethnic Chinese in the region are on the rise.
2. There is **disappointment in the region with India's economic policies**. Important economic agreements signed between India and East Asian countries are rather scarce. So far, India has only signed a memorandum of cooperation on oceans and fisheries with South Korea. Further India was the only country to withdraw from the recent Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) deal.
3. **Myanmar Crisis:** The ongoing political turmoil and civil strife in Myanmar pose a significant hurdle. Myanmar is a crucial land bridge for India's connectivity projects (like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project). Instability delays these projects, raises security concerns, and disrupts cross-border trade and movement.
4. **Slow Progress of Key Projects:** Major connectivity projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project have faced significant delays due to various reasons, including security concerns, legal and logistical issues, and land acquisition challenges.
5. **Inadequate Infrastructure in Northeast India:** The success of the Act East Policy heavily relies on robust infrastructure in India's Northeastern states, which serve as the gateway to Southeast Asia. However, this region still grapples with inadequate road, rail, and air linkages, hindering seamless connectivity.
6. **Ethnic Conflicts:** The ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur, for instance, poses a direct threat to the policy's objectives. Instability in the Northeast impedes infrastructure projects, deters investment, and raises concerns about cross-border insurgent movements and arms smuggling.
7. There is rising concern in the region with India's approach towards its minorities, especially Muslims and Christians.
  - Growing concern about Hindu majoritarianism in India has impacted civil society attitudes in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.
  - India deployed the soft power of "Buddhist diplomacy" but that too has not gained much traction as inter-religious tensions in the region grow.

#### Way forward to overcome the challenges of Act East Policy:

1. **Expedite Flagship Projects:** The government should **complete the tasks promised in the Delhi Declaration 2018**. This includes:
  - the digital connectivity projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam
  - the Trilateral Highway (TH) and
  - the Trilateral Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA)
2. **Role of States:** There must be empowering of States by the government to play a better role under the Act East Policy. For instance, a **Northeast branch of NITI Aayog** can be set up to bridge the gaps between the Centre and States while implementing the Act East.
3. **Regional Groupings:** The government should also focus on regional groupings like **BIMSTEC** which is a natural connector of South and Southeast Asia. Countries must enhance the negotiation process to conclude BIMSTEC MVA, BIMSTEC coastal shipping agreement, and BIMSTEC TFA (Trade Facilitation Agreement).
4. The development cooperation projects for the Act East should be put in fast-track by **avoiding cumbersome documentation and bureaucratic procedures**. For this, EXIM Bank of India should open its branches in all South, Southeast and East Asian countries. Further, coordination between

Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of External Affairs needs to be enhanced for timely implementation.

5. The government should **reap the low-hanging fruits** in India- Southeast Asia countries. For instance, international flights can be started from Imphal to other countries for boosting medical tourism. Imphal's Shija Hospital has already become a favourite destination of Myanmar people for health check-ups.
6. The country should **expand the outreach of Act East policy** by adding neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This would enable better development of India's Eastern and Northeastern states.
7. **Countering Chinese Influence:** While engaging with China, India needs to proactively offer viable alternatives and strengthen its own partnerships to balance growing Chinese influence in the region, particularly in critical infrastructure and strategic sectors.
8. **Prioritize Peace and Stability:** Ensure peace and stability in India's Northeastern states by addressing ethnic conflicts, insurgency, and cross-border issues. A stable Northeast is fundamental to the success of the AEP.

#### Conclusion:

India needs to further revamp the Act East Policy in such a way that its soft power enhances in the Southeast Asian region. This would produce multiplier effects in achieving the intended objectives of Act East policy.

Read More: [The Hindu](#)  
UPSC GS-2: International Relations

### National Sports Governance Bill – Provisions, Significance & Limitations – Explained Pointwise

The **National Sports Governance Bill, 2025**, recently introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill intends to bring comprehensive reforms in the sports administration & governance in the country, incorporating ethical practices, athlete welfare, and institutional standards. The Bill marks a watershed moment in India's sporting history by introducing significant reforms in sports governance that has hindered the nation's athletic potential for decades.

#### Important Provisions of National Sports Governance Bill:

##### 1. Establishment of NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNING BODIES:

- **National Olympic Committee (NOC):** Designated as the sole governing body for Olympic sports in India.
- **National Paralympic Committee (NPC):** Sole authority for governing Paralympic sports in the country.
- **Other Federations:** The Bill formally recognises National Sports Federations (NSFs) and Regional Sports Federations (RSFs) to streamline sports governance at national and regional levels.

##### 2. Creation of the NATIONAL SPORTS BOARD (NSB):

- A statutory regulatory body akin to SEBI, tasked with overseeing the functioning of all sports federations, including the BCCI.



- Empowered to grant recognition to sports bodies and enforce uniform governance standards.
- Will register all affiliated units of NSFs to improve transparency and coordination in the sports ecosystem.
- Equipped with budgetary support and capacity to hire domain experts in law, auditing, and governance.

### 3. Setting up of the NATIONAL SPORTS TRIBUNAL (NST):

- An independent dispute resolution body with powers equivalent to a civil court.
- Headed by a Chairperson (a sitting or retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court) along with two members with expertise in sports, administration, and law.
- Responsible for adjudicating disputes related to athlete selection, federation elections, governance matters etc.
- Appeals from the Tribunal can be made only to the Supreme Court.
- Civil courts will have no jurisdiction over matters covered by the Tribunal.
- All expenses will be met from the Consolidated Fund of India.

**4. National Sports Election Panel:** A dedicated panel to ensure free and fair elections for the Executive and Athletes' Committees of all recognised National Sports Bodies.

### 5. Code of Ethics and Transparency:

- Mandatory for every National Sports Body to adopt a Code of Ethics in line with international norms.
- Emphasis on governance through information—ensuring federations make essential data publicly accessible.
- **RTI Compliance:** All recognized sports organizations will be covered under the **Right to Information Act, 2005**, enhancing public accountability.

### 6. Safe Sport Policy and Grievance Redressal:

- Requires all sports bodies to implement a Safe Sports Policy to protect vulnerable groups, especially women and minor athletes.
- Grievance redressal mechanisms must be athlete-friendly, transparent, and time-bound.

### 7. Age and Tenure norms for Administrators:

- Upper age limit raised to 75 years.
- Removal of fixed tenure restrictions to help Indian administrators secure leadership roles in international sports bodies.

### 8. Bringing the BCCI under the regulatory framework:

- Though traditionally outside the ambit of government oversight, the Bill proposes bringing the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) under its regulatory scope.
- Once the Bill is enacted, the BCCI will have to get official recognition from the new National Sports Board. Any disputes involving the BCCI will be handled by the National Sports Tribunal.



**What are the key objectives of the Bill?**

1. **Promote Good Governance:** Establish ethical practices and universal principles of good governance, fair play, and transparency within national sports bodies, aligning them with the Olympic and Paralympic Charters and international best practices.
2. **Formalize Sports Administration:** Provide a legal backbone to sports governance, replacing the non-statutory Sports Code of 2011, which lacked enforceability.
3. **Promotion of Sports and Welfare of Athletes:** Establish frameworks for sports promotion and athlete welfare, while ensuring ethical practices in governance.
4. **Institutional Capacity and Standards:** Develop governance for sports federations aligned with global standards, Olympic principles, and ethical conduct.
5. **Sports Dispute Resolution:** Facilitate a unified and equitable system for resolving sports-related grievances and disputes.
6. **Prepare for Global Events:** Position India as a global leader in sports and strengthen its bid to host major international events like the 2036 Olympics by demonstrating a commitment to clean and professional sports governance.

**What is the significance of the Bill?**

1. **Enhanced Transparency and Accountability:**
  - **RTI Compliance:** Bringing all recognized sports bodies, including the BCCI, under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act is a landmark step. This will significantly increase public scrutiny and force federations to be more transparent in their functioning, decision-making, and financial management.
  - **CAG Audits:** Mandating periodic audits by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG) for the National Sports Board Fund will ensure greater fiscal discipline and accountability in the use of public funds.
  - By holding Federations accountable for their financial decisions, the Bill ensures that resources reach those who need them the most i.e. the emerging athletes, coaches & training facilities.
  - Introduction of **Whistleblower Protection** will empower the athletes & officials to report corruption without fear of retaliation.
2. **Athlete-Centric Approach and Welfare:**
  - The mandate for a minimum number of sportspersons of outstanding merit in the Executive Committees and General Bodies of federations ensures that athletes, who are the core stakeholders, have a direct voice in governance and policy-making. This is a crucial step towards making sports administration truly athlete-centric.
  - The introduction of a "Safe Sports Policy" with safeguards against harassment and abuse, particularly for women and minors, is vital for creating a secure and supportive environment for athletes. This aligns with global best practices for athlete protection.
3. **National Sports Tribunal (NST):** The establishment of a dedicated NST, headed by a high-ranking judicial officer, is a major positive which will help in reducing the litigation of sports-related disputes in the already overburdened judicial system of the country. It will also ensure that such disputes are resolved by bodies comprising of experts in the field of sports administration – leading to more informed & consistent judgments.
4. **Improved Governance & Professionalism of National Sports Governing Bodies:**
  - **Statutory Backing:** Moving from a non-statutory Sports Code to a full-fledged Bill provides a stronger legal foundation for governance, making guidelines enforceable.

- **Electoral Panel:** The creation of a National Sports Election Panel to oversee elections aims to ensure free, fair, and democratic processes within sports federations, reducing disputes over election irregularities.
- 5. **Gender Diversity:** The Bill mandates for a minimum number of women in executive committees is a significant step towards promoting gender equality and inclusivity in sports administration.
- 6. **Compliance with International Charters:** The Bill explicitly aims to align Indian sports governance with the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, Paralympic Charter, and international best practices. This will enhance India's credibility at the international level & will open doors for greater collaboration, funding & hosting opportunities of the country.
- 7. **Code of Ethics:** The requirement for national sports bodies to establish and adhere to a Code of Ethics will promote ethical conduct and reduce instances of corruption, doping and conflict of interest.

