



## 7 PM COMPILATION

**1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> week October, 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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## Seeds – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

In agriculture, the fundamental input is the seed, which is more than just a mere grain. Unlike grains, seeds encompass living embryos nestled within supporting or food storage tissues. Seeds prioritize the biological essence, emphasizing the living organism within, whereas grains emphasize the economic yield of the supporting tissue.

### Introduction:

- Seed plays an important role in farming due to its characteristics, Seeds are not just inert grains; they contain living organisms crucial for plant growth.
- As per **Seed Act 1966**, Seed means any of the following classes of seeds:
  - Used for sowing or planting, seed of food crops including edible oil seeds and seeds of fruits and vegetables,
  - Cotton seeds;
  - Seeds of cattle fodder;
  - Jute seeds include seedlings, tubers, bulbs, rhizomes, roots, cuttings, all types of grafts and other vegetatively propagated material, of food crops or cattle fodder.
- **Seed Replacement Rate (SRR):**
  - Measures how much of the total cropped area was sown with certified seeds in comparison to farm saved seeds.
  - Higher the Seed Replacement Ratio, higher is production as well as productivity.
- Regulation ensures the quality, safety, and integrity of seeds, safeguarding farmers' investments and ensuring consistent yields.

### Types of Seeds:

<b>Nuclear Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This is the hundred percent genetically pure seed with physical purity and produced by the original breeder/Institute /State Agriculture University (SAU) from basic nucleus seed stock.</li> <li>● A pedigree certificate is issued by the producing breeder.</li> </ul>
<b>Breeder Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Progeny of nucleus seed of a variety and is produced by the originating breeder or by a sponsored breeder.</li> <li>● Breeder seed production is the mandate of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).</li> </ul>
<b>Foundation Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Progeny of breeder seed is required to be produced from breeder seed or from foundation seed which can be clearly traced to breeder seed.</li> <li>● The responsibility for agricultural productivity of foundation seed has been entrusted to the NSC, SFCE, State Seeds Corporation, State Departments of Agriculture and private seed producers.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation seed is required to meet the standards of seed certification prescribed in the Indian Minimum Seed Certification Standards, both at the field and laboratory testing.</li> </ul>
<b>Certified Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progeny of foundation seed and must meet the standards of seed certification prescribed in the Indian Minimum Seeds Certification Standards, 1988.</li> <li>Its production shall be so handled as to maintain specific genetic identity and purity.</li> <li>Certified seed may be the progeny of certified seed provided this reproduction does not exceed three generations beyond foundation seed stage-I.</li> </ul>
<b>Labelled Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The seed notified under Section 5 of the Seeds Act, 1966, such seed sold in the market has to be labelled as prescribed under Section 6(a) and (b) of the Seeds Act Such seed is called Labelled Seed.</li> </ul>
<b>Hybrid Seeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hybrid (certified) seed is the first generation resulting from the cross of two approved inbred lines, one of which is male sterile.</li> </ul>

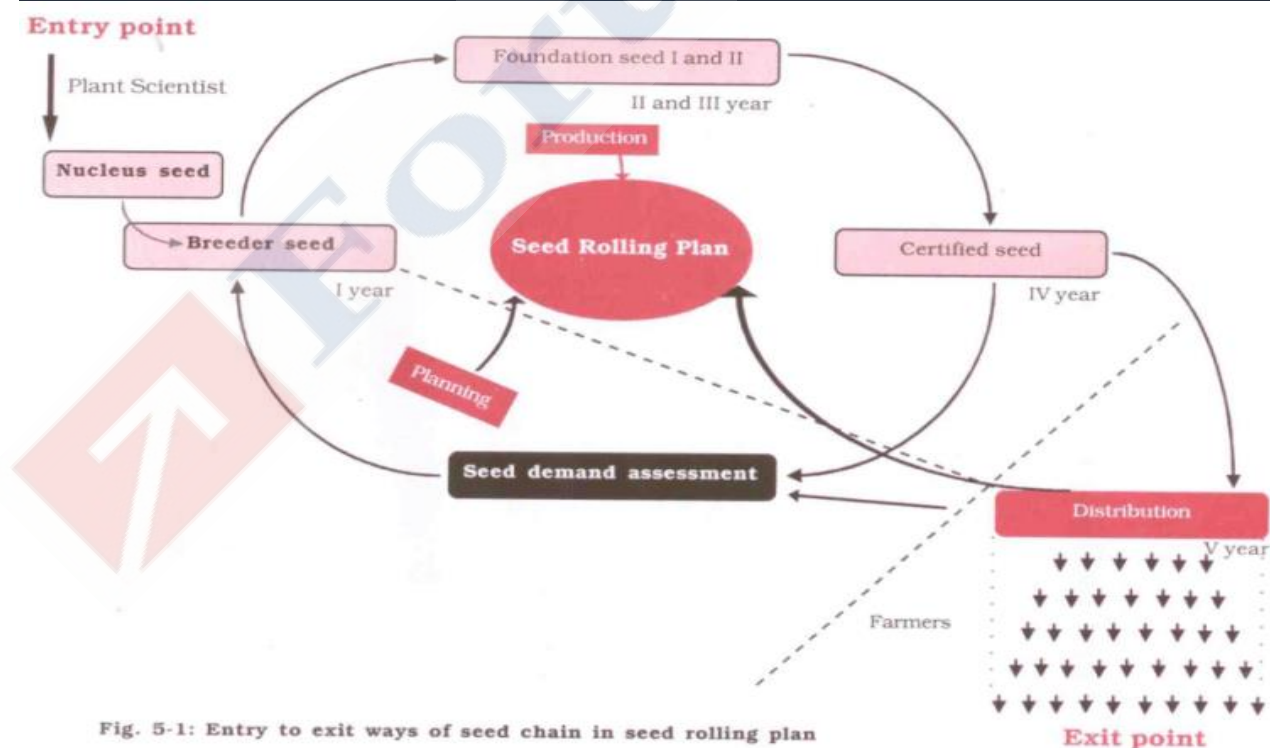
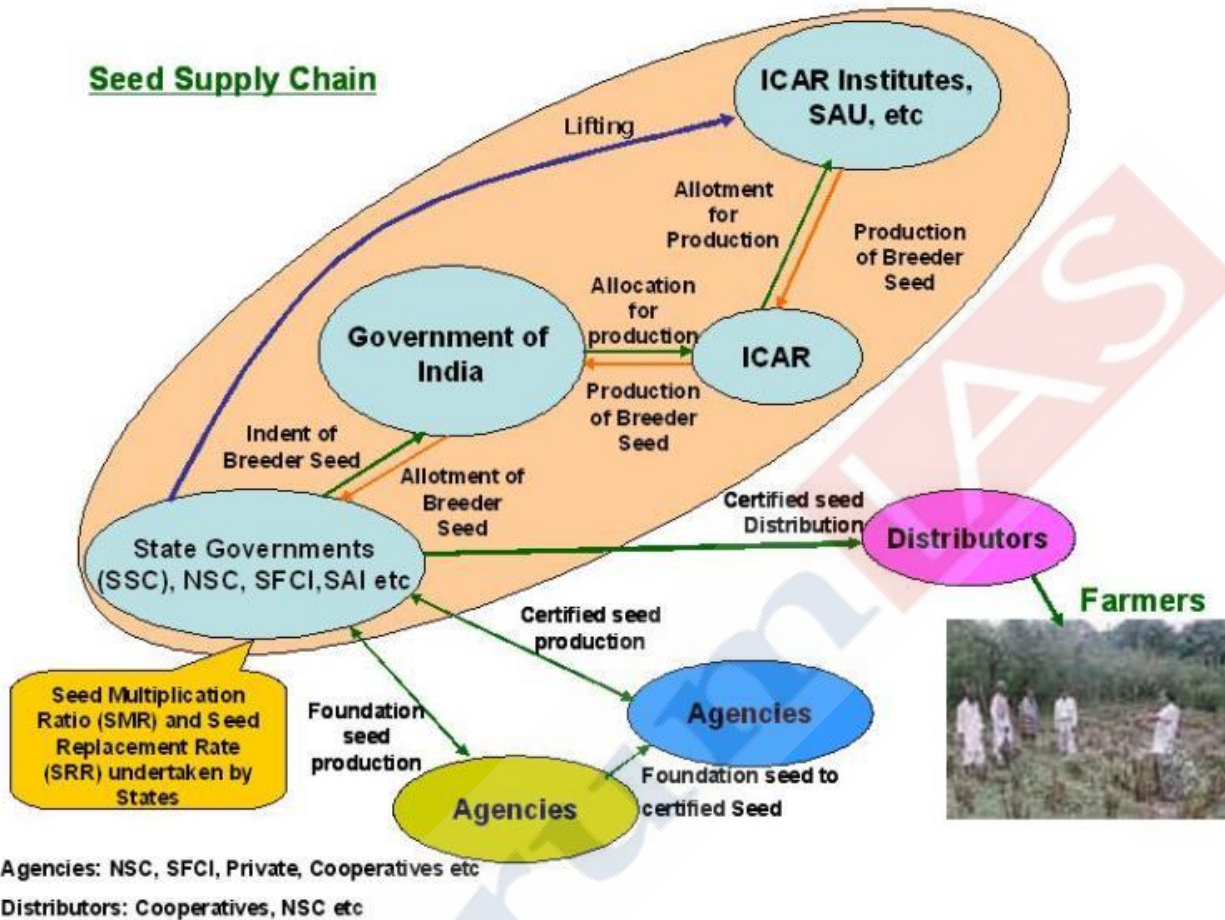


Fig. 5-1: Entry to exit ways of seed chain in seed rolling plan

Source: Vikaspedia

**Seed Supply Chain:**

Source: Vikaspedia

**Significance of Seeds for Agriculture:****1. Determinant of Crop Yield & Quality:**

- High-quality seeds contribute 20–25% directly to crop yields and, when combined with proper management, can boost total productivity up to 45%.
- Improved and certified seeds lead to better plant vigor, uniformity, and enhanced resistance against pests and diseases, ultimately resulting in higher output and quality produce.

**2. Driver of Agricultural Innovation:**

- Use of hybrid, genetically improved, and biofortified seeds enables adoption of high-yielding and stress-tolerant varieties.
- Seeds are central to the dissemination of new technologies such as drought-tolerant, pest-resistant, and climate-resilient crop varieties, supporting sustainable agriculture.

**3. Food Security:** Timely and affordable access to quality seeds is critical in ensuring food security for India's large population.**4. Risk Management:** Quality seeds help farmers manage risks from biotic and abiotic stresses—like droughts, floods, and pest outbreaks—by providing greater yield stability.**5. Input Cost:** Better seeds mean less need for chemical inputs (fertilizers, pesticides), lowering cultivation costs and minimizing environmental impact.



6. **Environmental Benefits:** Improved seed systems support diversified cropping, value-added crops, and market-oriented production, boosting farm income and export potential.
7. **Foundation of Rural Prosperity:** The availability of quality seeds is the bedrock of farm success, enabling small and marginal farmers to participate in productivity gains, poverty reduction, and rural development.

#### Challenges related to seeds:

1. **Limited Access to Quality Seeds:** Many farmers, especially smallholders, rely on farm-saved or uncertified seeds, leading to poor yields, low resistance to pests/diseases, and inconsistent quality. The availability of certified, hybrid, or improved seeds is uneven across regions and crops.
2. **High Cost (Affordability Issue):** Hybrid and biofortified seeds often cost significantly more than traditional varieties, creating affordability barriers for resource-poor farmers. Lack of credit and input subsidies further restricts access for marginal farmers.
3. **Counterfeit & Substandard Seeds:** The market is sometimes flooded with counterfeit, spurious, or low-quality seeds, particularly in high-demand seasons. Poor enforcement of seed quality standards and lack of awareness among farmers increases risk of crop failure.
4. **Storage Challenges:** Poor seed storage infrastructure leads to loss of viability, higher rates of decay, and wastage—especially among small producers.
5. **Distribution Bottlenecks:** Inadequate seed distribution networks (especially in remote/rainfed areas) cause shortages and seasonal mismatch.
6. **Regulatory Issues:** Delays in variety approval, seed certification, and complex regulatory procedures impede market entry for new, improved seeds.
7. **Intellectual Property & Legal Hurdles:**
  - Limited access to information, extension services, and demonstration plots hampers adoption of stress-resilient, hybrid, and climate-smart seed varieties.
  - Research-extension gaps mean many advances in seed technology do not reach farmers in time.

#### Government initiatives for seeds:

1. **Seed Legislation:** The seed industry in India has been governed by several legislative & policy frameworks such as Seed Act (1966), Seed Rules (1968), Seed (Control) Order (1983), New Policy on Seed Development (1988), Plants, Fruits & Seeds (Regulation of Import into India) Order (1989), Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Right Act (2001), and the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 including Seeds (1955), National Seed Policy (2002), and Seed Bill (2004).
2. **National Seed Policy 2002:**
  - Sets the framework for quality assurance, production, certification, and distribution of seeds across varieties and crops.
  - Focuses on protecting farmers' rights, encouraging private innovation, and improving availability of high-yielding and resilient seeds.
3. **National Mission on Seeds & Planting Material:**
  - Aims to increase production and supply of certified/hybrid seed, promote breeder and foundation seed multiplication, and strengthen public sector seed farms.
  - Supports seed hubs and demonstration plots to fast-track adoption of improved varieties.
4. **PM Fasal Bima Yojana Synergy:** While primarily a crop insurance scheme, it complements quality seed initiatives by reducing farmers' risk in trying new or improved seed varieties.

5. **Seed Mini-Kit Programme:** Distributes free/highly subsidized minikits of improved seed varieties (especially in pulses, oilseeds, and coarse cereals) to showcase performance and encourage adoption, especially among smallholders and in rainfed/difficult areas.
6. **Seed Certification & Distribution:**
  - The government, through State Seed Certification Agencies and the National Seed Corporation, strictly enforces certified seed production, testing, labeling, and market surveillance to curb substandard and spurious seeds.
  - Digital tools and the National Seed Traceability System (NSTS) improve transparency and track the seed supply chain.
7. **Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001:** Initiatives for faster variety registration, IPR protection under Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, and simplified field trial procedures.
8. **Indian Seed Vault:**
  - It is the second such seed bank in the world after the one at Norwegian Arctic island of Svalbard.
  - The gene bank was created at Chang-La, 75 km from Leh in Ladakh.
  - Another Seed Bank in India for long term storage of seeds is maintained in New Delhi by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) but that runs a huge electricity bill for refrigeration.
  - Currently holds 5,000 seeds of vegetables and crops developed and grown by the defence scientists.

#### Way Forward:

1. **Enhance Quality Assurance and Enforcement:**
  - Strengthen certification systems and market surveillance to eliminate substandard and counterfeit seeds.
  - Expand digital platforms like National Seed Traceability System for transparent tracking from production to sale.
2. **Promote Innovation and Research:**
  - Invest in development of climate-resilient, biofortified, and hybrid seeds suited for diverse agro-ecological zones.
  - Facilitate collaboration between public research institutions and the private sector for rapid variety development and adoption.
3. **Increase Seed Replacement Rate and Adoption:**
  - Set ambitious seed replacement targets and incentivize adoption through minikits, demonstrations, and targeted subsidies, especially in rainfed/remote regions.
  - Encourage adoption of new varieties via extension services and capacity-building initiatives.
4. **Strengthen Distribution and Accessibility:**
  - Improve last-mile distribution channels and infrastructure to ensure timely, affordable access of quality seeds to all regions, especially for small and marginal farmers.
  - Leverage digital ordering and agri-tech platforms for seed availability updates and farmer support.
5. **Support Farmer Awareness and Training:**
  - Scale up farmer training, field demonstrations, and digital extension to increase knowledge about benefits of improved and certified seeds.

- Promote awareness of seed quality, proper storage, and the risks of using uncertified seeds.

#### 6. Policy and Regulatory Reform:

- Streamline variety registration, approval procedures, and IPR protection to encourage private innovation and rapid market entry.
- Enforce effective grievance redressal mechanisms and simplify availing government schemes.

#### Conclusion:

Recognizing the significance of seeds as living entities and implementing effective regulations is essential for sustainable agriculture and food security.

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### Irrigation – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

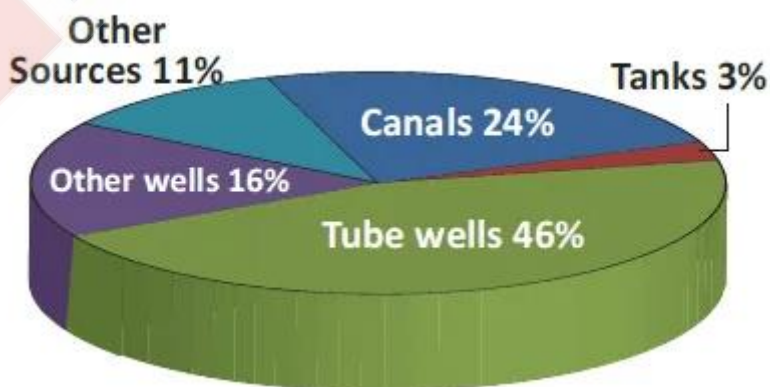
Irrigation is a key agricultural practice that entails the regulated and intentional application of water to plants or crops. It involves adding water to the soil in order to promote plant development and raise agricultural yield. Since ancient times, the method has been utilized to boost crop production and lessen the effects of dry spells or droughts.

