

# 9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



सत्यमेव जयते

**UPSC**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Week**

October. 2025

**Features :**

Arranged as per syllabus Topics  
Most complete coverage of major  
News Papers editorials

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## The danger of an unchecked pre-crime framework

### Introduction

Preventive detention in India has moved from an exceptional measure to a routine tool of governance. Even after the Supreme Court's caution in *Dhanya M.* (2025), authorities continue to invoke expansive state laws such as Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act (KAAPA), where broad "goonda/rowdy" categories blur the line between public order and ordinary law-and-order issues. NCRB figures—about 24,500 cases in 2022—reflect this normalization. Earlier rulings like *A.K. Gopalan* and *A.K. Roy* still shields the regime from the full protection of Articles 14, 19, and 21. Meanwhile, weak disclosure, delayed access to lawyers, and in-camera reviews persist.

### Preventive Detention

1. Preventive detention refers to the imprisonment of a person to prevent the possible commitment of crime on the grounds of suspicion that such a person may commit some crime in the near future.

2. It leads to the detention of a person without trial and conviction by a court. Its purpose is not to punish a person for a past offence but to prevent him from committing an offence in the near future.

[Note: There are commonly two types of detentions: preventive detention and Punitive detention]

Punitive detention, which means detention as a punishment for the criminal offence. It occurs after an offence is actually committed, or an attempt has been made towards the commission of that crime.]

### Constitutional Provisions Related to Preventive Detention

#### 1. Article 22 also authorises the Parliament to prescribe

(a) the circumstances and the classes of cases in which a person can be detained for more than three months under a preventive detention law without obtaining the opinion of an advisory board

(b) the maximum period for which a person can be detained in any classes of cases under a preventive detention law

(c) the procedure to be followed by an advisory board in an inquiry.

2. **The 44th Amendment Act of 1978** has reduced the period of detention without obtaining the opinion of an advisory board from three to two months. However, this provision has not yet been brought into force, hence, the original period of three months still continues.

#### 3. Power to enact

- The Constitution allows both the union and state to enact preventive detention laws.
- While Parliament is exclusively entitled to enact preventive detention laws related to defence, foreign affairs, and the security of India (List I, entry 9),

- Both Parliament and the state legislatures can make such laws for reasons to do with the maintenance of public order and ensuring supplies and services essential to the community and the security of a state (List III, entry 3).

### Legislation in India on Preventive Detention

1. **National Security Act, 1980:** This act provides for administrative detention for a period of up to one year.
2. **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967:** Prevents activities threatening India's sovereignty, security, and integrity.
3. **COFEPOSA 1974:** The act provided for preventive detention to maintain and improve foreign exchange and also to deter illegal trade prevailing.
4. **Public Safety Act, 1978:** Used in Jammu & Kashmir for preventive detention on grounds of public order and security
5. **TADA 1985:** The fundamental objective of this legislation is to demonstrate that it was agreed based on practice that preventive detention is required to deter and successfully counteract terrorism and violent acts.
6. **State-specific laws:** Some states have framed laws based on preventive detention in the context of bootleggers, human traffickers, land grabbers, cyber criminals, etc

### Grounds on which Prevention Detention can be made

Security of the state

Maintenance of the public order

Maintaining essential services and defence

Foreign affairs with the security of India.

### Important judgement on Prevention Detention

#### 1. A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950):

- The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Preventive Detention Act, 1950, and read Article 21 narrowly as “procedure established by law,” not “due process.”
- It treated Articles 19 and 21 as separate, allowing detention if a statute’s procedure was followed, even if the procedure was harsh.
- Preventive detention is permissible if the law’s procedure is observed, with limited judicial scrutiny of fairness.

2. **ADM Jabalpur Case:** The Court held that the right to approach the courts to challenge even illegal or malicious detentions was unavailable when Article 21 was suspended during an emergency.

#### 3. A.K. Roy v. Union of India (1982):

- The Court upheld the NSA but stressed that preventive detention is an exceptional power and must follow constitutional safeguards, including Article 22(5).
- It also clarified that the President's ordinance power is legislative and subject to constitutional limits and judicial review, including Article 21.
- Preventive detention is allowed, but only within strict procedural and constitutional checks.