#### What are the some of the criticisms of the Bill?

1. **Concerns over Autonomy and Government Interference:** A primary criticism is the potential for the Bill to violate the autonomy of National Sports Federations (NSFs) & the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). International bodies like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and International Paralympic Committee (IPC) strictly adhere to the principle of autonomy for national sports bodies. Excessive government control or interference could lead to the suspension or de-recognition of Indian sports bodies by these international organizations, potentially barring Indian athletes from participating in international events. For e.g. the proposed National Sports Board is given significance overriding powers to grant or suspend recognition of sports bodies – which could lead to direct govt control over day-to-day functioning of the autonomous sports bodies.
2. **Relaxation of Age Limits:** While the previous Sports Code (2011) had stricter age and tenure limits, the Bill reportedly allows for an upper age limit of **70 years for office bearers, extendable to 75** if permitted by international charters. Critics argue that this relaxation could lead to the entrenchment of older administrators, hindering the induction of fresh talent and ideas, and potentially allowing “institutional capture” by long-serving officials. Relaxation of age limit will limit the upward mobility of younger, former sportsperson into top leadership roles.
3. **National Sports Tribunal (NST) Jurisdiction and Appeals:**
  - Exclusion of disputes related to games organized by international bodies and anti-doping cases from the jurisdiction of NST means that a significant portion of sports disputes might still fall outside its purview.
  - Mandating the Supreme Court as the primary appellate body for NST decisions might add to the already heavy workload of the apex court, potentially defeating the purpose of faster dispute resolution.
4. **Lack of Clarity on State Associations:** The Bill lacks clarity on the role and regulation of State Olympic Associations and State Sports Federations, potentially weakening decentralization efforts and creating a regulatory vacuum at the state level.

#### Conclusion:

Despite some of its criticisms (which must be addressed) the Bill is not a piecemeal effort rather it aims to bring holistic overhaul to tackle every facet of sports governance in our country. The government & administration must now demonstrate unwavering commitment to implement these measures without succumbing to pressure from vested interests.

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UPSC GS-2: Important Bills & Legislation

## Money Laundering – Impact & Preventive Measures – Explained Pointwise

Money laundering is a serious offence as it has direct linkage with terror activities & organised crime. Despite the presence of stringent laws like Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, the number of money laundering cases in India has been continuously increasing.

### What is MONEY LAUNDERING?

- Money laundering, as defined under Section 3 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), is an act through which processes or activities connected to the proceeds of crimes are concealed, possessed, acquired, or used & projected as untainted property or claiming to be untainted property.
- Money laundering is the illegal process of concealing the origins of money obtained from illicit activities, making it appear to have come from legitimate sources.
- The term is said to have originated from the use of laundromats by organised crime syndicates in the USA as a cover for their crimes & under-the-table dealings.
- Money laundering primarily involves 3 distinct stages:

<b>PLACEMENT</b>	This is the initial stage where “dirty” money (proceeds of crime, often in cash) is introduced into the legitimate financial system. The goal here is to get the money into a financial institution or a legitimate business to move it away from its direct criminal source. It is done by breaking up large amounts of cash into smaller sums (a process called <b>smurfing</b> ).
<b>LAYERING</b>	Once the money is in the financial system, the layering stage involves creating multiple layers of complex financial transactions to obscure the audit trail and distance the funds from their illegal origin. The aim is to make it extremely difficult for authorities to trace the money back to its source.
<b>INTEGRATION</b>	This is the final stage where the “cleaned” money is reintroduced into the financial system through real estate, business or asset formation etc, in a way that makes it appear legitimate. At this point, the funds are virtually indistinguishable from legal funds, and the criminals can use them freely.

### What are the impacts of Money Laundering?

1. **Undermining Financial System Integrity and Stability:** Money laundering can compromise the integrity and stability of financial institutions. Illicit funds entering the financial system can distort market mechanisms, leading to economic imbalances and even crises.
2. **Reduced Tax Revenues:** Money laundering allows individuals and businesses to conceal their true income, leading to a significant reduction in tax revenues for governments. This loss of public funds hinders the government’s ability to finance essential public services, infrastructure projects, and social welfare programs.
3. **Impact on Monetary Stability:** The sudden inflow and outflow of large, illicit funds can create unpredictable changes in money demand & supply, cause large fluctuations in international capital flows and exchange rates, and destabilize financial markets & monetary stability of the country.

4. **Fueling Criminality and Organized Crime:** Money laundering is the lifeblood of criminal enterprises. By “cleaning” illicit profits, it enables drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms dealing, corruption, and other organized criminal activities to continue and expand. This directly leads to increased violence, drug abuse, and other social problems.
5. **Corruption and Weakened Governance:** Money laundering often involves corruption at various levels of government and private institutions. This erodes public trust in the effectiveness and fairness of governance, contributing to a sense of injustice and disillusionment among citizens. It undermines the rule of law and democratic institutions.
6. **Terror Financing:** Money laundering techniques are increasingly being used to finance terrorist organizations and activities. By obscuring the source and destination of funds, it allows terrorist groups to acquire resources, plan attacks, and sustain their operations, posing a direct threat to national and international security.

**What are the initiatives taken to tackle to the issue of Money Laundering?**

1. **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002:** PMLA was enacted to **prevent money laundering** and **provide for the confiscation of property derived from money laundering**. In line with the UN Political Declaration & Global Programme for Action (adopted by UNGA in 1990), PMLA aims to combat money laundering related to illegal activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling, and terrorism financing & to confiscate the property involved or obtained. No FIR is required to initiate proceedings under the Act, ECIR is sufficient to initiate proceedings. Only requirement as per the SC was that a scheduled offence be essential for the offence of money laundering.





## Prevention of Money Laundering Act Salient Features

Section 3 (Defines money laundering)	Section 3 of the PMLA defines money laundering as any <b>attempt, assistance, or involvement in processes connected to the proceeds of crime</b> to project it as untainted property
Offences under PMLA	<p>Offences mentioned under Part A, B and C of the Schedule of the Act.</p> <p><b>Part A-</b> Includes money laundering offences under the following acts- Indian Penal Code, Prevention of Corruption Act, Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, Trademark Act, Wildlife Protection Act, Copyright Act and Information Technology Act</p> <p><b>Part B-</b> Includes money laundering offences that are mentioned in Part A, but are of a <b>value of Rs 1 crore or more</b>.</p> <p><b>Part C-</b> Includes money laundering offences under <b>Trans-border crimes</b></p>
Section 4 (Punishment for Money Laundering)	The offence of money-laundering shall be punishable with <b>rigorous imprisonment for a term not be less than three years which can be extended upto seven years</b> and shall also be liable to fine.
Agencies powers under the Act	<p><b>1. Enforcement Directorate (ED)-</b> ED is responsible for <b>investigating the offences of money laundering and attachment of properties</b>.</p> <p><b>2. Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND)-</b> It is the <b>central national agency</b> responsible for receiving, processing, analyzing, and disseminating information relating to <b>suspect financial transactions</b>.</p> <p><b>3. Other Agencies-</b> The scheduled offences are <b>separately investigated by the agencies mentioned under respective acts</b>. For ex- The local police, CBI, customs departments, SEBI, or any other investigative agency, as the case may be.</p>
Obligations under the Act	<p><b>1. Maintenance of Records-</b> Imposes <b>obligations on banking companies, financial institutions, and intermediaries to verify and maintain client identity records</b>.</p> <p><b>2. Reporting of transactions-</b> These financial firms are required to <b>report their financial transactions</b> to the Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND).</p>
Setting up of Authority	<p><b>1. Adjudicating authority-</b> PMLA envisages the <b>setting up of an Adjudicating Authority</b> to exercise jurisdiction, power and authority conferred by it.</p> <p><b>2. Appellate Tribunal-</b> It also envisages the <b>setting up of an Appellate Tribunal to hear appeals against the order of the Adjudicating Authority</b> and the authorities like Director FIU-IND.</p>
Special Courts	One or more courts of sessions are designated as Special Courts to try offences under PMLA and other related offences.



**2. Establishment of Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND):** Established in November 2004, FIU-IND is the central national agency responsible for receiving, processing, analyzing, and disseminating information related to suspect financial transactions. FIU-IND perform functions like:

- **Collection of Information:** Acts as the central reception point for various reports (CTRs, STRs, Cross Border Wire Transfer Reports – CBWTRs, etc.) from reporting entities.
- **Analysis of Information:** Analyzes collected information to uncover patterns suggesting money laundering and related crimes.
- **Sharing of Information:** Disseminates valuable financial intelligence to national intelligence/law enforcement agencies (like ED), national regulatory authorities (RBI, SEBI, IRDAI), and foreign FIUs.
- **Central Repository:** Maintains a national database of financial transactions.

**3. Role of Enforcement Directorate (ED):** ED, under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, is the primary legal authority responsible for investigating and prosecuting money laundering offenses under the PMLA. Its mandate include:

- Conducting investigations to trace assets derived from proceeds of crime.
- Provisionally attaching properties involved in money laundering.
- Ensuring prosecution of offenders and confiscation of property by Special Courts.
- Enforcing the **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999**, and the **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA), 2018**, which often have overlaps with money laundering activities.

**4. Regulatory Measures by Financial Regulators:** Regulatory bodies like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for banking, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for capital markets, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) for insurance, issue comprehensive Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) guidelines for entities under their purview.

**5. KYC Norms:** These guidelines mandate strict Know Your Customer (KYC) norms, customer due diligence (CDD), enhanced due diligence (EDD) for high-risk clients, and ongoing transaction monitoring.

#### **6. International Cooperation and FATF Compliance:**

- **Implementation of FATF Recommendations:** India became the 34th member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2010, demonstrating its commitment to global AML/CFT standards. India actively works to implement the 40 FATF Recommendations, which provide a comprehensive framework for combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing. Regular mutual evaluations by FATF assess India's compliance and effectiveness.
- **Mutual Legal Assistance:** India engages in international cooperation through Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) to facilitate the exchange of information and assistance in investigations and prosecutions of money laundering cases across borders.
- **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA):** India has signed DTAA with 85 countries, which helps to check money laundering. These agreements promote exchange of financial & tax-related information between tax authorities of participating countries. This facilitates enforcement of tax regulations & helps prevent illegal activities like tax evasion & money laundering.