#### Current status of Irrigation in India:

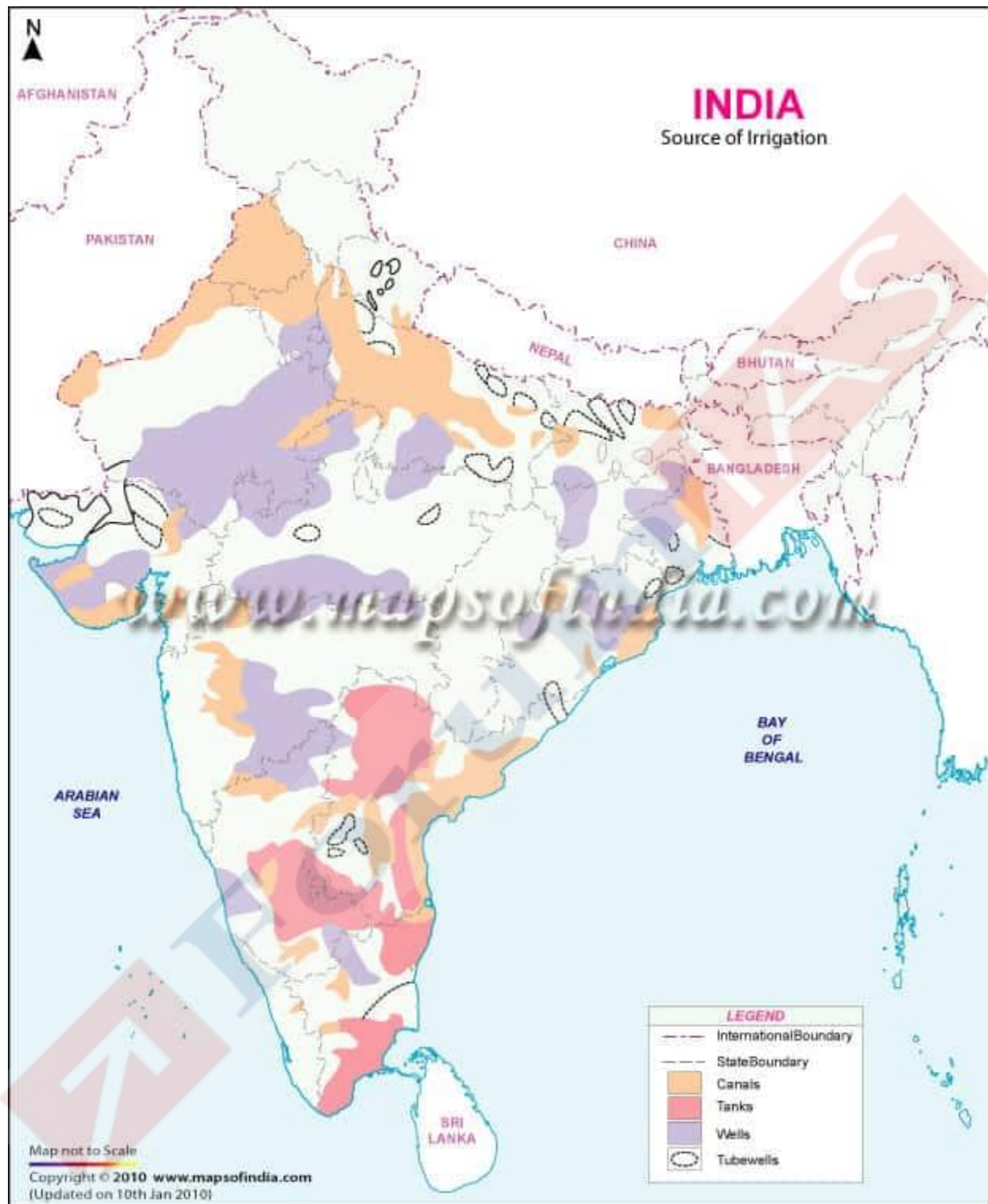
- India is one of the world's largest irrigated areas, with roughly 68 million hectares (MHa) of gross irrigated area as of 2025.
- About 48% of India's net sown area is under irrigation, with the remainder depending on rainfall.
- Major crops like wheat and sugarcane have over 90% irrigation coverage, while pulses and oilseeds rely more on rainfed farming.

#### Sources of Irrigation:

- Groundwater accounts for nearly 63% of irrigated area, making India the largest user of groundwater for irrigation globally.
- Canals contribute about 24%, while tanks, wells, and other sources provide the rest.







Source: Maps of India

### Types of Irrigation Systems:

1. **Surface Irrigation:** This irrigation technique, which involves flooding the entire field or a section of it with water, is the most popular. It is possible for the water to permeate the soil and get to the roots of

the crops. Surface irrigation is simple to set up and maintain, but it is inefficient since a lot of water is wasted to evaporation and runoff.

2. **Sprinkler Irrigation:** In this technique, water is applied to the crops using sprinkler heads. Droplets of water are sprayed and land on the soil's surface and leaves. Sprinkler irrigation is effective because it minimises water loss from runoff and evaporation. Although it may be used for a variety of crops, it uses a lot of energy to operate.
3. **Drip Irrigation:** This is a low-pressure irrigation technique that involves the application of water directly to the roots of the crops through a network of tubes and emitters. Drip irrigation is highly efficient as it delivers water directly to the plant roots, minimizing water loss due to evaporation and runoff. It is particularly useful for crops with shallow roots and in areas with limited water availability.
4. **Sub-surface Irrigation:** Irrigation below the soil's surface using buried pipes or porous tubes is known as sub-surface irrigation. Sub-surface irrigation is effective because it minimises water loss from evaporation and runoff by delivering water to the plant roots directly. It helps to lessen soil salinity and waterlogging, making it especially beneficial for places with high water tables or saline soils.
5. **Center Pivot Irrigation:** This method involves the use of a large sprinkler system mounted on a pivot that rotates around a central point to distribute water to crops in a circular pattern. The water is supplied through a pipeline running along the pivot, and the sprinklers distribute water evenly over a large area of land. Center pivot irrigation is efficient as it reduces water loss due to evaporation and runoff and is suitable for crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat that are planted in rows. However, it requires a significant investment in infrastructure and energy to operate.

#### Need for Irrigation in India:

1. **Uneven Distribution of Rainfall:** The arrival of the monsoon is uncertain and variable, especially in areas of low rainfall, e.g., Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh (High coefficient of variability). There is also variation in the spatial distribution of rainfall e.g. Meghalaya has much more rainfall than the Thar Desert.
2. **Inadequate Coverage:** Only 30% of cultivated land receives sufficient rainfall of more than 100cm. In areas of high rainfall, irrigation is necessary to increase farm productivity further. Monsoon gaps (no rain for two or more weeks during the sunny season) may damage crops without irrigation facilities.
3. **Seasonal Nature:** The monsoon is "seasonal." 75% of rainfall happens in 3-4 months of the year, and the remaining 8-9 months are marked by a dry season when irrigation is badly needed for growing crops (5 months dry in Kerala, nine months dry in North Western India).
4. **Type of Rainfall:** Rainfall in most parts of India is torrential and therefore there is less opportunity for soil to absorb water and surface water goes waste. Also, rainwater flows down very quickly along the hill slopes. Certain crops, such as rice, sugarcane, jute, and cotton, require more water and need irrigation even in areas of heavy rainfall.
5. **Problem with Monoculture:** Irrigation is necessary to end monoculture cropping practices in Indian agriculture. It is also necessary for the socio-economic transformation of rural India by making agriculture variable.
6. **Green Revolution:** Since the Green Revolution, the introduction of HYV seeds and heavy doses of chemical fertilisers have made irrigation necessary. Sandy and loamy soil can't retain water like Alluvial and black soil.

#### Significance of Irrigation:

1. **Enhanced agricultural productivity:** Regular and reliable water supply promotes optimal plant growth, increases land utilization, and raises per acre yields for food and cash crops. It supports cultivation of water-intensive and high-value crops like wheat, sugarcane, and vegetables, improving farm incomes.
2. **Ensure Stable Crop Production:** Irrigation shields crops from erratic monsoons and rainfall variability, reducing dependence on rainfed agriculture and stabilizing yields.
3. **Improved food security:** Irrigation mitigates the risk of crop failure caused by drought or insufficient rainfall, thereby ensuring a stable food supply for local populations.
4. **Stimulated economic growth:** Through increased agricultural output and productivity, irrigation can create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth in rural areas.
5. **Water storage:** Building dams and reservoirs that may be used to store water for irrigation and other uses is a common part of irrigation projects. This will boost infrastructural advancements.
6. **Climate resilience:** By providing a source of water when rainfall patterns become unpredictable, irrigation can aid farmers in adjusting to climate change. Also prevents deforestation and famine.

#### Challenges/Limitations related to Irrigation:

1. **Over-dependence on Groundwater:** Excessive extraction of groundwater—now around 63% of total irrigation use—has led to rapidly falling water tables in several states (Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, UP). Unsustainable groundwater use threatens long-term availability and increases costs for small farmers.
2. **Inefficient water usage & Water loss:** Traditional canal and surface irrigation systems suffer high water loss due to seepage, evaporation, and poor maintenance. Low efficiency means less water reaches crops, especially at tail ends of canal systems.
3. **Soil degradation:** Overuse of irrigation can cause soil salinization and waterlogging, which can lead to a decline in soil quality and ultimately reduce crop yields over time.
4. **Water pollution:** Irrigation can lead to contamination of nearby waterbodies due to the runoff of fertilizers and pesticides, causing ecological degradation and water pollution.
5. **Impact on biodiversity:** Irrigation can modify natural water flows, which can disrupt wetlands and other natural habitats, leading to a reduction in biodiversity.
6. **Regional Disparities:** Western and southern regions enjoy better irrigation coverage, while eastern, central, and northeastern states remain largely rainfed.
7. **Socio-economic inequality:** While irrigation can benefit some farmers, it can also create disparities between those who have access to irrigation and those who do not, leading to social and economic inequality within the region.

#### Various government initiatives related to irrigation:

1. **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY):**
  - a. Focuses on “Har Khet Ko Pani” (water to every field) to enhance irrigation coverage.
  - b. Promotes efficient water use with the slogan “Per Drop More Crop” by encouraging micro-irrigation (drip and sprinkler) and on-farm water management.
  - c. Integrates various schemes like Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP), Command Area Development (CAD), and other water conservation measures.
2. **Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP):** Provides central assistance for accelerating ongoing major, medium, and minor irrigation projects to improve water storage and distribution capacity.

**3. Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF):**

- a. Set up under NABARD with a corpus of ₹5,000 crore to promote adoption of drip and sprinkler irrigation nationwide.
- b. Encourages private investment and subsidizes equipment to improve water use efficiency.

**4. Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY):** A recent scheme focusing specifically on sustainable groundwater management in water-stressed areas through community participation and demand-side management.**5. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha Evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM):** This initiative promotes the installation of **solar pumps** for irrigation. It has three components:

- a. Installing standalone solar pumps.
- b. Solarizing existing grid-connected pumps.
- c. Setting up small solar power plants on agricultural land for farmers to sell excess power to the grid.

**6. Irrigation Projects:**

- a. **The Indira Gandhi Canal:** The Indira Gandhi Canal, which is located in Rajasthan, is one of India's biggest irrigation projects. The Sutlej River's water is diverted through the 600+ km long canal and into the Thar desert. Increased agricultural production is now possible in the desert region thanks to the project's creation of irrigated land covering more than 1.8 million hectares. (CCA of 5,28,000 ha.)
- b. **Narmada Valley Project:** In Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, the Narmada Valley Project uses water diverted from the Narmada River to irrigate more than 1.7 million hectares of land. Millions of people receive irrigation and drinking water from the project's numerous dams, canals, and reservoirs. (CCA is 1,46,800 ha.)
- c. **Project Krishna Godavari:** The Krishna Godavari Basin Project, which is situated in Andhra Pradesh, is one of the country's greatest river basin projects. In addition to irrigating more than 5 million hectares of land and producing hydroelectric power, the project includes a number of dams, canals, and reservoirs. As part of the project, various cities in the area receive drinking water. (CCA is 3,45,000-5,04,000 ha.)
- d. **Sardar Sarovar Project:** Located on Gujarat's Narmada River, the Sardar Sarovar Project serves a variety of purposes. Over 1.8 million hectares of land are irrigated by the project's several dams, canals, and reservoirs, which also provide hydroelectric power. A number of the region's cities also receive drinking water from the project. (CCA of 18,45,000 ha.)

**Way forward:****1. Promote Water-Use Efficiency and Micro-Irrigation:**

- Scale up adoption of drip and sprinkler irrigation systems to conserve water and improve crop water productivity.
- Provide subsidies, credit support, and technical training to farmers for efficient irrigation technologies.

**2. Sustainable Groundwater Management:**

- Implement strict monitoring and regulation of groundwater extraction, especially in overexploited regions.
- Encourage adoption of water-saving cropping patterns and recharge techniques like rainwater harvesting.

**3. Modernise Canal System:**



- Upgrade and maintain canal infrastructure to reduce seepage and improve equitable water delivery.
  - Implement automation and remote sensing technologies for better water control and scheduling.
- 4. Expand Irrigation Coverage & Equity:**
- Focus on neglected and rainfed regions, especially in Eastern and Northeastern India, to reduce regional disparities.
  - Support small and marginal farmers through community-managed irrigation and participatory water governance.
- 5. Integrate Climate Resilient Practices:**
- Promote drought-tolerant and less water-intensive crops along with climate-smart water management.
  - Use climate forecasting and advisories to optimize irrigation scheduling.
- 6. Promote Renewable Energy for Irrigation:** Expand use of solar-powered pumps to reduce dependence on grid electricity and diesel, ensuring sustainable, cost-effective irrigation.

**Conclusion:**

The development and management of irrigation systems in India are pivotal for the sustained growth of the agricultural sector and the livelihoods of millions of farmers. By prioritising sustainable irrigation practices, India can enhance agricultural productivity, secure rural livelihoods, and contribute to the nation's economic growth.

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### Contract Farming – Significance & Challenges – Way Forward

Contract farming is a significant and evolving topic in Indian agriculture, representing a formal, forward-looking link between farmers and commercial buyers. It aims to reduce market risk for farmers and ensure a consistent supply chain for companies.

**Introduction:**

- Contract farming can be defined as agricultural production carried out according to an agreement between a buyer and farmers, which establishes conditions for the production and marketing of a farm product or products. Typically, the farmer agrees to provide agreed quantities of a specific agricultural product.
- To regulate contract farming in India, the Ministry of Agriculture came out with a **draft Model Contract Farming Act, 2018**. The draft Model Act seeks to create a regulatory and policy framework for contract farming. Based on this draft Model Act, legislatures of states can enact a law on contract farming.
- Currently, contract farming in India requires registration with the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) in a few states. This means that contractual agreements are recorded with the APMCs which can also resolve disputes arising out of these contracts.

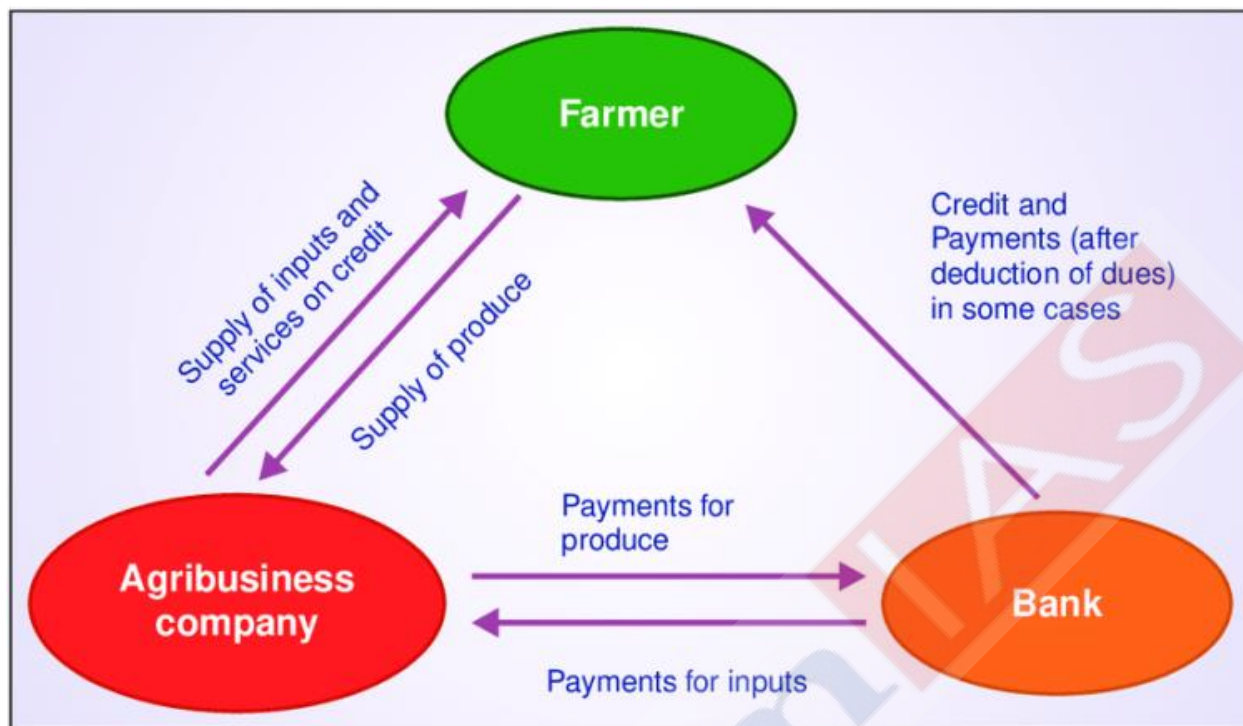


**Salient features of the Model Contract Farming Act, 2018:**

1. The Act lays special emphasis on protecting the interests of the farmers, considering them as the weaker of the two parties entering into a contract.
2. In addition to contract farming, services contract all along the value chain including pre-production, production and post-production have been included.
3. "Registering and Agreement Recording Committee" or an "Officer" for the purpose at district/block/ taluka level for online registration of sponsor and recording of agreement is provided.
4. Contracted produce is to be covered under crop/livestock insurance.
5. Contract framing is to be outside the ambit of the APMC Act.
6. No permanent structure can be developed on farmers' land/premises.
7. Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)/Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to mobilise small and marginal farmers has been provided.
8. It ensures buying of the entire pre-agreed quantity of one or more of agricultural produce, livestock or its product of the contract farming producer as per the contract.
9. Contract Farming Facilitation Group (CFFG) is being created for promoting contract farming and services at village/panchayat the level provided.
10. An accessible and simple dispute settlement mechanism at the lowest level possible is provided for the quick disposal of disputes.