**What are the concerns regarding the PMLA Act?**

**1. Inclusion of minor and less serious offences:** Inclusion of other less serious offences in the schedule dilutes the original intent of the law. The schedule of the Act has been expanded over the years, to include even **minor and non-serious offences** such as **copyright and trademark infringements**.

**2. Equates punishment for ordinary crimes with serious crimes:** PMLA equates the punishment under an ordinary crime with a serious economic offence. **For e.g.** With the **addition of The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** to the schedule of offences, **PMLA applies with all its rigour to public servants**. Thus, **a public servant charged with corruption and a hard-core drug trafficker are treated alike**.

**3. Broad Definition of 'Proceeds of Crime':** The broad definition of 'proceeds of crime', **provides considerable discretion to the authorities**. Critics fear that this discretion, in determination of 'proceeds of crime', can be misused by the investigating authorities.

**4. Stringent Bail Conditions:** An accused is **denied bail by the entire hierarchy of courts** because the **bail provision under PMLA** state that a **judge can give bail only when he is satisfied that the accused is innocent**. This is **against the Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence**, which presumes a person innocent until proven guilty.

**5. Burden of Proof of innocence on the accused:** The burden of proof of innocence, on the accused, presents a prominent **challenge in ensuring a free and fair trial**.

**6. Against the Federal principles and Basic structure Doctrine:** Under the PMLA, **the ED, can carry out investigation without the prior consent of the concerned State**. This is unlike other central police organisations, (like CBI), which are required to obtain the consent of the state before carrying out any policing/investigating activity. This **impinges the principle of federalism**, which is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

**7. Violation of the Fundamental Rights of Accused:**

- a. **Violation of Article 21:** Under PMLA, the ED does not require disclosing the details of **Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR)**, which contains the allegations against the accused person. This is against the fundamental **right of the accused to be informed of the charges and allegations**, which is a universally recognised right, and is **part of the right to life and liberty** under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- b. **Violation of Article 14:** Equating the punishment of accused of minor crimes and serious economic offence, is **violation of the fundamental right to equality** under Article 14 of the constitution.
- c. **Violation of Article 20(3):** The power of the authorities to issue summons to 'any person' (including the accused), to **give evidence or produce records** during the course of an investigation is in **violation of the right against self-incrimination**, which is a fundamental right under Article 20(3) of the Constitution.

**8. Extensive powers to the authorities:** The Act grants the Enforcement Directorate (ED) extensive powers of summons, arrest, and raids. This excessive power to the authorities, can potentially lead to its misuse and overreach. SC held that to initiate prosecution under Section 3 of PMLA, registration as scheduled offence is a prerequisite, but for initiating attachment of property under Section 5, there need not be a pre-registered criminal case. This provision has often been misused by authorities with politically motivated intentions.

**9. Low Conviction Rate:** According the the Report submitted by the FM in the Rajya Sabha, 5892 cases were taken up by the ED under PMLA since 2015. Of these cases, only 15 convictions have been ordered by the special courts.

**What have been the observations of the SC?**

<b>Strict bail conditions</b>	<p><b>Nikesh Tarachand Shah vs Union of India (2018)</b>- SC held that the bail provision of the PMLA Act was <b>unconstitutional</b> as it was <b>violation of Article 14 and Article 21</b>.</p> <p><b>Restoration of the Provision by the Parliament:</b> Parliament restored the strict bail provisions with certain amendments.</p> <p><b>Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022)</b>- The SC upheld that the strict bail provision is reasonable and has direct nexus with the purposes and objects of the PMLA Act. SC upheld the constitutionality of the PMLA.</p>
<b>ED's Overreach</b>	<p><b>Pankaj Bansal vs Union of India</b>- Supreme Court highlighted inconsistencies and lack of transparency in its operations. SC emphasized the <b>need for the ED to act with fairness</b>.</p>
<b>Procedural Violations</b>	<p><b>Pavana Dibbur vs The Directorate of Enforcement (2023)</b>- SC <b>observed procedural violations</b> and misuse of the PMLA. It pointed out the need for strict adherence to legal standards by the ED and other authorities.</p>

#### What should be the way forward?

##### 1. Amend PMLA:

- a. **Precise Definition of 'Proceeds of Crime':** A precise definition of 'Proceeds of Crime' under PMLA must be incorporated to **mitigate the potential abuse of its definition** by the authorities.
  - b. **Reassessment of Burden of Proof:** An amendment to PMLA which provides a **more equitable distribution of the burden of proof between the prosecution and the accused**, can be brought.
  - c. **Safeguards Against Overreach by Officers:** An **independent oversight mechanism to review and monitor the actions of law enforcement officers** must be established at the earliest.
  - d. **Review of the Stringent Bail Conditions:** The stringent bail conditions for **minor and non serious economic offence must be done away with**.
2. **Harmonization of Laws:** Ensure better harmonization and synergy between PMLA and other relevant laws (e.g., FEMA, Income Tax Act, Black Money Act, Fugitive Economic Offenders Act) to create a seamless legal framework for combating financial crime.
  3. **Capacity Building of Enforcement Agencies:** Significantly enhance the human and technical capacity of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), FIU-IND, CBI, and other investigating agencies. This includes:
    - a. **Specialized Training:** Provide advanced training to investigators, prosecutors, and forensic auditors in financial forensics, cyber forensics, blockchain analysis, and international cooperation.
    - b. **Adequate Staffing:** Ensure sufficient staffing levels to handle the increasing volume and complexity of money laundering cases.
    - c. **Technological Upgradation:** Equip agencies with cutting-edge tools for data analytics, artificial intelligence, and cyber intelligence to trace complex financial trails across jurisdictions.
  4. **Enhanced Independence and Transparency of ED:** Measures like **regular reporting and disclosure of cases handled, convictions secured, and actions taken**, must be incorporated to enhance the

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transparency in ED's functioning. These measures will ensure confidence among the public that ED is not a politicized institution.

5. **Strengthening Regulatory Oversight:** Empower financial regulators (RBI, SEBI, IRDAI) to impose stricter penalties and conduct more frequent and thorough audits of reporting entities to ensure compliance with AML/CFT guidelines.
6. **Leveraging Technology and Data Analytics:**
  - a. **Advanced Analytics and AI:** Encourage and mandate financial institutions to deploy advanced AI and machine learning tools for real time transaction monitoring, customer risk profiling, network analysis etc.
  - b. **Blockchain Forensics:** Develop expertise and tools for tracing illicit transactions on blockchain networks, given the increasing use of cryptocurrencies in money laundering.
  - c. **Data Standardization and Sharing:** Promote standardization of financial data across various entities to facilitate easier analysis and sharing of information while ensuring data privacy.

### Conclusion:

It is important that the authorities follow the recommendations of the FATF & ensure that money laundering cases are handled with care & caution so that misuse could be checked & genuine cases reported & investigated properly to enhance the rate of conviction & prevent the misuse of PMLA for political motives.

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UPSC GS-3: Internal Security

## Pesticides- Importance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

In recent years, the demand for crop protection chemicals, especially of herbicides, in India has increased tremendously. It is said that the market for herbicide is growing at a rate of 10% per annum.

### What is a Pesticide?

- Pesticides represent a broad category of chemicals formulated to control, repel, or eliminate pests that can inflict harm on crops, transmit diseases, or impact livestock. Pests in this context encompass a range of entities, including insects, fungi, rodents, and weeds. The multifaceted nature of pesticides plays a crucial role in modern agriculture, safeguarding crops and ensuring global food security.
- Types of pesticides:
  1. **Insecticide** = Engineered to target and eliminate insects.
  2. **Fungicide** = Developed to combat fungal infections in plants.
  3. **Herbicide** = Designed to manage and eliminate unwanted vegetation.
  4. **Rodenticide** = Formulated to control rodent populations.
- India's domestic crop protection chemicals market is valued at Rs 24,000cr. Insecticide is the largest segment, followed by herbicide & fungicide.

### What is the need & importance of pesticide?

1. **Protecting Crops from Damage:** Pests, including insects, weeds, and pathogens, can cause extensive damage to crops, leading to reduced yields and lower quality produce. Weeds compete with crops for essential resources like water, nutrients, and sunlight. Insects can consume crops, and fungi and other



pathogens can cause diseases that destroy plants. Without pesticides, significant losses of fruit (up to 78%), vegetables (54%), and cereals (32%) would occur due to pest damage.

2. **Ensuring Food Security:** Pesticides play a vital role in increasing crop yields and preventing post-harvest losses. By protecting crops from a wide range of pests, they help ensure a stable and affordable food supply for the growing population. Without pesticides, crop yields could drop significantly, leading to food shortages and higher prices.
3. **Controlling Disease Vectors:** Many times weeds harbor pests & pathogens that can cause damage to the standing crops. Herbicides are essential tools for controlling these weeds and preventing them from causing further harm.
4. **Labour Shortage:** Traditionally, agricultural operations like weed control have been performed manually by the agricultural labourers – either by hand or using simple tools like *Khurpi*. But manual weeding is time consuming, costly & most importantly, labours are not available when the farmers need it. On the other hand, using modern tools like power weeders significantly reduce the time to remove the weeds but are not very effective against weeds with deep roots or growing within densely planted crops. Hence, a more effective solution to the problem is the use of herbicides.
5. **Enhancing Economic Stability:** The use of pesticides supports agricultural economies by protecting the investments of farmers and ensuring predictable harvests. This stability helps to maintain food prices and provides a reliable source of income for agricultural communities. Furthermore, by protecting the crops from pests, pesticides helps in reducing the cost of production & increasing the farmer income.

#### What are the challenges of the pesticide sector?

1. **Health Risks and Poisoning:** Farm workers and communities face acute and chronic health issues due to exposure, including respiratory problems, neurological disorders, developmental delays in children, cancers, and—tragically—high rates of both accidental and intentional (suicide) poisonings, especially with highly hazardous pesticides.
2. **Environmental Pollution:** Pesticide residues are commonly found in soil, water, and air, contaminating drinking water, food products, and harming biodiversity such as beneficial insects, fish, and wildlife. Certain regions, like Punjab, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh, report pesticide levels in water and crops that exceed permissible limits, impacting ecosystems and public health.
3. **Regulatory and Enforcement Gaps:** Although the Insecticides Act governs pesticide use, enforcement is weak. Sales of banned or restricted pesticides are still common due to inadequate oversight, corruption, and regulatory loopholes. Monitoring infrastructure and regular residue testing are limited, especially for small farmers.
4. **Farmer Knowledge and Practice:** Many small-scale farmers lack training in safe and appropriate pesticide use. There is widespread off-label and excessive application, often guided more by vendor recommendations than scientific advice. Proper use of protective gear and safe storage are frequently absent – which exposes the farmers to the harmful effects of pesticides poisoning. Moreover, farmers in India generally use pesticides when they physically observe & assess the pest population or disease incidence to be significant enough to impact crop yield & quality (i.e. post-emergence) – which is not an effective way to use the pesticides.
5. **Increase in Cost of Crop Production:** The financial burden of repeated pesticide applications, coupled with the loss of crop yields due to pest resistance and climate change, increases indebtedness and distress among farming communities. Overdependence on chemical solutions is compounded by lack of access to affordable, effective alternatives.



6. **Monopoly of MNCs:** Unlike seeds & fertilisers, where there are enough Indian public & private sector players, crop protection chemicals industry in India is practically a multinational monopoly. A significant part of India's herbicide market is controlled by MNCs. For e.g. German Bayer AG has a market share of 15%, China's state-owned Syngenta has 12% & ADAMA has 10% market share.

#### What have been the various initiatives taken in the pesticide sector?

1. **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** The most significant initiative has been the widespread promotion of IPM. This is a comprehensive, eco-friendly approach that aims to keep pest populations below a level where they cause economic damage, without a heavy reliance on chemical pesticides. Under IPM, the government has established a network of Central Integrated Pest Management Centres (CIPMCs) across the country. These centers are tasked with pest and disease monitoring, producing and releasing **bio-control agents**, and providing training to farmers and agricultural extension officers.
2. **The Insecticides Act, 1968:** This is the primary legislation that governs the import, manufacture, sale, and use of pesticides in India. It created the **Central Insecticides Board & Registration Committee (CIB&RC)**, which is responsible for registering pesticides after a thorough evaluation of their efficacy and safety. The CIB&RC also has the power to ban or restrict the use of certain pesticides if they are found to be harmful to human health or the environment.
3. **Pesticide Management Bill, 2020:** This proposed legislation is intended to replace the outdated 1968 Act. The bill aims to modernize regulations, promote the use of **bio-pesticides**, and hold companies accountable for the quality and safety of their products. It also includes provisions for compensating farmers who suffer losses due to spurious or substandard pesticides.
4. **Increasing footprint of Indian pesticide manufacturers:** In recent years, some of the Indian companies have acquired the rights to active ingredients & brands from big global majors or are introducing innovative formulations. For e.g. Indian pesticide manufacturer, CCPL (Crystal Crop Protection Ltd.) has collaborated with USA & Japan based companies to develop a new paddy herbicide called **SIKOSA**.
5. **Biopesticides and Botanical Alternatives:** There is a strong push to promote **neem-based pesticides** and other botanical alternatives. Research projects are focused on developing and promoting these non-chemical options as effective tools for pest management.
6. **"Grow Safe Food" Campaign:** This initiative was started to create awareness among farmers and other stakeholders about the importance of judicious pesticide use and the proper methods of application.

#### What can be the way forward?

1. **Expand Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** Government and industry should mainstream IPM through extension, training, and demonstration programs, aiming to drastically reduce chemical dependence.
2. **Accelerate Adoption of Biopesticides:** Simplify the registration process for eco-friendly **biopesticides** and provide financial incentives to manufacturers and farmers for their production and use.
3. **Implement the Pesticide Management Bill, 2020:** The swift implementation of this bill is crucial to replace the outdated Insecticides Act, 1968. This new framework will bring more stringent rules for registration, sales, and quality control.
4. **Curb Spurious Pesticides:** Enforce strict penalties and strengthen state-level monitoring to combat the sale of counterfeit and substandard products, which pose significant risks to farmers and the environment.

5. **Boost investment in R&D:** Prioritize innovation in climate-resilient, locally formulated crop protection solutions. Encourage patents and public-private partnerships to reduce dependence on imports and multinationals.
6. **Empower farmers through extension:** Scale up training on safe pesticide handling, label comprehension, use of protective gear, and responsible disposal.
7. **Precision Agriculture:** Encourage the use of technology like drones, sensors, and satellite imagery to enable targeted and efficient pesticide application, minimizing waste and environmental contamination.
8. **Improve Extension Services:** Strengthen agricultural extension services and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) to educate farmers on the correct and judicious use of pesticides, dosage, and safety precautions.
9. **Move from 'post-emergence' to 'pre-emergence' pesticide use:** Farmers should be encouraged to shift from post-emergence pesticide application to prophylactic application of pre-emergent herbicides around or just after crop sowing. This will stop the weeds from coming out, helping keep the field clean from very start – thus, reducing the losses as well as cost of application of pesticides.

#### Conclusion:

Overall, India should aim to develop its own Sinochem – which owns MNCs like Syngenta & ADAMA – to reduce the monopoly of MNCs & import dependence of the pesticide sector. However, in the long term, the agriculture sector should be encouraged to move towards adopting more sustainable practices that relies less on chemical pesticides.

**Read More:** [The Indian Express](#)  
UPSC GS-3: Agriculture

### Groundwater Pollution – Causes, Consequences & Way Forward – Explained Pointwise

Groundwater is the most imp source of water in India. Over 85% of rural drinking water & 65% of irrigation water is sourced from groundwater. However, the rapid & often unregulated extraction of this vital source has triggered a growing yet largely invisible crisis: groundwater pollution. A recent report by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) revealed that a substantial portion of groundwater samples across the country contain pollutants in excess of permissible limits. The contamination is a complex issue, stemming from a combination of natural geological factors and human-induced activities.

#### Groundwater Pollution Level in India:

Pollutant	Extent	Impact
Nitrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to Annual Groundwater Quality Report (2024) by CGWB – &gt;20% of the samples collected from 440 districts were contaminated with nitrate.</li> </ul>	Nitrate contamination poses a severe threat to infants. When baby formula is mixed with nitrate-laced water, it can cause Blue-Baby Syndrome ( <b>Methemoglobinemia</b> ). The 2023 National Health profile recorded a 28% rise in hospital admissions from acute nitrate toxicity over 5 years in PB, HR & KN.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nitrate contamination is rampant in North India.</li> </ul>	
<b>Arsenic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arsenic levels in groundwater far exceeded the EHO limit of 10 microgram/liter in parts of Punjab &amp; Bihar.</li> <li>Arsenic exposure is mainly concentrated in the Gangetic belt – including West Bengal, Bihar, UP, Jharkhand &amp; Assam.</li> <li>CGWB report found unsafe arsenic levels in 29 districts of UP. In Ballia (UP), arsenic concentration has reached the level of 200 microgram/liter – which is 20 times the WHO limit – linked to 10,000 cases of cancer &amp; other diseases.</li> </ul>	<p>Arsenic in groundwater is responsible for increased risk of cancer &amp; neurological disorder.</p> <p>Arsenic pollution is also linked with skin lesions, gangrene &amp; respiratory problems.</p>
<b>Fluoride</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to Annual Groundwater Quality Report (2024) by CGWB – Excessive fluoride was detected in over 9% samples.</li> <li>Fluoride contamination affects 230 districts across 20 States.</li> <li>In Jhabua (MP), fluoride levels exceed 5mg/L – with 40% of tribal children affected.</li> </ul>	<p>Excessive fluoride in groundwater is causing widespread dental &amp; skeletal fluorosis in – particularly in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.</p> <p>Around 66 million people suffer from skeletal fluorosis in India.</p> <p>In Rajasthan, over 11,000 villages have reported the cases of skeletal fluorosis.</p>
<b>Uranium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uranium concentration above 100 ppb is found in several districts of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh &amp; Rajasthan – attributed to phosphate fertilisers &amp; unregulated groundwater withdrawal.</li> <li>A study by Central University of Punjab in Malwa region found</li> </ul>	<p>Uranium contamination is associated with serious risks of chronic organ damage &amp; nephrotoxicity.</p>

	Uranium levels in groundwater to exceed the WHO threshold of 30 microgram/Liter.	
<b>Iron &amp; Salinity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to Annual Groundwater Quality Report (2024) by CGWB – &gt;13% samples also exceeded safe limits for iron in groundwater.</li> <li>Salinity, or high chloride concentration, is a problem in coastal states due to seawater intrusion, as well as in inland areas of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Haryana due to hydro-chemical processes.</li> </ul>	Excessive iron in groundwater can cause gastrointestinal & developmental disorders.

### What are the main causes of groundwater pollution?

#### Geogenic (Natural) Sources:

- Mineral Dissolution:** Natural contaminants like arsenic and fluoride are released into groundwater when water interacts with specific rock and soil types in the aquifer. Over-extraction of groundwater can accelerate this process by changing the water chemistry and exposing new rock layers.
- Uranium in Rocks:** The presence of uranium is often due to natural uranium content in the aquifer rocks, which is released into the water under certain geochemical conditions.