**How does Contract Farming work?**

- Under contract farming, farmers can be given seeds, credit, fertilizers, machinery and technical advice so that their product is tailor-made for the requirements of the companies.
- There would be **no middlemen** involved and farmers would get a predetermined sale price from the companies.
- The farmer does not have to make trips to the mandis nor worry about getting seeds and credit for farming operations.
- By entering into a contract, the farmer reduces the risk of fluctuating market demand and prices for his produce and the companies reduce the risk of non-availability of raw materials.



#### Objectives of Contract Farming:

1. To promote a steady source of earnings at the individual farmer level.
2. To expand private sector investment in agricultural business.
3. To inspire financially rewarding employment opportunities in rural communities, especially for landless agricultural labour.
4. To bring down the burden of central and state-level procurement systems.
5. To minimize migration from rural to urban areas.
6. To create a market focus on crop selection by Indian farmers.
7. To promote value addition and processing.
8. To bring down as far as feasible, any seasonality associated with such employment.
9. To encourage rural self-reliance by pooling locally available resources and expertise to meet new challenges.

#### Advantages of Contract Farming:

1. Contract farming ensures a consistent supply of agricultural produce with quality, at the right time and lesser cost resulting in better control over the factors of production.
2. Farmers benefit from assured procurement and price stability, reducing uncertainties in agricultural marketing e.g. HyFun Foods procured 300,000 tonnes of potatoes from 6,000 farmers in Gujarat in 2023-24 and plans to engage 20,000 farmers by 2027-28 across 80,000 acres.
3. Assured supply aids food processing industries in better supply chain management. It reduces the demand-supply gap by plugging supply-side constraints. Contract farming also enables the food processing industries to invest in warehouses, cold storage and design the logistics in the long term.

4. It makes small-scale farming competitive. Small farmers can access technology, credit, marketing channels and information while lowering transaction costs. They are assured the market for their produce at their doorsteps, reducing marketing and transaction costs.
5. It reduces the risk of production, price and marketing costs. Contract farming can open up new markets which would otherwise be unavailable to small farmers, thereby reducing intermediaries thus providing more options to farmers.
6. Contract farming also ensures higher production of better quality, financial support in cash and /or kind and technical guidance. It enables optimal utilisation of installed capacity, infrastructure and manpower, and responds to food safety and quality concerns of the consumers.
7. It leads to direct private investment in agricultural activities as they find it profitable. The farmers enter into contract production with an assured price under terms and conditions.

**Challenges/Limitations of Contract Farming:**

1. Small and marginal farmers may not be roped in for this form of farming because companies may want a particular size of the crop which small farmers with their small parcels of land may not be able to produce. So, this will leave out the most vulnerable farmers from the ambit of corporate farming.
2. A **medium** sized farmer may not be literate enough to understand the nitty-gritty of the contract and all the clauses, and if the product does not meet the standards of the company, he may face mass rejection.
3. The farmer may be forced to produce only one type of crop year after year which will lead to monoculture, This invariably leads to the deterioration of soil.
4. Predetermined prices do not take care of food inflation and in case there is a price rise of the product, the farmer cannot take advantage and make a windfall profit because he is under contract to sell at the price agreed upon beforehand.
5. The average farmer being poor and semi-literate has little bargaining power vis-à-vis big corporations and hence there is little chance of his getting a fair price for his produce.
6. Informal or weakly enforced contracts limit farmers' legal recourse, leaving them exposed to unfair practices, such as stricter quality standards during bumper crop seasons.
7. A single buyer engaging with multiple farmers creates dependency, reducing farmers' negotiating power and enabling firms to dictate terms and maximize profits.

**Way Forward:**

1. Design policies specifically benefiting small-scale farmers, ensuring equitable terms, access to inputs, and fair prices to prevent marginalization.
2. Foster more competition to incentivise firms to offer better terms and services to the farmers. Steps should be taken to improve farmers' connectivity to spot markets and mandis across the country.
3. Information asymmetry should be addressed by maintaining an information repository of farmers, contracting firms, land availability, default rate and performance standards. This will help farmers and sponsors to evaluate each other prior to engaging in contracts.
4. Efforts should be made to encourage softer means for enforcement such as risk-sharing mechanisms in contracts, renegotiation options, and simplified and transparent contract terms.
5. Emphasis should be given to education and awareness regarding Farmer's rights. This can be done by leveraging Farmer Produce Organisations (FPO) and cooperative farming models.

6. Technology should be leveraged and Research and Development should be promoted. for contract registration, price monitoring, and grievance redressal to enhance transparency and efficiency in contract farming operations. Some of the areas which can be explored are:
- GIS/Remote Sensing
  - Soil Mapping
  - Crop Clinics
  - Farm experimental Facilities
  - Artificial Intelligence

**Conclusion:**

Contract farming is therefore seen as a key strategy to modernize India's supply chains and reduce agricultural risk, provided the regulatory framework remains strong enough to protect the interests of the small farmer.

**UPSC GS-3: Agriculture**

**Read More:** [Down To Earth](#)

**Buffer Stock – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise**

The buffer stock is a core component of India's food management policy, acting as an economic safety net for both farmers and consumers. It represents the strategic reserve of food grains held by the government to manage shortages, stabilize market prices, and ensure adequate food supply, particularly for vulnerable populations.

**Introduction:**

- Buffer stock refers to a reserve of a commodity that is used to stabilize price fluctuations and unforeseen emergencies. The concept of buffer stock was first introduced during the 4th Five Year Plan (1969-74).
- In India, buffer stocking of foodgrains is conceptually seen as a method to deliver strategic food and agricultural domestic support policies. Through these, the government caters multiple objectives such as providing famine relief, ensuring food security to consumers and providing production incentives to farmers.
- The responsibility for procuring, storing, and distributing the buffer stock lies primarily with the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

**Buffer Stock Norms in India:**

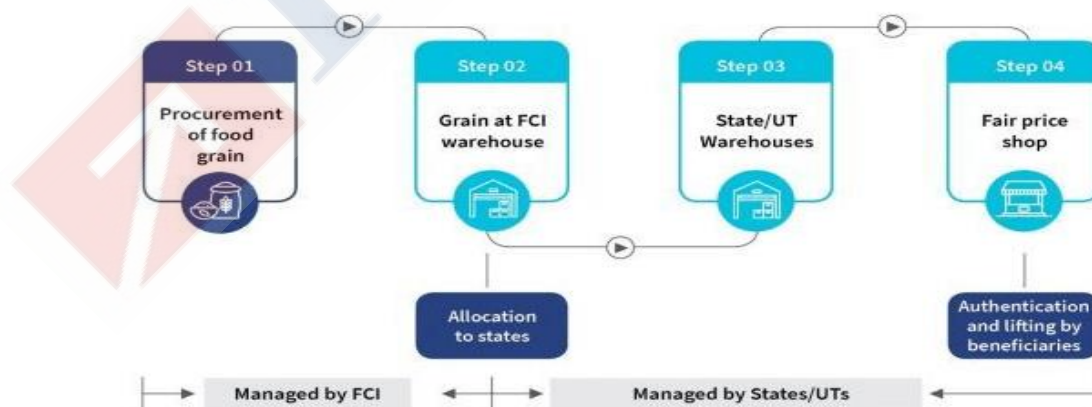
- The cabinet committee on Economic Affairs fixes the minimum buffer norms on quarterly basis: i.e as on 1st April, 1st July, 1st October and 1st January of every financial year.
- It is estimated that as on 1st of July 2025, approximately 358 LMT wheat and 377 LMT rice is available in the central pool, against the buffer norms of 275 LMT of wheat and 135 LMT of rice (LMT = Lakh MT).
- The central pool includes Operational Stocks and Strategic Reserves. Operational stocks meet monthly requirements under TPDS. Strategic reserves/food security stocks meet any shortfalls in future procurement.

**Objectives of Buffer Stock:**

<b>Consumption Side</b>	<p><b><u>Food Security and Distribution:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Counter Famine/Shortage:</b> To provide a continuous supply of food grains during periods of crop failure, natural disasters, or other crises where agricultural production falls short.</li> <li>● <b>Public Distribution System (PDS):</b> To supply grains to the Public Distribution System (PDS) and other welfare schemes (like the National Food Security Act, 2013), ensuring subsidized food reaches the poor.</li> </ul>
<b>Production Side</b>	<p><b><u>Price Stabilization:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Price Floor for Farmers:</b> To provide stability by purchasing grains from farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP). This guarantees a remunerative price, preventing distress sales and encouraging production.</li> <li>● <b>Price Ceiling for Consumers:</b> To control market prices. If open market prices rise too sharply, the government releases grains from the buffer stock to increase supply and bring prices down.</li> </ul>

**Procurement Process:**

1. **Minimum Support Price (MSP):** Before each cropping season (Kharif and Rabi), the government announces the MSP for key crops, including paddy (rice) and wheat.
2. **FCI Purchases:** Farmers sell their produce to the FCI and state agencies at the MSP. This assures farmers of a guaranteed income.
3. **Stock Accumulation:** The procured stock is stored in godowns (warehouses) across the country, managed by the FCI, and is rotated regularly to prevent spoilage.

**Process of grain movement****Significance of Buffer Stock:**



1. **Price stabilization:** Buffer stock aims to stabilize the prices of food grains, by regulating their supply in the market. The government intervenes in the market during periods of production fluctuations, natural disasters, or price volatility.
2. **Consumer Protection:** When necessary, the FCI releases stock into the open market through schemes like the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to cool down inflationary pressure on food prices.
3. **Food security:** Maintaining buffer stocks ensures a sufficient supply of foodgrains to meet the nutritional needs of the population and prevent food shortages. The government releases minimum buffer stock norms to ensure food security. It mitigates the adverse effects of production failures, natural calamities, or unforeseen events on the availability and prices of essential commodities.
4. **Welfare scheme:** The buffer stock serves as the backbone of India's social welfare system. The government utilizes this buffer stock to disperse the foodgrains to more vulnerable segments of the general public through a public distribution system, at lower than the market value which is otherwise called the issue cost.
5. **Increase farmers income:** By procuring grains at Minimum Support Prices (MSP), buffer stocks provide assured income to farmers, especially during years of excess production. This guarantees that farmers are shielded from price crashes in the open market.
6. **Market Intervention/ Supply Management:** Buffer stocks enable the government to intervene in markets and correct imbalances by releasing grains during supply shortages or surplus production, thereby preventing extreme price fluctuations that can harm consumers or farmers.
7. **Export Opportunities:** Buffer stocks, when managed efficiently, can also create opportunities for exporting surplus grain during years of good harvests, enhancing foreign exchange earnings and ensuring optimal use of excess production for e.g. Surplus wheat from buffer stocks was exported in 2021 to countries in South Asia and Africa, boosting India's presence in global grain markets.

#### Challenges related to Buffer Stock:

1. **Procurement cost:**
  - There are multiple costs involved in the procurement of buffer stock by FCI, which include handling expenses, storage cost, normal loss, administrative cost, rural development cess.
  - MSP is also being increased by the government which is raising the overall cost of procurement. The food subsidy bill is continuously increasing the burden of buffer stock cost.
2. **Storage Infrastructure:** India's current storage infrastructure is inadequate, with over-reliance on conventional godowns that lead to poor handling and spoilage of grains. The lack of modern silos results in significant post-harvest losses.
3. **High Maintenance Cost:** Maintaining large buffer stocks involves high operational costs, including storage, transportation, and procurement expenses, which put a strain on public finances. These rising costs can make the entire process unsustainable over the long term.
4. **Pilferage and Theft:** The buffer stock system faces challenges of pilferage and theft due to poor security measures and leakages in the distribution network. This results in substantial losses and reduced effectiveness of stock management.
5. **Quality Degradation:** Grains stored for extended periods under poor conditions often suffer from quality degradation, leading to reduced nutritional value. This is particularly an issue with traditional godowns, which lack proper ventilation and protection against pests.
6. **Logistical Challenges:** The transportation and movement of buffer stocks, especially across remote regions, present logistical hurdles. The delay in moving grains from one region to another leads to bottlenecks and mismanagement, affecting timely availability.

7. **Environmental Concerns:** The storage and movement of large buffer stocks also have environmental impacts, including carbon emissions from transportation and the use of non-eco friendly materials in storage.

#### Way Forward:

1. **Modernization of Storage Facilities:** India should modernize its storage infrastructure with climate-controlled silos to reduce post-harvest losses and maintain grain quality over time for e.g. The government has initiated a pilot project in 11 PACS under its ambitious grain storage plan, aiming to build 700 lakh metric tons of storage capacity over five years with Rs 25 lakh crore investment.
2. **Improved Inventory and Supply Chain Management:** Leveraging digital tools such as blockchain and IoT for real-time tracking of stocks and distribution can ensure efficient management for e.g. The Smart Warehouse Management System implemented by FCI aims to streamline grain storage and reduce leakages.
3. **Policy Reforms in Buffer Stock Management:** Reforming PDS and buffer stock norms, introducing decentralized procurement and localized storage will enhance the efficiency of stock utilization.
4. **Incentives for Private Sector Participation:** Encouraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) in building modern storage infrastructure and adopting efficient supply chain models can reduce the burden on government agencies and ensure better grain management.
5. **Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Practices:** Adopting green technologies such as solar-powered cold storage and eco-friendly packaging can make buffer stock management more sustainable, reducing its environmental impact.
6. **Enhanced Focus on Regional Disparities:** Addressing regional imbalances in buffer stock storage and distribution is key to ensuring food availability across all parts of India. Establishing regional buffer stock hubs and better connectivity to remote areas will help mitigate logistical challenges.

#### Conclusion:

The future of India's buffer stock system lies in modernization, digital integration, and sustainability. By focusing on reforms, innovation, and eco-friendly practices, the government can overcome existing challenges and transform buffer stock management into a robust and efficient mechanism.

UPSC GS-3: Agriculture  
Read More: [Arthapedia](#)

### National Food Security Act – Provisions, Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India's journey towards food security reached a significant milestone with the enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, transforming the "right to food" into a legal entitlement and marking a shift from a

welfare to a rights-based approach.



#### Introduction:

- The National Food Security Act of 2013 was enacted with the objective of providing food and nutritional security by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices for people to live a life with dignity.
- The Act covers up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized good grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population.

#### Important Provisions:

- Under NFSA, the government is obliged to give subsidized foodgrains every month to the beneficiaries identified by each state government based on the economic status of households.
- **Identification of Beneficiaries:** The identification of eligible households is done by the State Governments, adhering to inclusion/exclusion criteria set by the central government.
- **Two categories of beneficiary households:**
  - **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):** AAY households receive 35 kg of foodgrains monthly.
  - **Priority Households (PHH):** Each PHH member gets 5 kg of foodgrains monthly, including rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg, and coarse grain at Rs 1/kg.
- **Nutritional Support for Children:** Children between 6 months and 14 years receive nutritious, free meals through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes.
- **Maternity Entitlement:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a maternity benefit of at least ₹6,000 for six months to partially compensate for wage loss and ensure nutritional support.
- **Institutional Framework:**
  - Establishes State Food Commissions for monitoring and implementation.
  - Creates a grievance redressal mechanism at district level.

- Mandates transparency and accountability through social audits.

### Significance of the Act:

#### 1. Philosophical Shift: From Welfare to Rights:

- The most significant contribution of the NFSA is the paradigm shift it mandated in India's approach to public assistance.
- By explicitly stating that food access is a legal right for two-thirds of the population, the NFSA ensures that the government is legally obligated to provide subsidized food grains. This allows citizens to seek judicial recourse if entitlements are denied, fundamentally changing the relationship between the state and the beneficiary.

#### 2. Food & Nutritional Security:

- Through the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Act ensures monthly entitlements of rice, wheat, and coarse grains at highly subsidized rates to over 810 million beneficiaries.
- By guaranteeing affordable access to staples, the NFSA combats undernutrition and food insecurity among the poor.
- It reduces vulnerability to food price shocks, safeguarding low-income households against hunger.

#### 3. Enhanced Social Inclusion:

- Prioritizes marginalized sections, including SC/STs, women, and children, helping to address inequality.
- Ensures women's empowerment with provisions for female household heads as ration card holders.

#### 4. Poverty Reduction:

The assured supply of foodgrains acts as a form of income transfer. By reducing household expenditure on essential food items, it frees up a significant portion of the income of poor families, allowing them to spend on education, health, and other needs. This indirectly aids in poverty reduction.

#### 5. Crisis Management:

During national crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the NFSA mechanism allowed the government to immediately scale up distribution (e.g. through schemes like PMGKAY), ensuring no person went hungry when livelihoods were lost. The existing buffer stock and distribution network were instrumental in this massive relief effort.

#### 6. Driver of PDS Reforms & Accountability:

The NFSA necessitated and accelerated long-pending reforms in the Public Distribution System (PDS), drastically improving its efficiency and reducing leakage such as:

- **Technology Integration:** The mandate for effective delivery led to the widespread adoption of e-PDS (electronic PDS), including Aadhaar linking and the use of Point of Sale (PoS) devices at Fair Price Shops. This has significantly eliminated "ghost" beneficiaries and reduced the diversion of grains.
- **Grievance Redressal:** The requirement for state-level and district-level Grievance Redressal Officers and mandatory Vigilance Committees has built a layer of institutional accountability into the food distribution system, enhancing transparency.
- **Portability (ONORC):** The success of the NFSA is closely tied to the One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme, which ensures that NFSA entitlements are portable. This means a beneficiary can collect their subsidized food grains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) across the country, hugely benefiting migrant workers.