#### Anthropogenic Sources:

- Agricultural Runoff:** The excessive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides in agriculture is a major cause of contamination. These chemicals leach into the soil and eventually reach the groundwater, leading to high nitrate levels.
- Over-exploitation of Groundwater:** The aggressive and uncontrolled pumping of groundwater for agriculture and urban needs leads to a drop in the water table. This can not only increase the concentration of existing pollutants but also draw contaminants from deeper, previously unexposed layers – making aquifers more vulnerable to geogenic toxins & salinity intrusions. Arsenic & Uranium contamination of groundwater is mainly linked with over-exploitation of groundwater.
- Industrial Effluents:** Untreated or poorly treated industrial wastewater often contains toxic chemicals, heavy metals like Cadmium, Lead, Chromium, Mercury, and other pollutants. These can seep into the ground from leaks in pipes, industrial dumpsites, or improper disposal practices, contaminating the water table. For e.g. In Budhpur, Baghpat (UP), 13 people dies this year due to kidney failure allegedly linked to toxic discharges from nearby sugar mills & paper industry contaminating the local borewells.
- Lack of sanitation infrastructure:** Sanitation infra, especially in rural & peri-urban India, remains deficient or faulty – as a result – human waste can leach into the soil, introducing pathogens and



nitrates into the groundwater. Contamination from leaking septic systems & sewage infiltration has triggered repeated outbreaks of cholera, dysentery & hepatitis A & E in several parts of the country. For e.g. in Paikarapur (Odisha) sewage seepage from a faulty treatment plant led to mass illness of hundreds of residents.

5. **Institutional Fragmentation:** Agencies such as the CGWB, CPCB, SPCBs & Ministry of Jal Shakti operate in silos, duplicating the efforts & lacking coordination for integrated, science-based interventions.
6. **Weak Legal Enforcement:** Though we do have Water Act to prevent & control the water pollution, but its enforcement especially for groundwater discharge is inadequate. Regulatory loopholes & lax compliance encourage the polluters to remain scot-free.
7. **Lack of real time, publicly accessible data:** Monitoring of groundwater quality has been infrequent, & poorly disseminated. Without early warning systems or integration with public health surveillance, contamination of groundwater often goes undetected until serious health outcomes emerge.

#### What have been various government initiatives to control the groundwater pollution?

1. **Jal Shakti Abhiyan:** This campaign focuses on water conservation and rainwater harvesting to improve groundwater levels and quality.
2. **National Aquifer Mapping Project:** The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has completed a national-level mapping project to understand the country's aquifers, which is crucial for effective and sustainable groundwater management.
3. **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** This scheme is being implemented in water-stressed districts and focuses on a community-led approach to the sustainable management of groundwater resources.
4. **Regulatory Framework:** The Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has been constituted to regulate and control groundwater development and management across the country.

#### What can be the way forward?

1. **Groundwater Legislation:** A clear, nationwide legal framework is needed to regulate the extraction and use of groundwater. This should include a system of permits and fees to encourage responsible use and discourage over-exploitation.
2. **Reduce agrochemical use:** Encourage precision agriculture, integrated pest management, and organic farming to minimize fertilizer and pesticide runoff—the largest non-point source of groundwater contamination.
3. **Enforce existing regulations:** Ensure strict compliance with the Central Groundwater Authority (CGWA) guidelines on groundwater extraction and pollution control, with regular monitoring and penalties for violators.
4. **Industrial Waste Treatment:** Industries must be mandated to install and operate **effective effluent treatment plants (ETPs)**. The “zero liquid discharge” principle, where no industrial wastewater is released into the environment, should be a long-term goal for all polluting industries.
5. **Expand sewage and effluent treatment:** Invest in decentralized and centralized wastewater treatment plants in urban and peri-urban areas to curb infiltration of untreated waste into aquifers.
6. **Empower local communities:** Foster Water User Associations (WUAs) and participatory groundwater management models for localized planning, monitoring, and regulation. Ramp up public awareness campaigns about pollution sources, conservation practices, and the importance of safe waste disposal.
7. **Research, Monitoring & Real-Time Data:** Support continuous groundwater quality monitoring using advanced sensor networks and AI analytics to identify and target pollution hotspots. In areas affected



by arsenic, fluoride, or nitrate, implement location-specific remediation like the installation of community purification systems.

**Conclusion:**

India's groundwater crisis is no longer limited to just quantity – it is now about safety & survival as well. It calls for a bold, coordinated & multi-dimensional strategy that integrates regulation, technology, health & public participation.

Read more: [The Hindu](#)  
UPSC GS-3: Environment

**Electoral Transparency in India – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise**

Recently, several questions have been raised by various members of the civil society about the functioning of Election Commission of India – especially with regards to the commencement of Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar – which lacks transparency. The Leader of Opposition has also raised questions about the conduct of ECI in Karnataka Lok Sabha election, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly election & made allegations of 'vote chori' against the ECI. These questions have raised the issue of lack of transparency in the electoral process in our country in general & in the ECI in particular.

**What is electoral transparency?**

**Electoral transparency** refers to the openness, clarity, and accessibility of all processes, information, and funding related to elections, ensuring that citizens, stakeholders, and oversight bodies can scrutinize and trust

the integrity of the electoral system. It is a cornerstone of democratic governance, as it enables public oversight, reduces opportunities for corruption, and upholds the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

### What is the significance of electoral transparency?

**1. Builds Public Trust and Legitimacy:** When the electoral process is open to scrutiny, it instills confidence in voters, candidates, and political parties. This trust is fundamental for the legitimacy of the elected government and the stability of the democratic system.

**2. Ensures Accountability:** Transparency holds the Election Commission of India, political parties, and candidates accountable for their actions. It makes it harder for malpractices to occur unnoticed. **For example:** Public disclosure of election expenditure by candidates and parties allows citizens and watchdog organizations to monitor spending and identify potential violations of cap on election expenditure.

**3. Reduces Fraud and Malpractice:** Open procedures and clear guidelines minimize opportunities for electoral fraud, rigging, and manipulation. When processes are transparent, fraudulent activities are more likely to be detected and deterred. **For example:** The presence of polling agents from various political parties at polling stations and during vote counting, along with videography, serves as a deterrent to booth capturing, bogus voting, and tampering.

**4. Promotes Informed Decision-Making by Voters:** Transparency ensures that voters have access to crucial information, such as candidate backgrounds (including criminal antecedents), sources of political funding, and party manifestos. This allows them to make informed choices. **For example:** The mandatory disclosure of assets and liabilities of candidates, enforced by the ECI, helps voters assess the financial standing and potential conflicts of interest of those seeking office.

**5. Enhances Participation:** When voters perceive the electoral process as fair and transparent, they are more likely to participate actively, whether by registering to vote, casting their ballot, or engaging in political discourse. A sense of fairness encourages civic engagement. **For example:** Easily accessible and regularly updated voter rolls, available for public inspection, allow citizens to verify their inclusion and encourage new voter registration.

**6. Safeguards Fundamental Rights:** Electoral transparency aligns with fundamental rights such as the right to information (Article 19(1)(a)) and the right to vote. Without transparency, these rights can be undermined. **For example:** The Supreme Court's verdict striking down the Electoral Bond Scheme underscored the public's right to know the sources of political funding, reinforcing the importance of transparency for informed voting.

### What are various issues related to electoral transparency in India?

**1. Political Funding Transparency (Lack of transparency in the sources of political funding):** Anonymous donations make it difficult for citizens to know who is funding the political parties, raising concerns about quid pro quo arrangements and corporate influence. The government introduced Electoral Bond scheme, in 2017, to enhance the transparency in political funding. While the government argued it would curb black money by routing donations through formal banking channels, critics (including the Election Commission itself) argued it enhanced opacity. Opaque funding erodes public trust, fosters crony capitalism, and can distort policy-making in favor of anonymous donors rather than public interest.

**2. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs):** Opposition leaders have frequently described EVMs as “black boxes” because voters cannot independently verify if their vote was accurately recorded and counted as intended by the machine itself. They argue that the internal workings are not sufficiently transparent. The Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system was introduced to address this by allowing voters to see a paper slip of their vote. However, the ECI currently mandates counting VVPAT slips from only **five randomly selected EVMs** per

assembly constituency/segment. The opposition political parties are demanding 100% VVPAT verification with EVM count.

### 3. Accuracy & Transparency of Electoral Rolls:

- **Duplicate Entries:** Reports of individuals having multiple entries in the voter list, sometimes across different constituencies or even states, raise concerns about potential fraudulent voting.
- **Deletion of Genuine Voters:** Conversely, many genuine voters, especially migrant workers or those from marginalized communities, find their names missing from the rolls, leading to disenfranchisement.
- **Aadhaar Linkage Controversy:** While the Election Commission sought to link Aadhaar with voter IDs to de-duplicate the rolls, concerns were raised about the voluntary nature of the linkage potentially becoming implicitly mandatory, leading to exclusion due to authentication failures or privacy risks.
- **Abnormal increase in number of voters listed in electoral rolls between the elections:** The LoP raised the issue of abnormal increase in the number of voters between general election & Assembly elections in Maharashtra. The independent investigation has revealed that nearly 4 million new voters were added in just 6 months.
- **Special Intensive Revision:** The ECI deleted nearly 65 lakh voters from the electoral rolls in Bihar – but without providing the full list of deleted names & the reasons for their deletion. This resistance to disclosure makes it impossible for the political parties & people to verify whether the deletion is justified or if eligible voters have been disenfranchised. Also, such deletion of names disproportionately affect the marginalized communities – which can impact the electoral outcomes & erode trust in the system.

**4. Transparency in the Appointment of Election Commissioners:** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, changed the selection committee for the appointment of Election commissioners. Previously, a Supreme Court ruling in 2023 had suggested a collegium including the Chief Justice of India, the Prime Minister, and the Leader of Opposition. The new Act replaced the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister. This has raised concerns that the government will have a majority in the selection committee, potentially impacting the perceived independence of the ECI.

**5. Restrictive access to CCTV footage of the polling process:** The LoP has raised the objection that the Conduct of Election Rules 1961 were recently amended to restrict the access to CCTV footage of the polling process. Providing access to the CCTV footage to the nominees of the political parties is important to scrutinize the complaints.

### 6. Lack of Transparency in ECI:

- **Lack of transparency in Special Intensive Revision:** In a democracy, citizens have the right to know not just the decisions taken by the public authorities, but also why a decision impacting them was made. By not sharing the methodology & findings of independent appraisal on the basis of which the ECI is set to ask every voter in the country to prove their eligibility to vote, the ECI is violating people's fundamental right to information. Moreover, the 2003 records, which the ECI claims that the current exercise mirrors, are missing from the public domain.
- **Allegation by LoP:** There have been criticism with regards to the response by the ECI to the allegations made against it by the LoP. Instead of providing a substantive response to put an end on the claims, the ECI is either letting the govt speak for it or sounding like a spokesperson for the ruling party.