### Challenges/Limitations of the Act:



**1. Leakages and Inefficiency in PDS:**

- Persistent leakages, diversion of foodgrains, and corruption in the Public Distribution System (PDS) undermine efficient delivery of benefits.
- Errors in beneficiary identification and exclusion/inclusion issues result in deserving households missing out or ineligible ones receiving benefits.

**2. Quality of Foodgrains:**

- Beneficiaries often receive poor-quality or spoiled food grains, undermining the nutritional objectives of the Act.
- There is little provision within the Act for pulses, oils, or more nutritious foods.

**3. Fiscal Burden and Sustainability:**

- **Food Subsidy:** The difference between the Minimum Support Price (MSP) paid to farmers and the Central Issue Price (CIP) charged to beneficiaries (₹1, ₹2, ₹3) is borne by the government as the food subsidy. This subsidy is one of the largest items of non-developmental expenditure, putting pressure on the national fiscal deficit.
- **Buffer Stocks:** Maintaining adequate buffer stocks for distribution requires significant investment in storage and incurs heavy costs related to interest, storage, and wastage.

**4. Supply Chain and Infrastructure Gaps:**

- Shortcomings in logistics, transportation, and storage infrastructure lead to wastage and inefficiency.
- Old and insufficient warehouses, especially in remote regions, make timely and quality delivery challenging.

**5. Exclusion and Inclusion Errors:**

- **Exclusion Errors:** Genuinely poor and eligible households are left out of the list (often due to outdated data or complex documentation requirements), meaning those who need the food the most don't receive it.
- **Inclusion Errors:** Non-poor or ineligible households manage to acquire subsidized ration cards, leading to wastage of public resources.
- Migration, urbanization, and inter-state movement are not addressed adequately.

**6. Limited Nutrition Focus:**

- The Act focuses mainly on calorie security through grains, neglecting dietary diversity and micronutrient requirements.
- Provisions for pulses, oils, and fresh foods are minimal or absent.

**7. Functioning of Fair Price Shops (FPS):** While the implementation of PoS devices has improved transparency, challenges remain. These include internet connectivity issues in remote areas, resulting in transaction failures, and residual corruption by FPS dealers regarding timing, weighing, and behavior.**8. Weak Enforcement:** State-level Grievance Redressal Officers (GROs) often lack the authority, resources, or political will to effectively penalize violators or ensure timely resolution of complaints. The mandated Vigilance Committees are often defunct or non-functional.**Way Forward:**

- 1. Updating Population Coverage:** The Act must be amended to use current population estimates instead of the rigid 2011 Census figures. This change is crucial to include families who have moved into poverty or who were born after 2011, thereby reducing exclusion errors.
- 2. Dynamic Exclusion Criteria:** Instead of relying solely on old BPL (Below Poverty Line) lists, states should implement dynamic exclusion criteria using technology and data points (e.g., vehicle



ownership, government employment status, electricity consumption) to regularly update and clean beneficiary lists.

3. **Universalizing ONORC:** While the One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme has been implemented, continuous investment in seamless biometric and internet infrastructure is needed. The goal should be to make ration portability a frictionless experience, especially for internal migrant workers.
4. **Mandating Fortification:** Central and state governments should mandate the fortification of all rice and wheat supplied through the PDS with essential micronutrients like Iron, Folic Acid, and Vitamin B12. This is a highly cost-effective public health measure.
5. **Integrating with Local Produce:** Pilot programs should be launched to link Fair Price Shops (FPS) with local self-help groups (SHGs) or farmer producer organizations (FPOs) to provide seasonal, locally sourced, and subsidized fresh fruits and vegetables to beneficiaries, particularly through ICDS and Mid-Day Meal schemes.
6. **Smart Procurement and Storage:** Modernize the food supply chain by shifting from traditional bag storage to steel silos and implementing End-to-End Computerization of the PDS. This drastically reduces storage costs and physical wastage (spoilage and theft).

#### Conclusion:

The NFSA can evolve from a basic food distribution program into a dynamic, transparent, and nutrition-sensitive social security pillar for the nation if its challenges are addressed & next-gen reforms are implemented properly.

UPSC GS-3: Agriculture

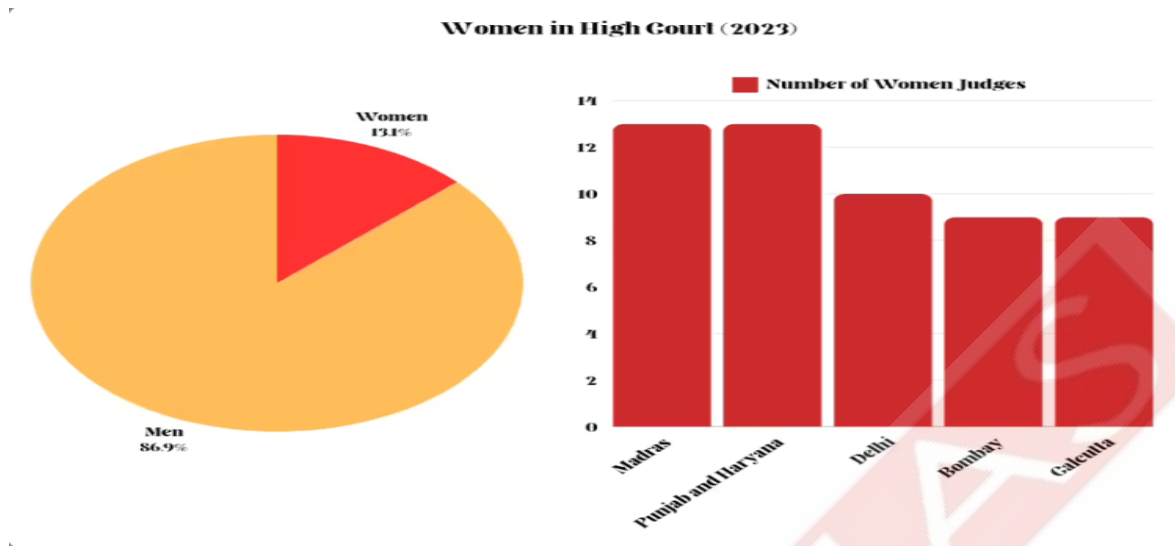
Read More: [Vikaspedia](#)

### Women Representation in Judiciary – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The women's representation in India's judiciary shows significant underrepresentation at higher levels, with better but still insufficient numbers in the lower judiciary. The "glass ceiling" remains strong for women judges, especially in promotions to higher courts. Minority and marginalized women face even greater barriers to advancement.

#### What is the Status of Representation of Women in Judiciary?

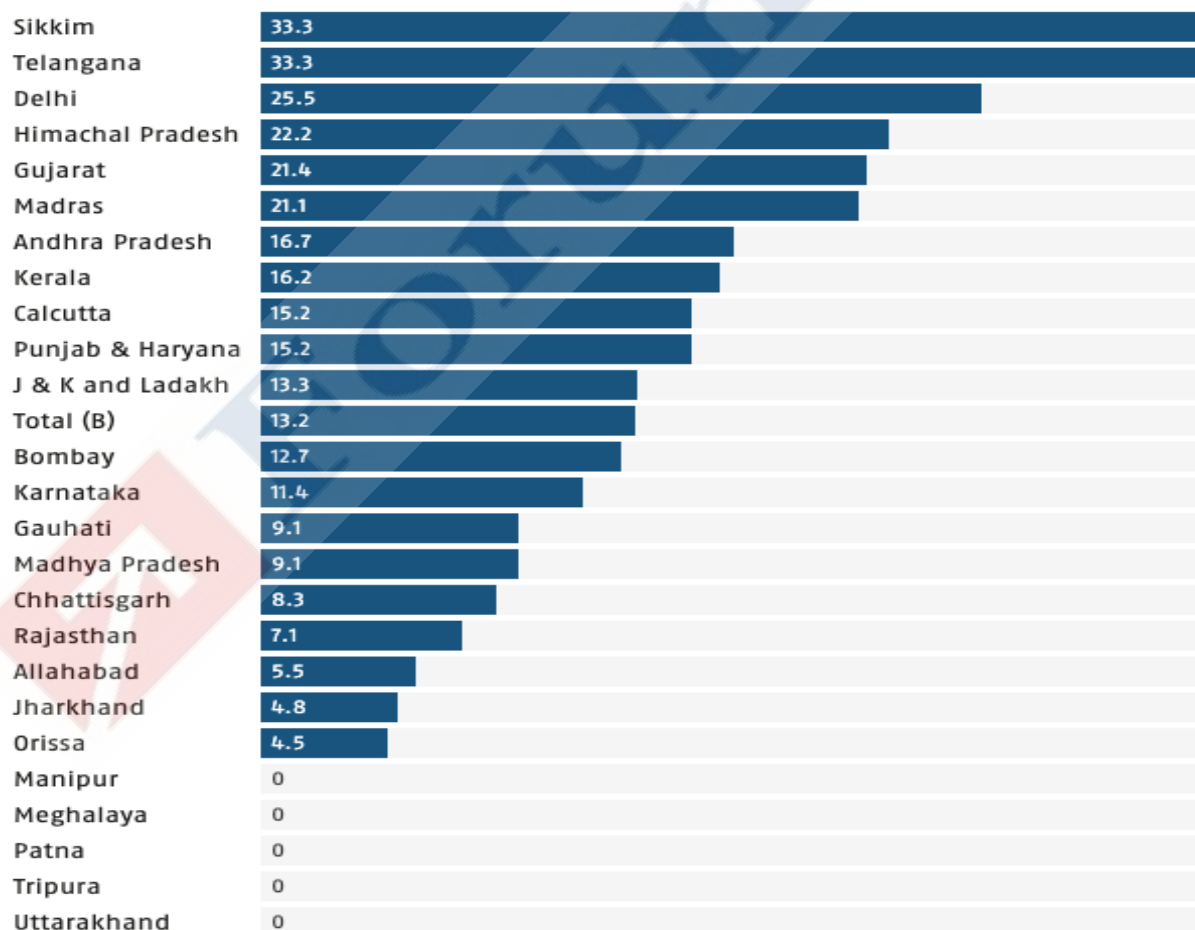
- **Supreme Court:**
  - As of 2025, only 1 woman judge (Justice B.V. Nagarathna) serves out of 34 judges, yielding a representation of just 2.9%.
  - In its entire history since 1950, only 11 women judges have ever been appointed to the Supreme Court (Of them, 6 have been appointed since 2014 and 5 since 2018) — just 3.8% out of 287 total appointments.
  - No woman has held the Office of Chief Justice of India.
- **High Courts:**
  - Collectively for all High Courts, Women Judges constitute only 13.1% of the Judges.



- However, there are considerable variations among High Courts (HCs). 5 HCs have not a single woman Judge. Another 7 HCs have < 10% Women Judges. Sikkim and Telangana HCs have the highest representation at 33.3%.

### Five HCs did not have a single woman judge

(women, % of total working strength of judges in High Courts)



- **District & Subordinate Judiciary:**
  - Women Judges constitute ~35% of the Judges in the lower courts. Here the proportion varies from 19.5% in Gujarat to 70% in Goa.
  - As of 2025, 7,852 women judges serve in district and subordinate courts.
  - 17 of the 36 States and UTs had a smaller proportion of women in the lower judiciary than the national average.
- Out of 1.7 million advocates in the country only 15% are women. Only 2% elected representatives in the State Bar Councils are women.

### What are the reasons for Low Representation of Women in Judiciary?

#### 1. Judicial Rules:

- Article 233 puts the condition of 7 years of practice as an advocate to be eligible for appointment as District Judge. The Judiciary has interpreted this as 7 years of continuous practice.
- Most States' Judicial rules dictate a minimum age of 35 years for entry as a district judge through direct recruitment. No one below the age of 55 years can be appointed as a judge in the Supreme Court. Marriage and Family responsibilities in this age group reduces the ability of women to compete for roles in the Judiciary.

#### 2. 'Leaking Pipeline' Syndrome:

- The leaking pipeline syndrome is often used as a metaphor for the way **women disappear as they move from lower to higher levels**.
- The phenomenon of the leaking pipeline is witnessed across a spectrum of careers including the Judiciary (~35% Judges in Lower Courts to ~11% in the SC).
- Family responsibilities, personal choices, long working hours and work-life conflict, working conditions, lack of access to employment opportunities, barriers to advancement, inadequate support from family results in women frequently dropping out mid-career.
- This 'voluntary withdrawal' masks the tacit consent given to patriarchally prescribed gender roles.

#### 3. Opaque Recruitment Process (Collegium System):

There are comparatively more women in the lower tiers of Judiciary due to the **presence of formal qualifications and examinations**. Such an arrangement is more rational and transparent. Appointments to Higher Judiciary are undertaken through an opaque Collegium System where the eligibility and selection criteria are not known. Critics of the collegium system say appointment depends upon favourable evaluations and professional/personal networks.

#### 4. Uncomfortable Environment:

The environment is hostile and sexist making it difficult for female litigators to grow as professionals. According to a Research Paper '**Structural and Discretionary Bias: Appointment of Women Judges in India**' 13 Judges out of 19 interviewed acknowledged the gender bias that exists in the appointment procedure of Judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts.

#### 5. Lack of Supportive Infrastructure:

The dearth of supportive provisions and infrastructure, from toilets to maternity leave, also contribute to a high attrition rate amongst women lawyers. In 6,000 courts across the country, 22% of them do not have separate toilets for women. As a result, many women law graduates prefer to join the corporate sector.

#### 6. Lack of Enabling Provisions:

While quotas for women have been implemented in the lower courts of many states, these policies are yet to be implemented in the Higher Judiciary. States like Assam,

Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha have these enabling provisions and have > 40% Women Judges.

### What are the impacts of Low representation of Women in Judiciary?

#### 1. Prejudice in Judgements:

- Critics argue that lack of gender perspective leads to prejudiced Judgments e.g. In August 2020, the High Court of Madhya Pradesh granted bail to a molester on the condition that he will get a rakhi tied by the victim.
- Sometimes Judgments tend to uphold the “behavioural ethics” of Indian women (i.e., how ideal women should behave) e.g., in June 2020, while granting bail to a rape accused, the Karnataka High Court observed that the “*after-rape behaviour of the victim is not how a rape victim ‘ideally behaves’*”.
- The basis of such judgements is limited to the ideal dignity of a woman, and not on the criminal nature of the act itself.

#### 2. Narrowing the Scope of Law: Women judges often bring lived experiences that push the boundaries of jurisprudence, introducing new legal concepts related to **equal opportunity, sexual harassment (e.g. Vishaka Guidelines in India)**, and reproductive rights. Low representation means these vital areas of law may progress slowly or remain undeveloped.

#### 3. Deficiencies in Legal Reasoning: The ability of the legal system to understand and respond to different social circumstances and experiences is enriched by more judicial diversity. If there is not adequate women’s representation, the justice system will not be able to meet the needs of women and other underserved communities.

#### 4. Impact on Access to Justice: Women litigants, especially those from economically weaker sections, often feel more comfortable and confident presenting their cases before a female judge. The lack of women on the bench can deter women from seeking legal recourse in sensitive matters, contributing to a **justice gap**.

#### 5. Undermining of Gender Equality & Causing Trust Deficit: Lack of women representatives in courts give rise to questions about the courts’ legitimacy as representatives of the societies they serve. A judiciary that does not reflect nearly half the population lacks legitimacy and fails the principle of representative justice.

#### 6. Lack of Role Models: High-ranking women judges serve as powerful **role models and sources of inspiration** for young girls and women entering the legal profession and other fields. Their visibility breaks stereotypes about women’s capacity for leadership and high office.

### What should be the way forward?

#### 1. Gender-Based Affirmative Action: Implement a policy where a certain percentage (e.g. 30% where feasible) of judicial positions, particularly at the **District and High Court level**, are reserved for women. While the Supreme Court appointments are based on seniority and merit, High Court recommendations must proactively seek out qualified women candidates.

#### 2. Mandatory Inclusion in Selection Committees: Ensure that all shortlisting and selection bodies, including the Collegium (at the Supreme Court level) and State-level committees, include **at least one woman member**. This inclusion brings diversity to the decision-making process itself, challenging inherent biases during candidate evaluation.

#### 3. Lateral Entry from Academia: Encourage and facilitate the lateral entry of women with strong academic backgrounds (law professors, legal scholars) into the mid-level judiciary or as judges in specialized tribunals. This broadens the entry point beyond traditional litigation tracks.

4. **Addressing Family and Work-Life Balance:** The biggest hurdle for women in the legal field is often the lack of institutional support for work-life balance. Judicial academies and the bar associations should advocate for:
  - **Childcare Facilities** within court complexes.
  - **Flexible Timings** for female lawyers and judges, particularly during early motherhood.
  - **Adequate Maternity Leave** policies that do not negatively impact seniority or career progression.
5. **Better Infrastructure:** Provide basic, dignified infrastructure in all courts, especially at the lower judiciary level (e.g. separate, well-maintained washrooms and retiring rooms), to support the comfort and safety of women lawyers and judges.
6. **Eliminating Gender Bias Training:** Introduce mandatory, regular **gender sensitization and unconscious bias training** for all sitting judges, law clerks, and court staff. This is essential to create a neutral and respectful court environment for female advocates and litigants.
7. **Mentorship and Support Networks:** Establish formal mentorship programs where senior women judges and lawyers mentor junior female colleagues, helping them navigate the systemic challenges and stay in the profession long enough to be considered for elevation.

#### Conclusion:

Bridging the gender gap in the judiciary will ensure that the judiciary is not only *independent* but also truly *representative* of the society it is tasked with serving.

UPSC GS-2: Indian Judiciary

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

### Health Insurance – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

Universal Health Care (UHC), envisioned by the Bhore Committee (1946), remains distant for India even after eight decades. While PMJAY and SHIPs have expanded formal coverage to over 80% of the population, they raise questions about sustainability, equity, and the future of India's public health system.

#### Status of Health Insurance Coverage in India:

- **National coverage rate:** Approximately 55% of households have some form of health insurance (government or private), up from 41% in 2021.
- **Ayushman Bharat-PM-JAY:** India's largest public health insurance plan now covers 107 million families (over 40% of the population).
- **Private insurance:** Over 30% of insured individuals are covered by private plans, with premiums ranging from ₹5,000–₹20,000 per person per year.

#### Significance of health insurance:

1. **Preventing Catastrophic Expenditure:** Health expenses, particularly for hospitalization (secondary and tertiary care), are a leading cause of families falling into poverty (About 7% of India's population is pushed into poverty annually due to out-of-pocket healthcare expenses). Health insurance, especially schemes like PMJAY, absorbs these unpredictable & high costs.
2. **Access to Quality Healthcare:** Insurance enables timely access to private and public healthcare services, allowing for cashless treatment and routine or emergency procedures.



3. **Formalizing the Healthcare Sector:** Insurance requires detailed record-keeping, standardized billing, and adherence to treatment protocols. This forces hospitals to adopt better transparency and accountability, which is essential for improving the quality of care and curbing over-billing practices.
4. **Social Impact & Health Equity:** Health insurance schemes, especially government-led ones like Ayushman Bharat, improve inclusivity by covering low-income, rural, and vulnerable populations. They contribute to improved national productivity, lower mortality, enhanced wellbeing, and reduction of catastrophic health expenditures.

**Various initiatives to expand the health insurance coverage:**

1. **Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY):**
  - Launched in 2018, PM-JAY offers ₹5 lakh annual cover per family for hospitalizations.
  - Covers secondary and tertiary care, both public and private hospitals nationwide.
  - Significant extension in 2025 to individuals aged 70 and above.
2. **State Health Insurance Programmes (SHIP):**
  - **Rajiv Aarogyasri** (AP, Telangana): Focused on BPL and serious illnesses.
  - **Arogya Karnataka:** Universal coverage aspirations with diagnostics, hospitalization.
  - **CMCHIS** (Tamil Nadu), **Bhamashah Swasthya Bima** (Rajasthan), and others provide cashless treatment and significant annual coverage.
3. **Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs):** Transformation of over 1.7 lakh sub-centres and PHCs into HWCs by 2024, offering primary healthcare and linking insurance benefits closer to communities.
4. **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):** ABDM is creating unique digital health IDs (ABHA) for every citizen. This infrastructure is vital for the future, as it will allow beneficiaries' medical records and insurance claims to be linked digitally, making the entire process of enrollment and portability seamless.
5. **Mandated standardized policies** (e.g. Arogya Sanjeevani), reducing complexity and improving transparency for customers.
6. Removal of **GST** from insurance premiums (2025) to make insurance more affordable.
7. **NIRAMAYA:** Special affordable health insurance scheme for persons with disabilities, covering OPD and diagnostics.
8. **Mental Health Coverage:** Expansion of benefits under Ayushman Bharat and private schemes to include mental health services.

**Challenges related to health insurance in India:**

1. **High Out-of-Pocket (OoP) Expenditure:** Even with the growth of insurance, over 60% of total healthcare spending is still paid out-of-pocket by patients. This is due to the lack of coverage for Out-Patient Department (OPD) expenses which constitute the bulk of everyday medical costs. Most insurance only covers hospitalization.
2. **The “Missing Middle”:** A vast segment of the Indian population is too wealthy to qualify for the highly subsidized PMJAY but too poor or informally employed to afford comprehensive private insurance. This group, estimated at around 30% of the population, often faces the greatest financial distress during a medical crisis.
3. **Complex Exclusionary Clauses:** Private insurance policies are often highly complex, containing numerous and difficult-to-understand clauses, especially concerning Pre-Existing Diseases (PEDs). PEDs typically involve waiting periods of 2 to 4 years, meaning individuals with chronic conditions (like diabetes or hypertension) cannot access coverage immediately, defeating the purpose of buying insurance when they need it most.

4. **Claim Denial and Disputes:** High rates of claim rejection or partial payment, particularly in the private sector, erode public trust. This often stems from ambiguity in policy wording, non-disclosure of health conditions by customers, or arbitrary interpretation of “medically necessary” treatment by insurers.
5. **Privatisation of Healthcare & Profit-seeking Behaviour:** Health insurance in India promotes for-profit medicine. About two-thirds of the PM-JAY budget is spent on private, mainly profit oriented hospitals. India’s healthcare system, however, is dominated by poorly-regulated profit seekers. Health insurance reinforces this bias rather than correcting it.
6. **Misdirected Focus:** Health insurance also tilts the focus of the healthcare system towards hospitalisation, when investments in primary & outpatient care may be more urgent. Focus on strengthening the PHC would not only ensure accessible treatment but also reduce unnecessary hospital visits & their financial burden.
7. **Lack of Awareness & Serious Utilisation Problem:** The combined coverage of PM-JAY & SHIP is estimated to be as high as 80% of the population. However, a large % of this population do not seem to know about these schemes or how to use them even if they are nominally enrolled. According to the 2022-23 Health Consumption Expenditure Survey – only 35% of insured hospital patients in that year were able to use their insurance. This is the main reason why there is no strong evidence linking the health insurance schemes with substantial reduction in OoP health expenditure.
8. **Discriminatory Treatment:** Targeted health insurance schemes create the issue of discrimination between insured & uninsured patients. Private hospitals prefer an uninsured patient because commercial charges for healthcare are usually higher for them – often much higher than the insurance reimbursement rates. Public hospitals, on the other hand, prefer insured patients because they get some money for their treatment. This creates the problem of discriminatory treatment & pressure to enroll for insurance on spot.
9. **Information Asymmetry and Fraud:** Both government and private schemes struggle with fraud and unethical practices. This includes excessive billing or unnecessary procedures by healthcare providers to maximize claim amounts, which, in turn, increases the overall cost of insurance for everyone. The NHA has recently recommended action against 3200 hospitals for fraudulent activities under PM-JAY.
10. **Regulatory Capacity:** While the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is active, ensuring compliance across thousands of hospitals and hundreds of insurance products requires enormous regulatory bandwidth, especially in monitoring billing practices and claim settlement integrity.

#### Way forward:

##### 1. Universal Health Coverage:

- Expand government schemes like Ayushman Bharat to cover the uninsured population (~400 million), especially focusing on outpatient care and chronic illnesses.
- Bridge the “Missing Middle” Gap: Encourage insurers to offer highly flexible, modular plans that allow the “missing middle” to buy specific coverage at a lower cost, with the option to add comprehensive coverage later.
- Increase public investment in primary and preventive healthcare, integrating insurance with wellness and early intervention programs.

##### 2. Affordability & Product Innovation:

- Standardize insurance policies with transparent coverage and limits (e.g. Arogya Sanjeevani) to eliminate confusion and mis-selling.

- Develop plans tailored for seniors, women, and low-income groups, including wellness-linked benefits and cashless OPD coverage.
- 3. Mandatory Health Claims Exchange (HCX) Use:** The government must mandate the use of the HCX platform by all hospitals and insurers (public and private). This standardized digital exchange will drastically reduce claim processing time, minimize disputes, and reduce fraudulent billing by creating an audit trail.
- 4. Strengthened Regulatory Framework:**
  - IRDAI reforms to speed claim settlements, mandate cashless anywhere facilities, protect consumer rights, and regulate premium hikes.
  - Introduce composite licenses allowing insurers to offer life and health insurance products seamlessly.
- 5. Increased Awareness & Literacy:**
  - Run public campaigns focused on the importance of insurance, especially in rural/underserved regions.
  - Promote financial literacy, especially around claim processes, policy selection, and benefits.
- 6. Paperless and Aadhaar-Linked Claims:** The goal should be for 100% cashless and paperless claim settlement for all enrolled patients, using the ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) ID for authentication and record access.

**Conclusion:**

Social health insurance is definitely an important pillar towards achieving UHC, however, to truly achieve the UHC, the focus should be on not only overcoming the limitations of the existing health insurance programmes but also on investing in basic public healthcare infrastructure.

**UPSC GS-2: Social Security**

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

### Neighborhood First Policy – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India's "Neighbourhood First Policy" is a central pillar of its foreign policy, aimed at strengthening ties and advancing peace, connectivity, and prosperity in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. The NFP accords primacy to nations in periphery with focus on encouraging trade, connectivity and people-to-people contact.

**Introduction:**

- Formally conceptualized in 2008 and prioritized since 2014, the policy aims to enhance India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic relations with its immediate neighbours: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- **Principles:** Guided by the "5S" framework— **Samman** (Respect), **Samvad** (Dialogue), **Shanti** (Peace), **Samriddhi** (Prosperity), **Sanskriti** (Culture).

**Salient features of India's Neighbourhood First' policy:**

- 1. Immediate priority to neighbours:** Priority is to improve the relations with immediate neighbours as peace and tranquility in South Asia is essential for realizing development agenda. The neighbourhood first policy actively focuses on improving ties with India's immediate neighbours.

2. **Dialogue:** It focuses on vigorous regional diplomacy by engaging with neighbouring nations and building political connectivity through dialogue. First initiative in this direction was extending an invitation to all heads of government of SAARC countries for the oath taking ceremony of the Prime Minister in 2014.
3. **Resolving bilateral issues:** Focus is on resolving bilateral issues through mutual agreement. For instance, India and Bangladesh have signed a pact to operationalise the historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA).
4. **Connectivity & Integration:** The primary goal is to physically and digitally integrate South Asia, making India the central hub for trade, transit, and people-to-people exchange:
  - **Physical Connectivity:** Focus on rapid development of infrastructure projects like roads, railways, and ports to facilitate trade. Key projects include the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (connecting India to Myanmar) and railway links to Nepal and Bangladesh.
  - **Digital Connectivity:** Extending internet and communication services, such as setting up communication lines or offering digital expertise, to partner nations.
  - **Energy Connectivity:** Establishing regional power grids to allow countries to trade electricity, benefiting nations like Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.
5. **Economic Cooperation:** It focuses on enhancing trade ties with neighbours. India has participated and invested in SAARC as a vehicle for development in the region. One such example is the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping for energy development i.e. motor vehicles, waterpower management and inter-grid connectivity.
6. **Technical Cooperation:** The policy put emphasis on technical cooperation. For e.g. a dedicated SAARC satellite was developed to share the fruits of the technology like tele-medicine, e-learning etc. with the people across South Asia.
7. **Disaster management:** India positions itself as the first responder during regional crises (e.g., the 2015 Nepal earthquake, humanitarian aid during the Sri Lanka economic crisis). This enhances goodwill and trust.
8. **Military and defence cooperation:** India is also focusing on deepening security in the region through military cooperation. Various exercises like Surya Kiran with Nepal, Sampriti with Bangladesh aim to strengthen defence relations.

#### Significance of NFP:

##### 1. Security & Strategic Significance:

- The policy ensures stable borders and regional peace by proactively engaging with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.
- It is critical for combating transnational threats like terrorism, smuggling, cybercrime, and illegal migration by establishing frameworks for security cooperation and intelligence sharing.
- India's engagement acts as a counterbalance to external powers—most notably China—in the region, reinforcing India's leadership and influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

##### 2. Economic Development & Integration:

- It promotes cross-border trade, energy cooperation, and infrastructure development—vital for economic growth and regional integration.
- Initiatives like the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement, transnational electricity grids, and trilateral highways accelerate development and link India's Northeast with neighbours.
- India's development aid and capacity-building projects foster economic stability and human development in neighbouring countries.



**3. People-to-People Ties (Soft Power):**

- Enhances people-to-people links, cultural exchanges, medical aid, scholarships, and disaster response across the region, building goodwill and mutual trust.
- Fosters regional solidarity and helps resolve disputes through dialogue and diplomacy rather than confrontation.

**4. Managing Migration and Refugees:** A stable and economically prosperous neighbourhood reduces the risk of large-scale, unplanned refugee influxes or illegal migration, allowing India to better manage its resources and demographics.**5. Establishing India as a Net Security provider:** As a regional power, India must be seen as the primary net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). By actively assisting nations like Sri Lanka and Maldives with maritime security, disaster relief, and economic stability, the NFP reinforces India's natural position as the first port of call during a crisis.**6. Improves India's Global Standing:**

- It positions India as a responsible regional power committed to peaceful coexistence, prosperity, and cooperation.
- Underpins India's ambitions for global leadership and a constructive role in forums like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

**Challenges with NFP:**

- 1. The Pakistan Factor:** The persistent hostility and border tensions with Pakistan consume a disproportionate amount of India's security and diplomatic bandwidth, often diverting focus and resources away from developmental aspects of the NFP with other, more cooperative neighbours.
- 2. The China Factor:** The most significant challenge is China's expanding economic and strategic footprint in South Asia (via the Belt and Road Initiative – BRI), which offers neighbours large-scale, easy-term loans, potentially drawing them away from India's orbit.
- 3. Internal Instability:** Political instability or internal crises in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka can complicate or halt Indian-funded projects.
- 4. Asymmetric Power Balance:** India's immense size, economic, and military power can evoke a sense of unease or "Big Brother" syndrome in smaller neighbours like Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. They often strategically balance their ties with India against China to assert their sovereignty and gain better leverage, slowing down cooperation with New Delhi.
- 5. Security Concerns:** Complex security dynamics, especially with Pakistan, and issues related to cross-border terrorism, refugees, and border disputes often overshadow developmental cooperation efforts.
- 6. Border Disputes and Water Issues:** Unresolved border issues (e.g., with Nepal, Pakistan) and critical disputes over the sharing of trans-boundary rivers (e.g., with Bangladesh and Nepal) create inherent friction that makes high-level cooperation difficult to sustain.
- 7. Slow Bureaucracy and Delays:** Indian-funded projects often face significant delays due to bureaucratic procedures, environmental clearances, internal political changes in India, and slow release of funds. This lack of timely execution can lead to frustration in the partner country and create a negative image of India's capabilities.

**Various initiatives under NFP:**

- 1. BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA):** India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal are working on this framework to allow seamless movement of passenger and cargo vehicles across borders. This is vital for lowering trade costs and increasing efficiency.

2. **Coastal Shipping Agreements (Bangladesh):** India utilizes ports in Bangladesh (like Chittagong and Mongla) to move goods to its landlocked North-Eastern states, shortening transit times significantly.
3. **Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link (Bangladesh):** This project, once fully operational, will connect India's North-East to Bangladesh's railway network, dramatically reducing travel time from Kolkata to Agartala.
4. **Cross-Border Petroleum Pipelines (Nepal/Bangladesh):** Initiatives like the Motihari-Amlekhgunj oil pipeline to Nepal ensure reliable and efficient supply of petroleum products, removing logistical bottlenecks.
5. **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region):** While broader, SAGAR is the maritime dimension of the NFP. It involves defence cooperation, disaster relief & humanitarian aid.
6. **Lines of Credit (LoC):** India extends concessional LoCs to finance infrastructure and development projects tailored to the needs of the neighbour. For example, LoCs have financed railway upgrades in Bangladesh and housing reconstruction in Sri Lanka.

#### Way forward:

1. **Dedicated Implementation Cell:** Create a specialized, fast-tracked "Neighbourhood Projects Cell" within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that focuses solely on the execution of NFP projects. This cell should be empowered to bypass bureaucratic hurdles, ensuring that all necessary clearances are obtained within strict deadlines.
2. **Digital Connectivity Hub:** Proactively offer India's digital public infrastructure (like Aadhaar, UPI, and Digital Health Stack) to interested neighbours (like Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan) on an open-source, non-proprietary basis. This fosters seamless integration and builds dependency on India's technology, not just its capital.
3. **Focus on Soft Power and Culture:** Increase the number of scholarships, fellowships, and cultural exchange programs. Sponsor regional cultural festivals and joint historical research projects. This addresses the "hearts and minds" element, portraying India as a benign, culturally accessible power, contrasting with the often transactional nature of other partnerships.
4. **Hybrid Financing Models:** Move beyond traditional grants and pure Lines of Credit (LoC). Utilize Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and equity investments in neighbouring countries, allowing Indian private firms to invest directly in large-scale infrastructure alongside the host nation's government.
5. **Debt Management Assistance:** Instead of directly competing on every loan, India should offer expertise and financial support to neighbours to help them manage and restructure existing unsustainable debts (often from China), positioning India as a responsible and reliable economic counselor.

**Conclusion:** India's Neighbourhood First Policy is fundamental for its security, development, and international standing, demanding continued diplomatic engagement and trust-building with regional partners.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

Read More: [Observer Research Foundation](#)

### India-Bhutan Relationship – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India-Bhutan relations are marked by exemplary friendship, trust, and multi-sectoral cooperation, but also face complexities arising from strategic, economic, and geopolitical challenges.

#### Introduction:

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- Relationship with Bhutan is cornerstone of India's Neighbourhood First Policy.
- The relationship is characterized by deep trust, shared security interests, and extensive developmental cooperation. It is often described as a special relationship that has withstood geopolitical challenges.
- The relationship is built on a legacy of mutual respect and is underpinned by key treaties:
  - **Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1949):** This was the original foundation, establishing close ties.
  - **Revised Treaty of Peace and Friendship (2007):** The treaty was revised to reflect Bhutan's sovereignty and transition to a constitutional monarchy. While preserving the spirit of close cooperation, the revised treaty grants Bhutan full authority over its foreign policy, while New Delhi remains committed to assisting Bhutan's security and development.