**What have been the various initiatives to enhance electoral transparency?**

- 1. Disclosure of Candidate's Assets and Liabilities:** Following the Supreme Court's judgment (e.g., *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms, 2002*), the ECI mandated that all contesting candidates file an affidavit disclosing their criminal antecedents, financial assets, liabilities, and educational qualifications.
- 2. Supreme Court's Ruling on Electoral Bonds:** Supreme Court, in its judgment in February 2024, struck down the Electoral Bond scheme as unconstitutional. It directed the State Bank of India (SBI) to disclose all details of electoral bonds purchased and redeemed to the ECI, which then published this data.
- 3. First Level Checking (FLC) of EVMs/VVPATs:** Before every election, EVMs and VVPATs undergo a thorough "First Level Checking" by engineers of the manufacturing PSUs (BEL and ECIL) in the presence of representatives of political parties. This process allows political parties to inspect the machines and verify their integrity before deployment, ensuring transparency at a critical stage.
- 4. Electoral Roll Management through ERO Net:** The ECI launched ERO Net, an online platform that automates the process of electoral roll management, including registration, field verification, and decision support for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs). It aims to minimize errors, prevent duplicate entries, and make the process of voter registration and modification more transparent and efficient.
- 5. Four Qualifying Dates for Electoral Roll Enrolment:** Recent amendments allow citizens turning 18 years on 1st January, 1st April, 1st July, or 1st October to file claims for enrolment, rather than just 1st January. This ensures continuous and more inclusive enrolment, making the electoral roll more representative and transparent.
- 6. cVIGIL App:** The cVIGIL mobile application allows citizens to report Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations and expenditure-related infractions directly to the ECI with geo-tagged photos/videos. The ECI promises action within 100 minutes. It empowers citizens to be vigilant, provides real-time reporting of violations, and ensures quick response from election authorities, making the enforcement of MCC more transparent and effective.

**What can be the way forward?**

- 1. Bring Political Parties under RTI:** A long-standing demand is to bring all political parties, especially those receiving public funding or significant public interest, under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act. This would allow citizens to seek information about their finances, including donations and expenditures.
- 2. Lower Anonymous Donation Threshold:** Reduce the threshold for anonymous cash donations significantly, ideally to zero, or at least below the current ₹20,000. All donations, regardless of amount, should be made through traceable digital means (cheque, bank transfer, digital payment).
- 3. Increased VVPAT Verification:** A scientifically determined, statistically robust sample size for VVPAT counting should be adopted to ensure a higher degree of confidence in the EVM results. In case of any discrepancy, a full manual counting of VVPAT slips in the affected constituency should be immediately triggered.
- 4. Real-time Online Updates with Transparency:** Make the electoral roll update process more dynamic, allowing for real-time online updates. Ensure that all additions, deletions, and modifications to the electoral roll are published transparently and immediately, allowing for public scrutiny and objections.
- 5. Publish Voter Rolls and Turnout Data Promptly:** The Election Commission should release consolidated, digital, and machine-readable electoral rolls and real-time voter turnout data for all elections. This includes making Form 17C data and CCTV footage from polling booths publicly available to address concerns about discrepancies and build confidence in the process.



**6. Access for Observers:** Ensure that domestic and international observers, as well as party agents, have unhindered access to polling and counting centers to monitor the process.

**Conclusion:**

The onus lies on ECI to enhance transparency in the electoral process & strengthen the trust of the voters on the process of electing their representatives through a free & fair elections. ECI must recover its institutional voice to deal with the challenge & should respond by bringing more transparency in exercises like SIR that will strengthen the faith in the institutions that are meant to safeguard the democratic process.

**Read More:** [The Hindu](#), [The Indian Express](#), [The Hindu](#)  
**UPSC Syllabus GS-2: Election Process**

### Plastic Pollution Treaty – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution represent a serious global environmental issue that negatively impacts the environmental, social, economic and health dimensions of sustainable development. To address the issue, a Global Plastic Treaty has been proposed by the UN, however, halfway into the talks, the consensus remains elusive because of the rift between two blocs.

#### What is the Plastic Pollution Treaty?

- In March 2022, the UN Environmental Assembly convened in Nairobi, Kenya, to debate the global plastic crisis. In a historic move, 175 nations voted to adopt a global treaty for plastic pollution—agreeing on an accelerated timeline so that the treaty could be implemented as soon as 2025.
- The UNEP has been spearheading the efforts to get countries to evolve, by consensus, a legally-binding treaty that commits them to address plastic pollution on land as well as in oceans.
- An Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) was formed to draft this treaty.

#### What is the need or significance of the Treaty?

1. **Scale of Plastic Pollution:** Over 460 million tons of plastic are produced annually; only 9% is recycled, with up to 14 million tons entering oceans every year. Without intervention, plastic production could triple by 2060.
2. **Environmental & Health Impacts:** Plastic pollution drives biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, contributes to climate change, and poses threats to human health, especially the microplastics. Microplastics have contaminated drinking water, food, and air globally. These tiny particles can carry hazardous chemicals and are linked to serious health risks, including endocrine disruption and toxicity.
3. **Economic Cost:** Plastic pollution imposes massive costs on fisheries, tourism, and cleanup efforts, amounting to billions of dollars globally every year. It hampers sustainable development by damaging vital natural assets and increasing public health expenditures.
4. **Climate Change:** Plastics are produced from fossil fuels and the entire lifecycle—from extraction to production, disposal, and incineration—emits greenhouse gases. The plastics sector already contributes about 3–5% of global emissions, which are projected to rise steeply as plastic demand soars.
5. **Need for global cooperation:** Plastic pollution knows no borders, spreading across countries and continents via oceans, air, and trade in waste. A global treaty would provide a **coordinated framework** for international action—setting binding targets, harmonizing regulations, sharing best

practices, and supporting countries (especially developing ones) with financial and technical resources.

#### What are the key focus areas of the Treaty?

1. **Comprehensive Scope:** The treaty covers the **full plastic lifecycle**, not just waste management, but also design, production, and hazardous chemicals in plastics.
2. **Legally Binding Measures:** Unlike voluntary or fragmented national actions, the treaty sets out binding commitments and targets, aiming to phase out high-risk single-use plastics, set design requirements, and enable robust implementation through compliance mechanisms.
3. **Extended Producer Responsibility:** Proposals include measures making producers accountable for plastic waste, with a shift towards better product design and circular economy principles.
4. **Production:** Addressing the upstream side of the problem by controlling the production of plastic, especially virgin (new) plastic. This could involve caps on production or a requirement for a certain percentage of recycled content.
5. **Design:** Promoting the design of plastic products that are easier to reuse and recycle. This includes eliminating problematic and unnecessary plastics.
6. **Waste Management:** Improving waste collection and recycling infrastructure, particularly in developing countries.
7. **Circular Economy:** Shifting from a linear “take-make-dispose” model to a circular one where plastic is kept in the economy and out of the environment for as long as possible.
8. **Chemicals of Concern:** Regulating hazardous chemicals used in plastic production, which can have negative impacts on human health.

#### What are the challenges in the Plastic Treaty Negotiations?

1. **Country Positions and Economic Interests:** Ever since the negotiations have started, 2 broad coalitions have evolved over 4 sessions of INC. One is, the **High Ambition Coalition (HAC)** chaired by Norway & Rwanda – which is more organised & formal. The other group is called **Like Minded Country (LMC)**, which includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, China & other – it is a smaller group of countries whose interests are aligned because they are all major petrochemical states. Under the current rules of negotiations, countries cannot pass a proposal by a majority vote, and near-unanimous agreement is required.
2. **Lifecycle vs. Waste:** There is strong disagreement over whether the treaty should tackle the entire life cycle of plastics (from design and production to disposal and recycling) or focus only on waste management. HAC countries seek to impose cuts or cap the production of plastic & its constituent, polymer. While the LMC countries say that the plastic pollution can be addressed through waste management, and imposing production cuts would only cause disruptions in trade, rather than a meaningful reduction in plastic production & use. India has also shown support to LMC's viewpoint & wants that the negotiations must be limited to plastic pollution & not production, which can affect the right of development.
3. **Caps on Plastic Production:** HAC countries advocate for mandatory caps on primary plastic production, believing limits are crucial to stem plastic proliferation. LMC, on the other hand, oppose production constraints, arguing they would hamper economic development and innovation.
4. **Chemical of Concern:** Negotiators remain divided over how the treaty should regulate hazardous chemicals found in plastics, such as phthalates, BPA, and persistent organic pollutants. There is debate about lists of banned or restricted chemicals and the mechanisms for reviewing and updating these lists for evolving risks.

5. **Financial & Technical Support:** Developing countries emphasize the need for fair and effective financing, arguing that implementing treaty requirements—such as plastic waste infrastructure upgrades or transitioning to safer alternatives—requires robust, accessible financial and technical support. Disagreements exist over sources of funding, financial mechanisms, and responsibilities of richer producers.
6. **Pace of Negotiations:** Independent observers have expressed disappointment at the pace of negotiations. For e.g. Article 6 (Plastic Production) has not even had a first reading & Article 3 (Chemicals of Concern) continues to be bracketed. Without effective measures in these two Articles, the curbing of plastic pollution across the full lifecycle will not be accomplished. A treaty without these provisions will only result in plastic proliferation.