#### Significance of India-Bhutan Bilateral Relations:

For India	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Buffer Against China:</b> Bhutan's location as a buffer state between India and China is critical for Indian national security, especially in the sensitive Chumbi Valley and Doklam region, which are close to India's Siliguri Corridor. Thus, Bhutan is important for India to secure its 'Chicken's neck' corridor.</li> <li><b>2. Regional Diplomacy:</b> Bhutan aligns with India on global and regional platforms like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BBIN, reinforcing India's leadership and countering external influences.</li> <li><b>3. Countering Internal Threats:</b> Cooperation with Bhutan is vital for border management and checking the movement of insurgents and extremist groups operating in India's North-Eastern states.</li> </ol>
For Bhutan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Trade and Investment:</b> India is Bhutan's largest trading partner, accounting for over 75% of its imports and nearly 60% of its exports. Duty-free trading and free movement of goods bolster Bhutan's economic stability.</li> <li><b>2. Hydropower Cooperation:</b> Indian investment in Bhutan's hydel projects (Tala, Chukha, Kuricchu, Mangdechhu) provides Bhutan with a steady and sustainable revenue stream. The revenue generated from selling hydropower to India often accounts for over 25% of Bhutan's national revenue, making it the single largest source of foreign exchange.</li> <li><b>3. Development Aid:</b> India is the largest provider of development assistance to Bhutan, contributing thousands of crores for Five Year Plans, education, health, infrastructure, and High Impact Community Development Projects.</li> <li><b>4. Indian Diaspora:</b> About 50,000 Indians are presently working in Bhutan in the sectors such as infrastructure development, hydropower, education, trade and commerce signifying close people to people ties between the two countries.</li> </ol>

#### Challenges in India-Bhutan Bilateral Relations:

- 1. Bhutan-China Border Talks:** Bhutan is actively engaged in border negotiations with China, particularly concerning the disputed areas in the north and the crucial Doklam Plateau in the west. Any

settlement reached between Bhutan and China has profound implications for India, especially for the security of its Siliguri Corridor (the “Chicken’s Neck”).

2. **Hydropower Concerns:** While hydropower is a cornerstone of bilateral cooperation, Bhutanese critics sometimes see project terms as too favorable to India, leading to public dissent and questions around equity and sustainability. Delays and cost overruns in hydropower projects contribute to discontent in Bhutan.
3. **Trade Diversification & Economic Diversification:**
  - Bhutan faces a persistent trade deficit, importing much more from India than it exports, despite preferential trade agreements.
  - Bhutan is keen to diversify its economy into non-hydro sectors like high-end tourism, IT, and sustainable industries.
  - Despite the free trade agreement, Bhutanese businesses sometimes face non-tariff barriers or bureaucratic hurdles when trying to access the Indian market.
4. **Connectivity & Infrastructure Gaps:**
  - Road, rail, and transport links between India and Bhutan remain limited, hampering further economic and strategic integration.
  - Bhutan’s reservations about joining the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement due to sustainability and environmental concerns have slowed regional connectivity initiatives.
5. **The “Big Brother” Syndrome:** Due to India’s overwhelming size and historical role as protector, there is a persistent public sentiment (though small) in Bhutan that views India as overly dominant or a “Big Brother.”
6. **Environmental & Social Sensitivities:** Bhutan’s focus on Gross National Happiness and environmental preservation sometimes clashes with India’s infrastructure-led approach (e.g., highways, hydropower, BBIN MVA). There are concerns about the potential social impacts of rapid integration, such as migration and cultural change.
7. **Border Management & Security:** While the 699 km India-Bhutan border is largely peaceful, incidents of illegal crossings, militant hideouts, and smuggling necessitate close security cooperation.

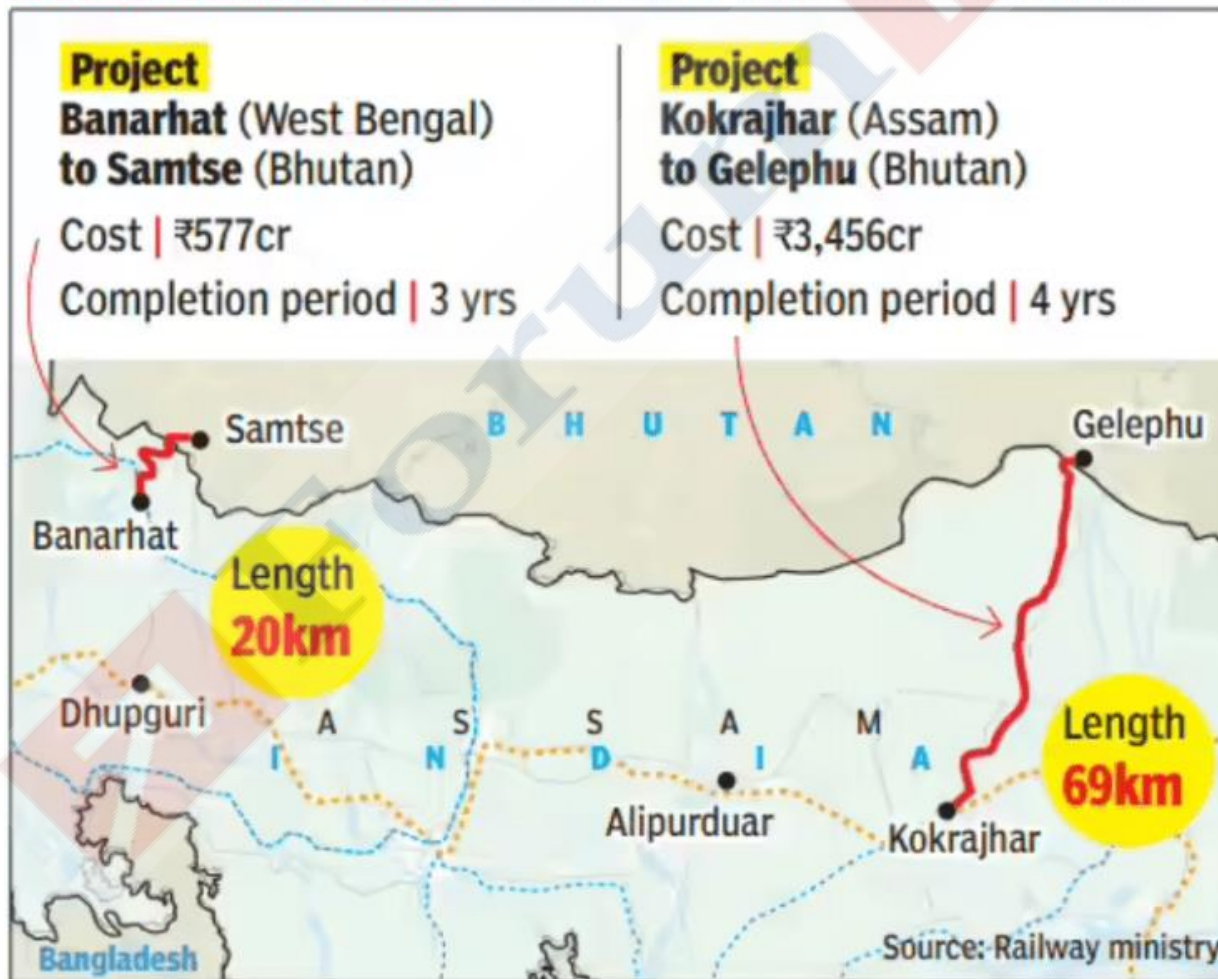
#### Various areas of Cooperation between India & Bhutan:

1. **Hydropower Cooperation (Economic Engine):** This is the single most important economic aspect of the relationship and a key driver of Bhutan’s national revenue.
  - **“Win-Win” Model:** India funds, constructs, and operates major hydroelectric projects in Bhutan. India then purchases the surplus electricity at preferential rates. This arrangement provides Bhutan with massive revenue (accounting for over 25% of its GDP) and provides India with clean, renewable energy.
  - **Projects:** Key projects include Chukha, Tala, Kurichhu, and the large Punatsangchhu Hydroelectric Projects (I and II), which are the result of deep technical and financial collaboration.
2. **Trade & Economic Cooperation:**
  - **Duty-Free Access:** Bhutan enjoys free trade access to the Indian market for most of its exports.
  - **Development Assistance:** India is Bhutan’s largest development partner. The Government of India provides significant financial grants and support for Bhutan’s Five-Year Plans, funding critical sectors like education, health, and infrastructure development.



- **Currency Stability:** The Indian Rupee (INR) is fully convertible with the Bhutanese Ngultrum (BTN), and India extends currency swap arrangements to Bhutan, ensuring financial stability during economic fluctuations.
3. **Security & Strategic Cooperation:**
- **Border Security:** India is responsible for training the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA). The RBA and Indian forces cooperate closely on border management.
  - **Doklam Standoff (2017):** When the Chinese military attempted to build a road on the disputed Doklam plateau (claimed by Bhutan), Indian forces intervened based on the strategic implications for India's own security (Siliguri Corridor or 'Chicken's Neck'). India's intervention demonstrated its commitment to Bhutan's territorial integrity.
4. **Connectivity & Infrastructure:** India funds and constructs cross-border roads, border infrastructure (BRO Project DANTAK), bridges, and new cross-border railway lines (Gelephu/Kokrajhar, Samtse/Banarhat).

## BRIDGING GAP BETWEEN 2 NATIONS



Source: Times of India

5. **Environmental & Climate Cooperation:** Joint conservation projects, such as the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA), and collaboration to keep Bhutan carbon-negative and promote eco-tourism.
6. **Health Cooperation:** Medical aid, initiatives like Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, COVID-19 assistance, and support with vaccines/essential medicines highlight the health partnership.

#### Way Forward:

1. **Make Economic Partnership More Equitable & Diversified:**
  - Ensure hydropower and trade agreements address Bhutan's concerns on dependency, revenue sharing, and sector diversification (tourism, digital economy, agriculture).
  - Foster Indian investments into Bhutan's non-hydro sectors—IT, services, manufacturing, health, education—to create jobs and build resilience.
  - Offer Bhutan full access to India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), such as the UPI payment mechanism, to modernize their financial sector.
2. **Upgrade Connectivity & Infrastructure:**
  - Accelerate new cross-border railway links (e.g., Gelephu-Kokrajhar, Samtse-Banarhat), border checkposts, and digital integration for seamless trade and transit.
  - Enhance road, air, and digital connectivity for North-East India, Bhutan, and regional integration.
3. **Strengthen Security & Strategic Coordination:**
  - Maintain regular security dialogues and border consultations to monitor regional threats, especially China's moves near the Doklam plateau.
  - Intensify cooperation in border management, anti-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and disaster response.
4. **Promote Sustainable Development & Environmental Harmony:** Joint efforts on green energy (hydro, solar, hydrogen), eco-tourism, disaster resilience, and climate adaptation in line with Bhutan's Gross National Happiness approach.

**Conclusion:** India-Bhutan relations are a model for good-neighbourly partnerships built on mutual respect, trust, and extensive cross-sectoral cooperation. Continued strategic sensitivity, transparency, and mutual benefit are key to sustaining and strengthening the relationship in the face of evolving regional dynamics.

**UPSC GS-2: International Relations**

Read More: [Times of India](#)

### India-Afghanistan Relationship – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The recent visit of the Afghan Taliban government's Foreign Minister in India has been described as unprecedented & groundbreaking by several geopolitics experts. It is the Taliban's highest-level visit to India since seizing power in 2021. In this regard, let us understand the significance & challenges in the India-Afghanistan relationship.

#### Introduction:

- India-Afghanistan relations have been shaped by geography, history, and strategic interests. Afghanistan has historically served as a bridge between South Asia and Central Asia, fostering trade,

cultural exchanges, and political alliances. However, its geopolitical significance has also made it a hotspot for great power rivalries.

- In recent years, India has emerged as a key partner in Afghanistan's development and stabilization efforts. The return of the Taliban in 2021 marked a significant turning point, prompting India to recalibrate its policy to safeguard its strategic interests and historical ties.
- Since Taliban's takeover in 2021, India has maintained a limited diplomatic presence while focusing primarily on humanitarian and people-to-people assistance.

### What is the historical background of Indo-Afghan Relations?

<b>Ancient Links and Cultural Exchange</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Indus Valley Civilization:</b> Indo-Afghan relations trace back to the Indus Valley Civilization, with trade and cultural exchanges flourishing between the two regions.</li> <li>2. <b>Silk Road Connection:</b> Afghanistan's position on the Silk Road facilitated trade and cultural exchanges between India and Central Asia.</li> <li>3. <b>Shared Heritage:</b> The Gandhara civilization, based in modern-day Afghanistan, influenced Indian art and culture, notably in Buddhist sculptures like the Bamiyan Buddhas.</li> <li>4. <b>Religious and Epic References:</b> Ancient Indian texts like the Mahabharata and Rigveda mention Afghanistan, underscoring longstanding ties. Emperor Ashoka's efforts to spread Buddhism to Afghanistan further highlight historical connections.</li> </ol>
<b>Medieval Period and Islamic Empires</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Durrani Empire:</b> Under Ahmad Shah Durrani in the mid-18th century, Afghanistan became a regional power influencing Indo-Afghan ties.</li> <li>2. <b>Mughal Empire:</b> Afghan rulers like Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, shaped Indian history, bringing Indo-Persian art, architecture, and literature into India.</li> </ol>
<b>British Period (19th-20th Century)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Anglo-Afghan Wars:</b> British India's attempts to control Afghanistan as a buffer state against Russia strained regional dynamics.</li> <li>2. <b>Partition of India:</b> Post-1947, Afghanistan refused to recognize Pakistan's creation, supporting Pashtun autonomy and influencing Indo-Afghan relations.</li> </ol>
<b>Post-Independence and Cold War Period</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>1947-1979:</b> India maintained friendly ties with Afghanistan, formalized by the Indo-Afghan Friendship Treaty (1950).</li> <li>2. <b>Soviet Invasion (1979-1989):</b> India supported Soviet-backed Afghan governments, while Pakistan and the U.S. aided Mujahideen forces.</li> <li>3. <b>Kandahar Hijacking Incident (1999):</b> The hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814 highlighted security concerns with the Taliban regime.</li> </ol>

<b>Post-Taliban Era (2001-Present)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Strategic Partnership:</b> India invested heavily in Afghanistan's reconstruction, funding infrastructure projects like the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and Afghan Parliament Building.</li> <li><b>Challenges Post-2021:</b> The Taliban's return has strained relations, forcing India to evacuate its embassy and recalibrate its approach.</li> <li><b>New Beginning:</b> India has reopened its embassy in Kabul and established direct contact with the Taliban government, while pursuing an "engagement without recognition" policy due to ongoing concerns about governance and rights.</li> </ol>
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### Significance of India-Afghanistan Relationship:

#### For India:

<b>Geostrategic Significance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Gateway to Central Asia:</b> Afghanistan serves as a vital link for India's access to energy-rich Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.</li> <li><b>Countering Pakistan's Influence:</b> A stable Afghanistan reduces Pakistan's strategic depth, supporting India's geopolitical interests.</li> <li><b>Chabahar Port Connectivity:</b> India's investment in Iran's Chabahar Port facilitates trade with Afghanistan, circumventing Pakistan.</li> </ol>
<b>Regional Security</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Terrorism Concerns:</b> Afghanistan's stability directly impacts India's security, especially concerning cross-border terrorism and groups like the Haqqani network.</li> <li><b>Taliban-Pakistan Nexus:</b> A Taliban-dominated Afghanistan raises fears of increased Pakistani influence and destabilization in Kashmir.</li> </ol>
<b>Economic Significance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Trade and Transit:</b> India-Afghanistan air freight corridors and the Chabahar Port boost bilateral trade.</li> <li><b>Natural Resources:</b> Afghanistan's rich reserves of minerals like lithium, copper, and rare earths present opportunities for India.</li> </ol>

#### For Afghanistan:

- Major Development Partner:** India has invested over \$3 billion in 500+ infrastructure and community projects, including dams, roads, hospitals, and schools, offering education, health, and livelihood benefits to Afghans.



2. **Humanitarian Assistance:** India provides regular emergency aid—food, medicines, disaster relief—and is respected for help during crises, including earthquakes and pandemic response.
3. **Trade Potential:** India is a major export destination for Afghanistan, and supports trade links through air corridors and Chabahar Port.
4. **Scholarships:** Thousands of Afghan students pursue higher education in India with scholarship support, strengthening people-to-people links.

#### What are the areas of engagement between India- Afghanistan?

##### Developmental Assistance

##### 1. Infrastructure Projects:

- **Zaranj-Delaram Highway:** Connects Afghanistan to the Iranian border.
- **Salma Dam (Afghan-India Friendship Dam):** A major hydroelectric and irrigation project in Herat province.
- **Afghan Parliament Building:** A major symbol of democratic friendship, built and gifted by India in Kabul.

##### 2. Healthcare and Education: India has built hospitals and provided scholarships for Afghan students.

##### 3. Capacity Building: India provided training to thousands of Afghan students, civil servants, and military officers, helping to build the country's institutional capacity.



<b>Trade and Economic Relations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Air Freight Corridor:</b> Facilitates direct trade bypassing Pakistan.</li> <li><b>Chabahar Port:</b> Enhances Afghanistan's connectivity to global markets.</li> </ol>
<b>Regional Security and Counter-terrorism</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Capacity Building:</b> India trains Afghan security forces to counter terrorism.</li> <li><b>Taliban Dynamics:</b> India cautiously engages with the Taliban, focusing on its security concerns.</li> </ol>
<b>Humanitarian Assistance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Crisis Support:</b> India has provided food grains and COVID-19 vaccines to Afghanistan.</li> <li><b>Community Projects:</b> Over 200 programs, including schools and water supply systems, have been implemented.</li> </ol>

#### Challenges in India-Afghanistan Relations:

- Political Instability in Afghanistan:**
  - Taliban Takeover (2021):** The lack of an inclusive government complicates bilateral ties.
  - Uncertain Governance:** India's projects face risks under the Taliban regime.
- Security and Pakistan Factor:**
  - Strategic Depth Doctrine:** Pakistan's influence over the Taliban undermines India's interests.
  - Cross-Border Terrorism:** Taliban-Pakistan ties threaten Kashmir's stability.
- Geographic Connectivity Barrier:**
  - Geographic Disconnect:** India lacks direct land access to Afghanistan.
  - Limited Air Corridors:** Air freight corridors are not a comprehensive solution.
- Drug trafficking:** Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium, and the drug trade has contributed to instability and violence in the region, affecting both India and Afghanistan.

#### What should be the way forward in India-Afghan Relationship?

- Sustain Diplomatic Engagement while Withholding Formal Recognition:**
  - Maintain a functional full embassy, regular high-level exchanges, and technical partnerships, without immediate formal recognition of the Taliban.
  - Uphold conditional engagement, demanding assurances against the use of Afghan territory for terrorism targeting India, and keeping dialogue channels open for real-time intelligence sharing and security cooperation.
- Expand Targeted Development and Humanitarian Diplomacy:**
  - Continue needs-based development projects (healthcare, water, rural infrastructure, education), responding to urgent Afghan requirements and building grassroots goodwill.
  - Invest in humanitarian aid (food, medicine, earthquake support) and publicly visible projects to counter Chinese and Pakistani influence, reinforce soft power, and stabilize communities.

**3. Strengthen Counter-terrorism Cooperation:**

- Institutionalize intelligence exchange, joint investigations, and security sector capacity-building based on India's 2011 Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan.
- Intensify cross-border anti-narcotics collaboration and border management to tackle trafficking and radicalization risks.

**4. Secure Economic Connectivity & Cooperation:**

- Expand alternative trade and transit corridors, notably via Chabahar Port, revitalize the Air Freight Corridor, and develop resource-sector partnerships with robust contractual safeguards.
- Explore investments in minerals, water resource management, and sectoral modernization to create mutual incentives for regional stability.

**5. Balance Principles & Realpolitik:**

- Engage with the regime on the basis of practical security and development needs, without losing sight of India's advocacy for inclusive governance, minority protection, and women's rights.
- Use multilateral forums to pressure for more inclusive policies and broader international engagement.

**Conclusion:** A patient, pragmatic, and principled approach—with robust humanitarian aid, targeted development diplomacy, and strategic cooperation—will safeguard Indian interests and support Afghanistan's peace, progress, and stability in a volatile region.

**UPSC GS-2: International Relations**

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

**India-Myanmar Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise**

The India-Myanmar relationship is one of India's most strategically important but geopolitically complex partnerships. The relationship is currently dominated by India's competing needs for **border security** and its commitment to the **Act East Policy**, all while navigating the unstable political environment created by the 2021 military coup.



Map of major regions in Myanmar and India's northeastern states.

### Historical Background:

India and Myanmar have a long history of cultural, religious, and trade links that date back to ancient times. As the land of Lord Buddha, India is a country of pilgrimage for the people of Myanmar.

<b>British Era</b>	Both India and Myanmar were part of British India during colonial rule until 1935.
<b>Post Independence</b>	After independence, India and Myanmar established diplomatic relations and maintained close ties. India and Myanmar signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1951.
<b>2002</b>	The Indian Consulate in Mandalay was reopened, and the Consulate of Myanmar was set up in Kolkata.



2014	Myanmar became part of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and its "Act East" policy.
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#### Significance of Myanmar for India:

- 1. Geo-strategic:** Myanmar is India's gateway to South-East Asia and development of North-Eastern India. Myanmar is an important pillar of India's "Neighborhood First" policy and "Act East" Policy. **For e.g.** Development of India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) trilateral highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT) corridor relies on Myanmar.
- 2. Tackling insurgency in Northeast:** Insurgent groups such as ISCN-K, ISCN-IM have operational bases inside Myanmar. **For e.g.** Cooperation of Myanmar government in controlling Naga insurgency.
- 3. Countering China:** Myanmar is crucial for India to counter its growing influence in the South-East Asian region. **For e.g.** India is developing the Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state to counter the Chinese-fronted Kyaukpyu port.
- 4. Reduction of illegal migration in India:** A stable Myanmar is necessary to reduce the illegal Rohingya and Chin migration in India.
- 5. Cultural ties:** Buddhism which is the majoritarian religion in Myanmar has its roots in India, which has led to huge cultural similarities between India and Myanmar.

#### Major Areas of Cooperation Between India and Myanmar:

- 1. Trade and economy:** Bilateral trade between India-Myanmar has grown from \$12.4 million in 1980-81 to \$2.18 billion in 2016-17. Myanmar is the beneficiary of India's duty-free tariff preference scheme for least-developed countries (LDCs). Indian companies such as Essar, GAIL, and ONGC Videsh Ltd. have invested in Myanmar's energy sector.
- 2. Infrastructure and Connectivity:** India-Myanmar relations has been bolstered by the key connectivity projects. India has invested deeply in the infrastructure projects in Myanmar:
  - India and Myanmar inaugurated the 250-kilometer **Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo highway**, popularly called the Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road, in 2001.
  - India is building the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport** to link Kolkata to Sittwe in Myanmar and then from Myanmar's Kaladan river to India's North-East.



- India, Myanmar, and Thailand are building the **Asian Trilateral Highway**, which will connect India to ASEAN.



3. **Free Movement Regime (FMR):** The border is governed by an FMR, which allows people residing within 16 km on either side to cross without a visa. This facilitates local tribal links (especially the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities) but is a major security challenge, especially during conflicts.
4. **Defence cooperation:**
  - India and Myanmar conduct a joint military exercise, called **India – Myanmar Bilateral Military Exercise (IMBEX)**.
  - **Operation Sunrise** between India-Myanmar armies jointly target the militant groups that operate in the border states.
5. **Multilateral partnership:** Myanmar is also a key component of India's strategy to bridge South and South-East Asia through ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC).
6. **Education and research:** India has developed Myanmar Institute of Information and Technology and Advanced Center for Agricultural Research and Education (ACARE) for conducting research on pulses and oilseeds.
7. **Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief:** India has provided humanitarian aid and disaster relief in natural calamities in Myanmar like Cyclone Mora (2017), Komen (2015), earthquake in Shan State (2010) and COVID-19.

#### Challenges in India-Myanmar Relations:

1. **Political Unrest in Myanmar:**
  - **Military Coup in 2021:** Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) landslide victory in the 2020 elections sparked concern among the military. The military (Tatmadaw) alleged electoral fraud and staged a coup in February 2021. Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders were detained, sparking widespread protests and a violent military crackdown.
  - **Anti-Junta Armed Struggle:** Various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) intensified their resistance against the military regime, resulting in escalating conflicts across the country.
2. **India's Policy Paradox with respect to Myanmar Coup:** India faces a dilemma in the form of its commitment to democracy vs. its internal security concerns. On one hand, India has been engaging with the military junta to control insurgent groups operating along the India Myanmar border. On the other hand, India also favours the establishment of federal democracy in Myanmar.

3. **Massive Influx of Refugees in India:** The ongoing armed struggle between the military Junta and the People's Defence forces in the Chin region, Sagaing region have led to massive influx of refugees in India, especially in Mizoram and Manipur. This influx of refugees in India has emerged as a major bone of contention between India and Myanmar, as these have been linked to violent ethnic clashes, drug trafficking and smuggling.
4. **Misuse of Free movement regime:** The Free Movement Regime between India and Myanmar is being exploited by militants and cross-border criminals for the illegal transportation of weapons, contraband goods, and counterfeit Indian currency.

**Northeast insurgency and Drug Menace:** Myanmar-China border is the hotbed of local armed separatist groups operating in Myanmar soil and Indian groups, ranging from ULFA in Assam to the NSCN (IM) in Nagaland. Myanmar's Golden Triangle region is a notorious hub for drug trafficking.



5. **China's Inroads in Myanmar:** China has been steadily increasing its influence in Myanmar, investing heavily in infrastructure projects and expanding its economic footprint. For e.g. The launch of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).
6. **Delays in regional connectivity Projects:** The inordinate delays in the implementation of the connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Connectivity project have widened the trust deficit between India and Myanmar.

#### Way Forward:

1. **Support for democracy and human rights:** The United Nations Special Rapporteur has reported an increase in India's arms supply to the military since the coup. Arming the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Military) undermines India's position on restoring democracy. India should continue to advocate for the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar like the release of political prisoners and ending the military junta's crackdown on dissent.
2. **Engagement with all stakeholders:** India should use its influence to open channels of dialogue with and between the junta and the opposition, including armed ethnic groups.



3. **Use of Regional Organisations for enhanced cooperation:** India should collaborate closely with the ASEAN nations for a peace plan for Myanmar.
4. **Enhanced Economic Engagement:** India should continue to engage with Myanmar economically to promote sustainable development for the benefit of the people of Myanmar. The delayed connectivity projects like the Kaladan and Asian Trilateral Highways must be expedited at the earliest.
5. **Closer Security Cooperation:** India must closely collaborate with Myanmar in intelligence sharing and coordinated efforts to combat insurgencies and drug trafficking.
6. **Solidarity with the People of Myanmar:** Providing aid and service to those affected by the crisis will alleviate suffering and demonstrate India's solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

**Conclusion:** India-Myanmar relations remain vital for India's eastern strategy, Northeast integration, regional stability, and for managing China's expanding influence—necessitating patient engagement, rapid implementation of projects, and balanced diplomatic outreach.

**UPSC GS-2: International Relations**

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### India-Israel Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India-Israel relations are characterized by a strong, multi-dimensional strategic partnership that prioritizes defense, security, technology, agriculture, and innovation while showing remarkable political alignment on key global and regional issues.



Source: ORF

**Historical development:**



<p><b>Distant and Hesitant (1948 – 1992)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Initial Recognition (1950):</b> India formally recognized Israel in 1950 but, due to Cold War dynamics, the large Muslim population in India, and a commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), it <b>did not establish full diplomatic relations</b>. Israel was only permitted to open a consulate in Mumbai.</li> <li>• <b>Pro-Palestinian Stance:</b> India's foreign policy strongly supported the <b>Palestinian cause</b> and the Arab world, opposing Israel in international forums like the UN.</li> <li>• <b>Covert Cooperation:</b> Despite the diplomatic freeze, contacts existed, especially after India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Israel reportedly provided limited, discreet military aid to India in the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan, laying the groundwork for future defense ties.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Full Normalization and the Defense Pivot (1992 – 2014)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Breakthrough (1992):</b> India established <b>full diplomatic relations</b> with Israel in 1992. The geopolitical landscape shifted with the collapse of the Soviet Union, end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization.</li> <li>• <b>Defense Imperative:</b> The relationship quickly pivoted to <b>defense and security</b>. The Kargil War in 1999 proved to be a critical moment, as Israel provided India with crucial laser-guided missile kits and UAVs, often supplying spare parts and equipment faster than traditional Russian or Western suppliers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deepening, De-Hyphenation, and Strategic Alignment (2014 – Present)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>De-hyphenation Policy:</b> India explicitly adopted a “de-hyphenation” policy, asserting that its relationship with Israel is <b>independent</b> of its historical relationship with the Palestinians. This allows India to maintain ties with both without the former constraining the latter.</li> <li>• <b>Multilateral Groupings:</b> The partnership has expanded into the emerging regional structure, <b>I2U2 (India, Israel, US, UAE)</b>, focusing on joint investments in water, energy, transport, space, and food security.</li> </ul>

#### Significance of India-Israel Bilateral Relations:

1. **Political Convergence:** Both countries support each other's positions on critical issues—India has backed Israel's right to self-defence, and Israel supports India's stance against cross-border terrorism. This convergence raises each nation's diplomatic profile and provides reliable allies in volatile regions.
2. **Defense and Security:**
  - Israel is one of India's top defense suppliers, providing advanced technologies in drones, air defense, missiles, and intelligence—enhancing India's military readiness and anti-terror capabilities.

- Joint R&D and co-production in areas like electronic warfare and missile defense directly strengthen India's self-reliance and modernization.
- 3. **Intelligence and Counterterrorism:** Robust intelligence-sharing and operational cooperation have helped India counter terrorism and address emerging hybrid threats, with both countries facing similar security challenges in their regions.
- 4. **Trade and Investment:**
  - Bilateral trade—now touching \$7–8 billion—spans agriculture, high-tech, defense, and pharmaceuticals.
  - The 2025 Bilateral Investment Treaty is expected to boost two-way FDI, fintech, and start-up collaborations, setting the stage for a future free trade pact.
- 5. **Agriculture and Water Management:** Israeli innovation in drip irrigation, water conservation, and precision agriculture has been scaled across India, improving Indian farmers' efficiency, raising rural incomes, and addressing chronic water scarcity.
- 6. **Innovation Ecosystem:** India benefits from Israeli expertise in start-up incubation, cyber security, AI, and "smart city" technologies, and the I4F fund fosters joint research and product development for global markets.

#### Challenges in India-Israel Bilateral Relations:

1. **The Palestine Issue:** While India has successfully employed a policy of "de-hyphenation" (treating ties with Israel and Palestine separately), India remains a traditional supporter of the Palestinian cause in multilateral forums like the UN. This diplomatic position is sometimes at odds with Israel's global interests.
2. **Energy and Diaspora:** India relies heavily on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for a substantial portion of its **crude oil and natural gas** supplies. Furthermore, over **9 million Indian expatriates** reside in the Gulf, contributing critical remittances to the Indian economy. Any perceived over-alignment with Israel risks jeopardizing these vital economic and energy lifelines.
3. **Iran & China Factors:** India's ties with Iran (for Chabahar port, regional strategy, energy) and Israel's very close relationship with China in high technology (Israel-China trade: \$22 billion+) produce diverging priorities, and India is concerned about technology transfers from Israel to China and Chinese FDI in Israel.
4. **Limited Technology Transfer:** India's priority under its "**Aatmanirbhar Bharat**" initiative is to acquire technology for domestic manufacturing. While Israel is generally more willing to share defense technology than other nations, it still places restrictions on the full transfer of proprietary or sensitive systems, especially those containing **US components** (which are subject to US export control laws).
5. **Non-Defense Trade Plateau:** Despite ambitious targets, non-defense trade has generally plateaued between \$6 billion and \$8 billion, highlighting challenges in market access and scaling commercial engagement beyond established sectors.
6. **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Israel, a high-tech exporter, shares concerns with other Western nations regarding India's relatively lenient IPR regime, particularly concerning the protection of software and digital innovation.
7. **Public Opinion in India:** Despite the government's strong public embrace, a significant segment of the Indian public and political opposition maintains traditional sympathy for the Palestinian cause, requiring the ruling party to occasionally temper its rhetoric and maintain a semblance of balance on the issue.

#### Areas of cooperation between India & Israel:

**1. Defence & Security:**

- **Arms Trade:** Israel is consistently one of India's top three defense suppliers. India procures critical systems like radar, missile defense shields (e.g., the **Barak 8** system developed jointly), drones, and sophisticated surveillance equipment.
- **Joint Research and Development (R&D):** The focus has shifted from a buyer-seller relationship to joint development and co-production, aligning with India's "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiative.
- **Counter-Terrorism:** Extensive intelligence sharing and training cooperation, particularly relevant due to shared security threats.

**2. Water & Agriculture:**

- **Drip Irrigation and Micro-Irrigation:** Israel has implemented the **Indo-Israel Agricultural Project (IIAP)**, establishing dozens of "Centres of Excellence" across various Indian states. These centres train Indian farmers on high-tech techniques, primarily focused on micro-irrigation, protected cultivation (greenhouses), and maximizing yield with minimal water use.
- **Water Management and Recycling:** Cooperation in water treatment, desalination, and recycling technology to help India address its growing urban water scarcity.

**3. Cybersecurity and R&D:** Deep cooperation in cybersecurity, and joint research and funding in high-tech areas through the **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)**.**4. I2U2 Grouping:** India and Israel are core members of the I2U2 initiative, along with the **US and UAE**. This group focuses on promoting joint investments in key sectors like food security, water, energy, and transportation infrastructure, demonstrating Israel's role in India's regional economic strategy.**Way Forward:****1. Deepen Strategic and Defense Cooperation:**

- Strengthen defense ties by accelerating joint R&D, co-production of advanced military technologies (drones, missile defense, cyber security), and institutionalizing regular high-level dialogues.
- Expand intelligence and counter-terrorism cooperation, leveraging Israel's expertise and India's regional security needs.

**2. Expand Economic and Investment Collaboration:** Fully implement the 2025 Bilateral Investment Treaty to boost two-way FDI, remove barriers, and scaffold a future Free Trade Agreement to increase trade volumes beyond the current \$7–8 billion.**3. Enhance Innovation and Technology Exchange:** Foster shared innovation in AI, biotech, cybersecurity, and smart infrastructure utilizing the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F).**4. De-Hyphenation through Integration:** By channeling joint investments and projects through the I2U2 framework, India demonstrates that its partnership with Israel is **not exclusive** but is actively beneficial to the Arab world. This provides a diplomatic shield for India's ties to Israel.**5. Knowledge Corridors:** Establish structured "Knowledge Corridors" linking major Indian R&D institutions (like the IITs and IISc) with top Israeli universities and research centers to ensure a steady flow of research talent and joint discovery.