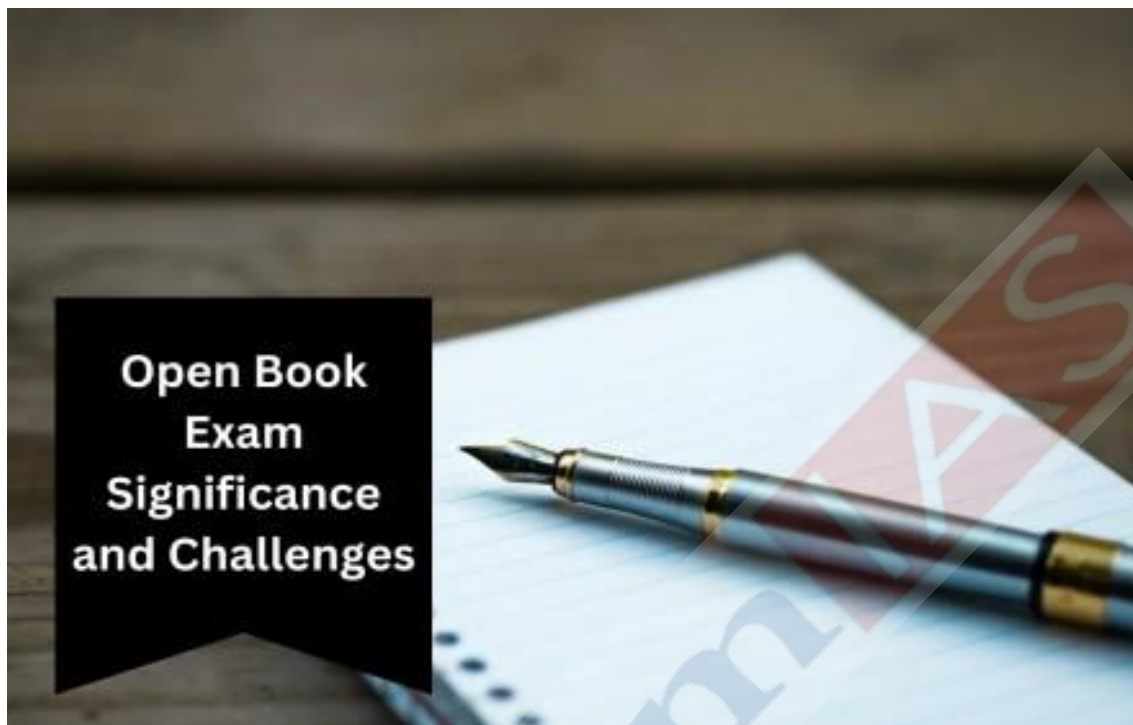
#### What can be the way forward?

1. **Parallel Progress:** Encourage negotiation on contentious Articles (such as product standards, upstream controls, and scope) in parallel rather than blocking progress by linking them to other issues like finance or implementation. This avoids stalemates, brings all parties to engage, and maintains momentum.
2. **Balanced Approach:** Strive for a treaty that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, not just waste management, but also design, production, and hazardous chemicals. At the same time, recognize practical limits, address the issue of plastic manufacturers in developing countries where any cap on production of primary polymers will do more harm than good in the absence of the alternatives & focus immediate action on the most harmful single-use plastics while creating pathways for extension to broader categories.
3. **Binding Commitments & Flexibility:** Blend **binding obligations** (especially for reduction of high-risk plastics and chemical use) with certain elements of voluntary or nationally determined measures for countries with unique capacities and realities. Build flexibility into implementation timelines and support mechanisms.
4. **Financial & Technical Support:** Ensure the treaty creates clear, accessible funding mechanisms—possibly beyond the Global Environment Facility—to support implementation, especially in developing countries facing disproportionate burden.
5. **Recognition & Inclusion of Local Voices:** Explicitly acknowledge the crucial role of local and subnational governments—who manage waste, public education, and land use—in both the legal text and financial arrangements.

#### Conclusion:

Ending plastic pollution is in our grasp, and the treaty negotiations are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do so. The world is watching and demands decisive, historic action to protect human health and the environment.

Read More: [The Hindu](#)  
UPSC GS-3: Environment

**Open Book Exam – Significance and Challenges – Explained Pointwise**

The CBSE has decided to introduce open book assessment in class 9 from 2026-27 after a pilot study showed strong teacher support for the idea. CBSE conducted a pilot comprehensive study to assess the viability of implementing Open Book Exam (OBE) for students from classes 9 to 12 in November-December 2023 for subjects like English, Mathematics and Science for Classes 9 and 10, and English, Mathematics and Biology for Classes 11 and 12.





# Open Book Examination

The CBSE has decided to conduct a pilot comprehensive study to **assess the viability** of implementing **Open Book Exam (OBE)** for students from **classes 9 to 12**.

## Open Book Examination

This is an examination pattern where **students are allowed to refer to their books and notes** to answer questions.

## Types of Open Book Examination (OBE)

There are 2 types of open book examination.

- 1) **Restricted open book assessment**- Students are allowed to **refer only the study material** approved by the exam-conducting authority.
- 2) **Free type open book assessment**- Students are allowed to **bring any material** of their choice.

## Open Book Examination (OBE) not a new concept for Indian Students

**1. 2014- CBSE introduced Open Text Based Assessment (OBTA)** which was implemented in **Class 9 (Hindi, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Science)** and **Class 11 (Economics, Biology, and Geography)**. It was aimed to ease the burden of memorization and promote information processing skills.

However, **it was discontinued in the 2017-18** academic year due to its failure to develop critical thinking skills among students.

**2. 2019- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** permitted open book exams in **engineering colleges** following a recommendation from an advisory body.

**3. 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 Lockdown-** Various Central Universities, like **Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aligarh Muslim University, IIT Delhi, IIT Indore, and IIT Bombay** have conducted open book tests to evaluate students.

Created By Forum IAS

## What is Open Book Examination (OBE)? What is the History of OBE in India?

**Open Book Examination:** This is an examination pattern where students are allowed to refer to their books and notes to answer questions during the examination. An OBE allows students to use approved materials such as textbooks & class notes during assessment, rather than mainly testing their memory. In an OBE, the challenge for the examinee lies in knowing where to look, making sense of the material & applying it to the problem at hand. OBE evaluate whether students can interpret ideas effectively.

**Types of Open Book Examination (OBE):** There are 2 types of open book examination.

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**OBE not a new concept for Indian Students:** Open-book exams are not a new idea for India.

1. **2014:** CBSE introduced Open Text Based Assessment (OBTA) which was implemented in Class 9 (Hindi, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Science) and Class 11 (Economics, Biology, and Geography).  
It was aimed to ease the burden of memorization and promote information processing skills. However, it was discontinued in the 2017-18 academic year due to its failure to develop critical thinking skills among students.
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**Why CBSE introduced Open Books Examination(OBE) in India?**

1. **Transformation of Culture of assessment in line with NEP 2020:** The National Education Policy 2020 has recommended for moving away from rote memorization & towards competency-based learning. CBSE is exploring Open Book Examination (OBE) as an alternative for regular exams.
2. **On the lines of National Curriculum Framework:** The CBSE has proposed open book assessment based on the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) released last year. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education has highlighted the need to reform the current assessment process, which is 'focused on measuring rote learning'. To change that, it calls for different learning styles & give students feedback, while still aiming to improve overall learning outcomes.

**What are the advantages of Open Book Examination (OBE) in India?**

1. **Shift of Focus from 'rote learning' to 'conceptual understanding':** Open Book Examination will help the students focus on core concepts, high-order foundational skills, and self-peer assessments. Various studies conducted on the OBE system in different countries have found out that OBE has have a positive impact on internalization of concept rather than just memorization. According to a Norwegian study conducted in 2000, students taking OBEs are more likely to look for connections between ideas instead of just recalling the facts.
2. **Promotion of critical and creative thinking:** OBE helps to assessment of learner readiness, application of course content to real-life scenarios, analysis of case studies and connection of content with real-world situations.
3. **Prevents the proliferation of coaching industry-:** The examination system using an open book would prevent the proliferation of board-exam based coaching industry.
4. **Encourages Resource Management Skills:** Through the use of Open Book method of examination, students learn to efficiently navigate and use reference materials. This leads to the development of a valuable skill in quickly finding relevant information, which is of great help in academic and professional settings.
5. **Reduction in examination related stress of Students:** According to a 2021 study involving medical students from All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bhubaneswar, it was found that open book exams were less stressful. OBE will reduce the exam related cases of student suicides in India.

**What are the Challenges/limitation with the system of OBE?**

1. **Challenge for Indian Teachers:** There is lack of creativity on part of Indian school teachers to design innovative Open Book assessments. Questions in an open book exam, unlike a traditional exam, cannot be direct.

2. **Reduction in student's motivation for studies:** Students often get complacent in an open book examination assessment system, by completely ignoring the strong memorization or critical thinking skills.
3. **Challenges of Time Management:** Students may spend too much time searching for information in their materials leading to incomplete or rushed answers.
4. **Exacerbation of inequality among students:** The availability of different resources can create inequality among students. Students with better access to high-quality materials may have an advantage over their peers.
5. **Logistical Challenges:** Organizing and administering OBEs can be logistically difficult for the teachers, with the students trying to bring too many books into the exam environment.
6. **Risk of plagiarism:** There are risks of plagiarism, with students being tempted to copy answers or use unauthorized materials.
7. Despite early experiments, OBEs remain rare in high-stakes school exams for e.g. standardized tests such as US's SATs & UK's GCSEs – still require closed-book answers.

#### What Should be the way Forward?

1. **Implementation of Yashpal Committee Report:** The Yashpal Committee Report, 'Learning Without Burden', had recommended reducing the burden of exams and introduction of measures like OBEs to reduce the 'catch up' syndrome. *(Catch up syndrome is the popular belief that India needs to catch up with the explosion of knowledge had occurred in the West through strict curriculum and rigorous examinations).*
2. **Development of spirit of critical pedagogy:** Teachers must engage in a meaningful dialogue with young students. They should remove their whole attention from "completing" the official syllabus in time.
3. **Training of students:** Students must be trained on how to write an open book exam, and develop the necessary skills of analyzing concepts to get the benefits of Open Book Exam.
4. **Training of teachers:** Teachers must be trained on formulating comprehensive, unique questions for an OBE, different from the formulaic and archaic questions in a regular exam.

#### Conclusion:

OBEs can become a game changer for the education system of our country, however for real gains, it requires specific training such as teaching students how to break down a question, analyze the concept & apply them, instead of merely looking up answers.

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**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper 2 Social Justice – Issues relating to Education, Human Resources.

### Criminal Justice System – Challenges & Way Forward – Explained Pointwise

The recent acquittal of the accused in Malegaon blast case & Mumbai train blast case raises serious questions on investigating & prosecuting agencies of our countries as well as underlined a glaring failure of our criminal justice system.

#### What is Criminal Justice System?

The **Criminal Justice System** (CJS) encompasses a series of institutions, agencies, and processes established by the government to curb crime in the nation. In India, Article 21 guarantees the **Right to Speedy Justice** as a

fundamental right. But according to Prison Statistics 2015, out of the total 4,20,000 inmates in various jails across the country, 2,82,076 or 67.2% were undertrials prisoners reflecting gross injustice and broken criminal justice system in India.

### What are the issues with Criminal Justice System in India?

1. **Massive Case Backlog and Judicial Delays:** With nearly 30 million criminal cases pending in the system (the annual capacity of which is only half that number), and with another 10 million or more cases being added every year, whatever is left of the system is bound to collapse completely unless some radical alternatives are adopted urgently.
2. **Shortage of judges:** India has only about **21 judges per million people**, violating recommended ratios and leading to overburdened courts, poor facilities, and systemic inefficiency.
3. **Shortage of Police Personnel:** Against a UN norm of 222 police personnel per lakh of population, India's officially sanctioned strength is a paltry 181, and the actual strength is an abysmal 137. Similarly, all the judges in the country add up to just 18 per million population, despite a three-decades old Law Commission recommendation to increase it to 50, which itself is at the low end of the ratio in developed countries.
4. Even after adjusting for increasing population, India's crime rate has been rising over the years. The decade from 2005 to 2015 saw a 28% increase in complaints of cognizable offences, from 450 per lakh population to 580.
5. **Police Misconduct and Human Rights Violations:** Transparency International found that 62% of people reported paying bribes during their interactions with the police. Misaligned incentives to arrest persons (for example, to demonstrate the progress of investigations) have resulted in 60% of all arrests being "unnecessary or unjustified". Reports of **custodial deaths, torture, sexual assault, and unlawful detentions** reflect inadequate oversight and accountability.
6. **Weak Prosecution:** The prosecution system is often understaffed and lacks the specialized skills needed to effectively argue complex cases. This is sometimes made worse by poor coordination between the police and the prosecution.
7. **Low Conviction Rates:** India's conviction rate remains low compared to global benchmarks, reflecting ineffective investigation and prosecution.
8. **Lack of infrastructure:** There are also enormous shortfalls in the number of police chowkis, weapons, forensic science laboratories (FSLs). For example, Nearly a million items sent for forensic examination in India, representing a shocking 38% of all such cases, remain unattended for a year or more. Low adoption of forensic methods, outdated tools, and lack of technological infrastructure compromise investigation quality.
9. **Overcrowded Prison:** A significant number of undertrials are languishing in prisons for prolonged periods, often for crimes they may not have committed, leading to severe overcrowding.
10. According to the **National Crime Records Bureau:**
  - More than 80% of reported crimes went unpunished due to loopholes in the present criminal justice system.
  - More than 66% of India's prisoners are undertrials, which is over twice the global average of 32%. Of these 2,54,857 undertrials, more than 2,000 have been in prison for over five years. Overburdened by the flood of arrestees (nearly 75 lakh were arrested in 2012, according to the National Crime Records Bureau), prisons have experienced an increase in the number of undertrials and overcrowding.
  - India has one of the lowest **Police-Population ratios**, of 131.1 officers per 1,00,000 population (against the UN norms of 222). Corruption is also an endemic problem.



**What are the reasons for poor Criminal Justice System of our country?**

1. **Outdated Legal and Procedural Frameworks:** Many laws and procedures date back to the colonial era and have not kept pace with modern crime trends, especially organized and cybercrimes. This has led to harassment of innocent civilians by the government agencies and very high pressure on the judiciary to dispose-off the cases with limited and redundant laws. For example, Dramatic Performance Act, 1876.
2. **The inefficiency of Judiciary:** The system takes years to bring justice and has ceased to deter criminals. Furthermore, there is no cooperation between the judiciary, prosecutors and the police. Many of the guilty go scot-free while the innocent remain on undertrial. According to the NCRB data, about 67.2% of the total prison population consists of undertrial prisoners.
3. **Weak Investigation and Evidence Collection:** Procedural lapses, non-preservation of evidence, and poor inter-agency coordination often derail prosecutions. Witness protection remains weak, with intimidation and hostility undermining the integrity of trials.
4. **The complexity of crime:** The number of crimes has increased rapidly in recent times and the nature of crimes is also increasingly becoming more complex due to technological growth and innovation. India's criminal justice system is not encompassing the new era's novel crimes. Inefficient investigation procedures have led to a haphazard investigation of crimes and delayed justice. Increase in cyber-crimes, fake news, mob-lynching etc. are some complex crimes.
5. **Access to justice:** The rich and the powerful are hardly convicted even for serious crimes. The ever-growing connection between politics and crimes is making justice of the poor and the marginalized society highly difficult.
6. **Lack of public confidence:** In the current times, the civilians have stopped relying on the CJS as it is expensive, complicated, inefficient and has long-winded procedures. This has led to current social problems like mob lynching.

**What have been various initiatives to improve the Criminal Justice System?****Legislative Reforms:**

1. **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:** This replaces the Indian Penal Code (IPC). It aims to decolonize the penal code, introduce new provisions for contemporary crimes like mob lynching and organized crime, and consolidate scattered sections.
2. **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023:** This replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). It introduces strict deadlines for investigations, mandates forensic examinations for serious crimes, and promotes the use of digital evidence.
3. **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA), 2023:** This replaces the Indian Evidence Act. It formally recognizes electronic and digital records as evidence, modernizing the rules of evidence to align with the digital age.

**Judicial Reforms:**

1. **Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):** This project aims to integrate the five pillars of the criminal justice system—police, courts, prisons, forensic labs, and prosecution—through a single digital platform. This reduces delays and human errors caused by manual record-keeping.
2. **e-Courts Project:** This initiative focuses on the computerization of courts. It includes the digitization of case records, online filing of petitions, and live streaming of court proceedings to enhance transparency and accessibility.

3. **Fast-Track Courts:** Established to handle specific categories of cases, such as those involving sexual offenses against children (POCSO Act) and other serious crimes, to ensure speedy disposal.

#### Prosecution Reforms:

1. **Witness Protection Scheme:** This scheme provides security to witnesses and their families to prevent intimidation and ensure they can testify without fear, thereby strengthening the prosecution's case.
2. **Digital Evidence:** The legal system now officially recognizes digital records and mandates audio-video recording of search/seizure and other proceedings.
3. **National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS):** Adoption of digital forensic databases and evidence management systems for improved conviction rates.
4. **Mandatory Forensics for Serious Crimes:** More reliance on scientific investigation, DNA and fingerprint matching, and regional forensic labs.

#### Police & Prison Reforms:

1. **Strict Timelines for Police Investigation:** The new laws require police to complete investigations within 90 days, with similar deadlines for charge-sheet filing and trial framing, addressing delays and case backlog. This makes the process transparent and time-bound, ensuring speedier justice delivery.
2. **Prison Reforms:** Initiatives are ongoing to improve prison conditions, and focus on the rehabilitation and reformation of prisoners through education, vocational training, and counseling.

#### Malimath Committee:

- **"Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System"** constituted by GoI in 2000 under the chairmanship of Justice VS Malimath.
- Its mandate was to review and suggest comprehensive reforms for India's criminal justice system.
- Some of its recommendations were:
  - Need for more judges to dispose-off a large number of pending cases.
  - Constitution of a **National Judicial Commission** to deal with the appointment of judges to the higher courts and amendment of Article 124 to make impeachment of judges.
  - Creation of separate criminal division in higher courts that have judges specialising in criminal laws.
  - Article 20(3) of the Constitution, which protects the accused from being compelled to be a witness against himself/herself, needs to be modified. The courts should be given freedom to question the accused to give information and draw an adverse inference against the accused in case the latter refuses to answer.
  - **Victim Compensation Fund** should be created under the victim compensation law and the assets confiscated from organised crimes should be made a part of it.

#### What can be the way forward?

1. **Strengthen Implementation of New Laws:** The new codes (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) specify strict deadlines for investigation, chargesheet filing, and judgments. Ensuring compliance, backed by adequate staffing and infrastructure upgrades, is crucial for reducing delays and case backlog.
2. **Police Reforms:**

- **Separate Investigation and Law & Order:** A long-standing recommendation is to separate the police's investigative and law and order functions. This would allow a specialized team to focus solely on investigations, leading to higher quality and more timely outcomes.
  - **Police Accountability:** Political interference and a lack of accountability undermine the police's independence. Establishing **State Security Commissions** and transparent appointment processes with fixed tenures for police officials can help curb external influence.
3. **Prison reforms:** Reforming the property based bail system, provision of proper legal support to remove problem of undertrials, improvement of prison conditions is needed. Thus, India needs to reform its archaic system to incorporate more efficient practices like restorative justice, plea bargaining, etc. that will ensure a more robust criminal justice system.
  4. **Widen Digital Infrastructure:** Expand the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) and e-courts, ensuring all police stations and courts have reliable internet, equipment, and digital training.
  5. **Build Institutional Capacity:** Modernize courtrooms, police stations, forensic labs, and prisons to support technology adoption and humane jail conditions.
  6. **Make Justice System Victim centric:** The system should be victim centric to ensure that the victims get justice. The victim should get a chance to put forth his case and quick completion of trials is needed to ensure that they do not lose faith in the system. Fixing responsibility quickly and transparently will maximise the sense of justice to the victim.
  7. **Malimath committee's recommendations:** Malimath committee has recommended many reforms which need to be implemented.

**Conclusion:**

Criminal Justice System in India is currently in a state of uncertainty and is highly unpopular due to its inefficiency. Clearly, the reforms in India's Criminal Justice System are a need of the hour. The reforms should not only make CJS more efficient but also be sensitive to both the innocent and the needs of the law enforcing officers.

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