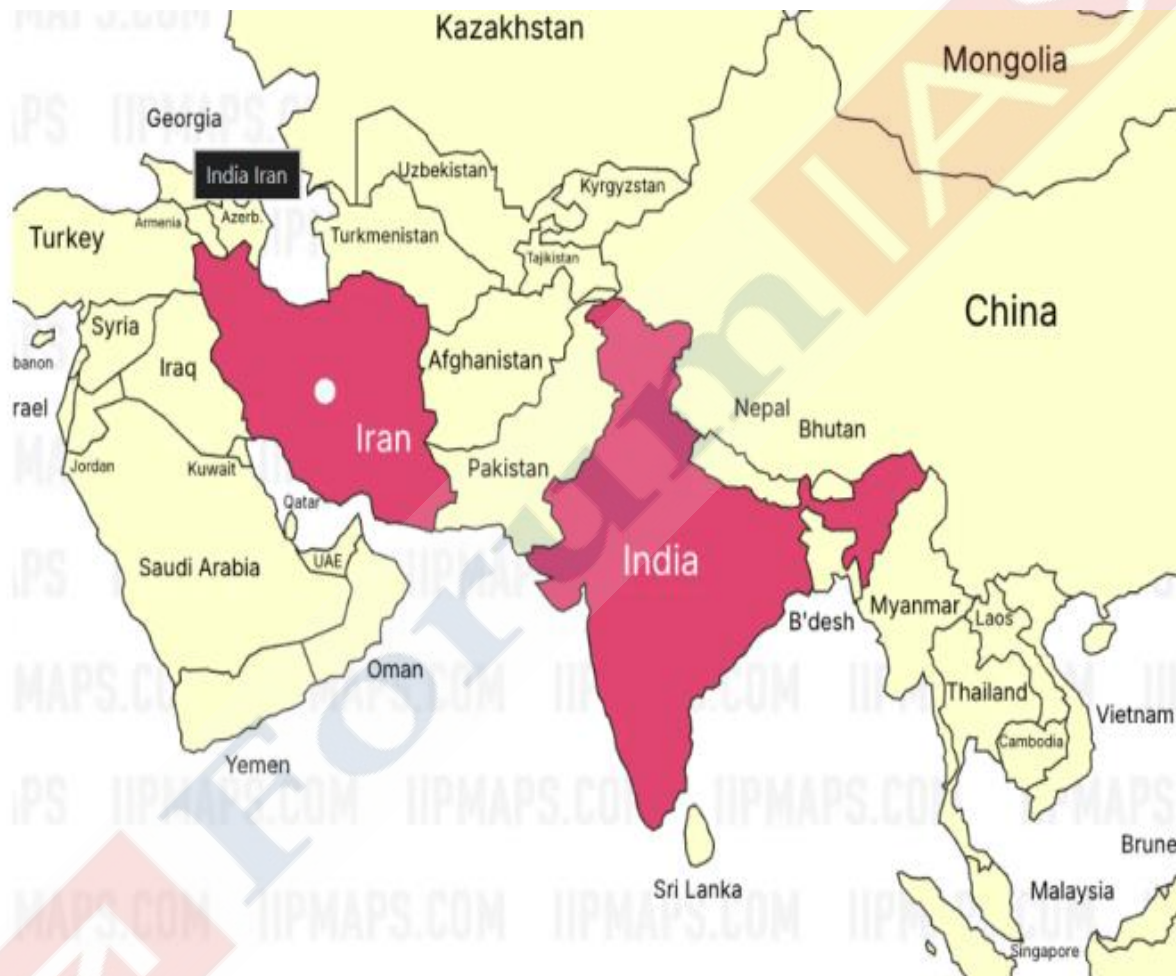
**Conclusion:** A pragmatic, multi-sectoral, and balanced approach respecting geopolitical sensitivities and focusing on enhanced cooperation will cement India-Israel relations as a cornerstone of India's strategic and innovation-driven growth trajectory.

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Read More: [Embassy of India](#)

### India-Iran Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The India-Iran bilateral relationship is a deeply **historical, civilizational, and strategically complex** partnership. It is characterized by India's enduring need for **energy security and regional connectivity** balanced against the immense pressure of **US sanctions** and the need to maintain strong ties with Israel and the Gulf states.



Source: Politics for India

### Historical development of India-Iran Relations:



<p><b>Ancient &amp; Medieval Period</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cultural and Trade Links:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Interaction between the civilizations of the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia, as well as later spread of Persian culture and language into India, laid an early foundation of cultural and economic exchange.</li> <li>○ Artifacts such as Indus seals have been found in Iran, and Persian influence is evident in Indian languages, architecture, and cuisine.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Shared Heritage:</b> The Persian language and Islamic culture strongly influenced North-West India over centuries, with historical ties reinforced by migration, religious scholarship, and trade routes linking both regions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>20th Century - Foundation of Modern Diplomatic Relations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Official Diplomatic Ties (1950):</b> India and Iran formally established diplomatic relations in 1950. Early political visits included the Shah of Iran's visit to India in 1956 and Prime Minister Nehru's to Iran in 1959, laying a framework for cooperation.</li> <li>• <b>Changing International Alignments:</b> During the Cold War, India adopted non-alignment and had close ties with the Soviet Union, while Iran was allied with the West under the Shah's regime, leading to a complex but largely cordial relationship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Post-1979 Era</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Islamic Revolution Impact:</b> After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, India maintained relations while navigating the shift from the Shah's monarchy to the theocratic republic. Despite differences, both sustained diplomatic and economic ties.</li> <li>• <b>1990s Cooperation:</b> Both supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in Afghanistan, contrasting with Pakistan's support of the Taliban. This alignment fostered closer strategic cooperation.</li> <li>• <b>2000s Deepening Ties:</b> India engaged actively with Iran on energy imports, petrochemicals, and infrastructural projects such as Chabahar Port, alongside increasing trade and cultural exchanges.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Contemporary Period</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chabahar Port &amp; INSTC:</b> These projects symbolize India's strategic interest in Iran as a gateway to Central Asia and Europe, bypassing Pakistan and enhancing trade connectivity.</li> <li>• <b>Energy Challenges:</b> US sanctions on Iran compelled India to halt crude oil imports in 2019, but India continues exploring alternative payment mechanisms and investments.</li> <li>• <b>Strategic and Regional Diplomacy:</b> Both countries cooperate on Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, and participate in multilateral forums (NAM, SCO), advocating sovereignty and multipolarity.</li> </ul>
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### Significance of India-Iran Bilateral Relations:

1. **Energy Security:** Iran was one of India's most reliable and crucial suppliers of crude oil, often providing favorable credit terms. Cooperation in petrochemicals, urea plants, and energy transit remains important for India's long-term needs.
2. **Gateway to Eurasia (Chabahar Port):** The port of **Chabahar** on Iran's southeastern coast is India's most critical strategic asset in the country. It provides a reliable sea-land route that allows India to **bypass Pakistan** entirely to reach Afghanistan and the resource-rich **Central Asian Republics (CARs)**. This port ensures humanitarian and trade access to landlocked Afghanistan.
3. **Regional Stability:** India and Iran share a common interest in a stable Afghanistan, free from extremism and drug trafficking. This convergence of security concerns allows for crucial dialogue and cooperation on regional security challenges.
4. **Economic Complementarity:** Iran has abundant natural resources (oil, gas, fertilizers), which India requires, while India can supply engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products. This economic complementarity ensures a natural basis for trade, provided the financial transfer mechanisms can be secured.
5. **Historical Ties:** India and Iran share millennia of cultural, linguistic (Persian), and intellectual links, creating a foundation of trust and people-to-people bonds. This "civilizational partnership" adds legitimacy and public support to current diplomacy.
6. **People-to-People:** There are strong academic and religious links, with India being home to large Shia and Zoroastrian communities. This shared history provides a foundation of goodwill even when diplomatic ties are stressed.

### Challenges in India-Iran Bilateral Relations:

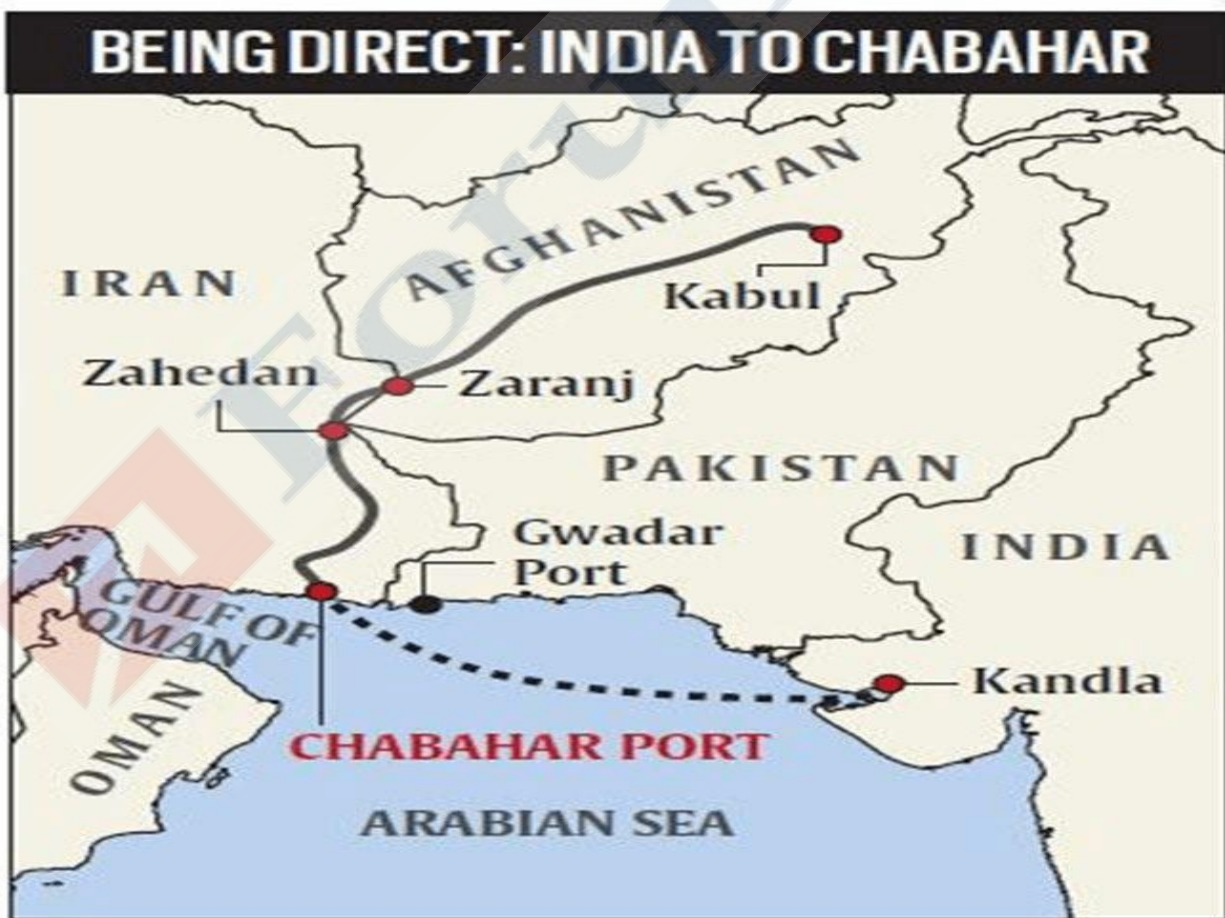
1. **Oil Imports Halt (2019):** Under immense pressure from the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign, India was forced to **halt all oil imports from Iran** in 2019. This eliminated the historical economic foundation of the relationship and cost India a reliable supplier that offered favorable payment terms (like rupee payments).
2. **Delayed Execution of Projects:** Delays in operationalizing the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar Port and related railway/INSTC projects, caused by sanctions, bureaucratic inertia, and lack of commercial certainty, have limited the transformative impact of India-Iran connectivity.
3. **Rail Link Abandonment:** The crucial Chabahar-Zahedan railway link, intended to connect the port to Afghanistan and the INSTC, saw India withdraw from a major financing role due to the sanctions risk, severely undermining the port's long-term utility for regional connectivity.
4. **Geopolitical Rivalries & Balancing Act:**

- India's warming relations with the US, Saudi Arabia, and especially Israel (Iran's regional foes) have made it harder to pursue a robust Iran partnership.
  - Iran's increasing engagement with China and Pakistan (including strategic and infrastructure projects) creates additional friction and limits India's influence in West Asia and Central Asia.
5. **Economic & Trade Constraints:** With oil trade diminished, India's exports (pharmaceuticals, food products) have also stalled, and Rupee-Rial payment mechanisms remain vulnerable to external disruptions.
  6. **Divergences on Regional Security & Terrorism:** Conflicting approaches on Afghanistan, Iran's support for non-state actors (Hezbollah, Hamas), and periodic statements by Iranian leaders on Indian domestic issues (e.g., Kashmir, treatment of Muslims) cause diplomatic discomfort.
  7. **Religious & Societal Sensitivities:** India's Sunni-majority Muslim community and Iran's Shia leadership sometimes lead to divergent positions and occasional rhetorical friction, especially on issues like the status of Indian Muslims and Kashmir.

#### Areas of Cooperation:

##### 1. Strategic Connectivity:

- **Chabahar Port:** Joint development and operationalization of the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar provides India critical access to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe. This investment is a geopolitical imperative for India because it:
  - Bypasses Pakistan for trade and humanitarian aid access to **Afghanistan**.
  - Secures a foothold on the Gulf of Oman, enhancing India's maritime reach.



- **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):** Iran is a vital transit country for the INSTC, a multi-modal network designed to connect India to **Russia and Europe** via sea, rail, and road. Cooperation here aims to reduce freight transit time and costs by up to 40%.
- 2. Energy Partnership:**
  - **Oil and Gas Trade (Historical):** Before US sanctions forced a halt in 2019, Iran was one of India's most reliable and crucial suppliers of **crude oil**, often offering favorable terms and payment arrangements (including rupee payments).
  - **Natural Gas and Fertilizers:** India continues to explore long-term deals for natural gas and has a strong interest in procuring **urea and other fertilizers** from Iran, which are critical inputs for Indian agriculture.
  - Collaboration includes oil field exploration, development of LNG infrastructure, and power transit.
- 3. Trade & Economic Engagement:**
  - **Non-Oil Trade:** India exports essential commodities like **rice, tea, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods** to Iran, while importing chemicals, raw materials, and fruits. Efforts are ongoing to find viable, non-sanctioned payment mechanisms to sustain this commerce.
  - Newer engagements include cooperation in petrochemicals, renewable energy, machinery, and the auto sector.
- 4. Shared Interests in Multilateral Forums:** Both nations cooperate in multilateral organizations (e.g., NAM, SCO) on sovereignty, regional security, and rule-based order, supporting India's profile as an independent, pluralistic voice.
- 5. Science, Technology & Education:**
  - MoUs on cooperation in science, technology (including pharmaceuticals, biotech, nanotechnology, water management), academic exchange, and joint research.
  - Student and researcher exchanges, government scholarships, and scientific workshops deepen educational ties.
- 6. Cultural & People-to-People Ties:**
  - Longstanding civilizational bonds, including shared Persian heritage, language, and cultural exchanges are fostered through cultural centres, tourism, and artistic collaborations.
  - India hosts a vibrant Iranian diaspora and continues to promote cross-cultural understanding.
- 7. Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals:** Enhanced collaboration on pharmaceutical exports and regulatory standards, especially after 2025, and joint initiatives in healthcare supply chains.

### Way Forward:

- 1. Prioritize Chabahar Port and Connectivity Projects:**
  - Ensure timely completion and expansion of Chabahar Port and associated infrastructure (Zahedan rail link, integration with INSTC), positioning India as a reliable connector to Central Asia and Afghanistan.
  - India must finalize the long-pending **long-term lease agreement** for the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar. This provides stability, confidence to operators, and secures India's presence.
  - Use Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and regional trilaterals (e.g., with Armenia) to advance connectivity and trade.
- 2. Establishing Sustainable Financial Mechanisms:**
  - **Rupee-Rial Mechanism:** India should explore reviving and formalizing a **rupee-rial payment mechanism** for non-oil trade, focusing on essential Indian exports like



pharmaceuticals, tea, and rice. This mechanism avoids the US dollar system entirely and is crucial for sustaining commercial ties.

- **Barter Arrangements:** Encourage structured **barter arrangements** where India can receive Iranian fertilizers or raw materials in exchange for Indian finished goods, bypassing cash transactions that trigger sanctions flags.

**3. Expand Trade & Investment:**

- Conclude trade agreements and bilateral investment treaties to diversify the trade basket—pharmaceuticals, agriculture, engineering goods, and new services—with a special focus on MSMEs.
- Promote mutual FDI and joint ventures, modernize customs cooperation, and reduce red tape for smoother bilateral commerce.

**4. Strengthen Counterterrorism & Security Collaboration:** Institutionalize intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and crisis management, addressing mutual concerns in Afghanistan and broader regional instability.

**5. Maintain Strategic Autonomy & Balance Geopolitics:**

- Sustain India's de-hyphenated approach—robust ties with both Iran and Israel/US/Arab Gulf—while asserting independence in foreign policy decisions and regional engagement.
- Engage in dialogue with the US/EU to mitigate the impact of sanctions on vital connectivity and energy projects for regional stability.

**6. Leverage Cultural & People-to-People Bonds:** Strengthen educational, cultural, artistic, and diasporic engagement, capitalizing on shared historical ties to build goodwill and resilience.

**7. Utilise Multilateral Forums:** Advocate for common interests in SCO, BRICS, UN, and regional platforms to promote a multipolar order, support rule-based engagement, and coordinate on Afghanistan and counter-terrorism.

**Conclusion:** By prioritizing the physical connectivity through Chabahar and securing innovative financial channels, India can ensure the relationship survives the current geopolitical winter and is positioned to flourish when external conditions change.

**UPSC GS-2: International Relations**

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