#### 4. **Rekha v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011):**

- The Supreme Court reaffirmed that Article 21 strongly protects personal liberty and that Article 22(3)(b) allows preventive detention only as a narrow, exceptional carve-out.
- It held that Preventive detention is strictly exceptional; where regular criminal procedures can manage the risk, a detention order is unlawful.

#### 5. **Dhanya M. v. State of Kerala (2025)**

- The Court called preventive detention a “draconian measure” to be used only for serious threats to public order, not for ordinary law-and-order violations.
- It ruled that authorities cannot use preventive detention to circumvent bail orders or as a substitute for seeking bail cancellation under criminal law.
- Do not weaponise preventive detention against bail; show a live, proximate necessity beyond ordinary procedures.

#### **Major concern related to preventive detention**

1. **Misuse:** Preventive detention is used far beyond its original intent. Authorities often prefer it as an easy tool against protestors and politically weighted groups. NCRB data show a near-doubling over eight years, with about 24,500 cases in 2022, signalling normalisation of an extraordinary power.

2. **Bypassing Ordinary Law:** Many situations could be handled by the penal code—investigation, charge, trial, bail, or bail-cancellation. Yet detention is invoked. This replaces due process with executive shortcuts.

3. **Lack Due Process:** Detainees often lack full, timely disclosure of grounds and face delays in accessing lawyers. Advisory Board reviews are in-camera and largely rely on executive records. Non-disclosure in the name of “national interest” undermines natural justice and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) standards.

4. **Delayed Relief:** Courts do strike down orders for non-application of mind or procedural lapses, but usually after long custody. Habeas petitions are frequently delayed or dismissed on technical grounds. There is no meaningful compensation or immediate review, allowing harm without real remedy.

5. **Structural Flaws:** Preventive detention laws in many states use vague or elastic grounds, so the net is wide and often catches people who should be dealt with under ordinary criminal law. Even the safeguard in Article 22 is weakened because authorities can refuse full disclosure of grounds “in public interest,” creating a direct tension with Articles 19 and 21 and with basic due-process norms.

6. **Colonial roots as a problem:** Because preventive detention grew out of Raj-era practices aimed at silencing dissent, many experts question its relevance and legitimacy today.

#### **Way forward**

1. **Revisit the constitutional basis:** In view of the Supreme Court's observations in *Dhanya M.*, India should reassess the older rulings in *A.K. Gopalan* and *A.K. Roy* and update the preventive-detention framework so it satisfies today's constitutional tests—due process, proportionality, and stronger protection of fundamental rights..
2. **Narrow the scope of use:** Permit preventive detention only for truly grave threats such as terrorism or transnational drug cartels, and prohibit its routine administrative use.
3. **Guarantee robust procedural safeguards:** Give every detainee a statutory right to legal representation before the Advisory Board, and supply the grounds of detention, except in narrowly defined, exceptional cases of serious public-interest risk.
4. **Mandate strict judicial control:** Require prompt and periodic judicial review of every detention, fix short maximum detention periods, and bar rolling or indefinite renewals.
5. **Provide remedies and accountability:** Make compensation compulsory for unlawful or wrongful detention and create personal and institutional consequences for mala fide actions.
6. **Raise the standard of judicial review:** Direct higher courts to test the **substantive necessity and proportionality** of detention, not just the detaining authority's "subjective satisfaction," and build clear jurisprudence on these tests.
7. **Institutionalise transparency and data:** Establish a national monitoring framework that publishes annual statistics on preventive detention, including age, gender, religion, and caste, and releases Advisory Board submission and outcome data.
8. **Periodic audits:** Require periodic audits by the NHRC and State Human Rights Commissions.

**Improve policing:** train police and prosecutors to strengthen evidence-based investigation so that preventive detention remains an exceptional last resort.

## Conclusion

To restore liberty as the rule and detention as the exception, India must confine preventive detention to narrowly defined threats, enforce real safeguards and time limits, and submit every order to stringent, periodic judicial review. Transparent data, independent audits, compensation for wrongful detention, and stronger routine policing will curb misuse. Aligning the framework with Articles 14, 19, and 21 is essential to protect constitutional values without compromising security.

## Drug Regulation in India

**UPSC Syllabus Topic:** GS Paper 2 -Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health. And GS paper 3- Indian economy

## Introduction

India's pharmaceutical industry, celebrated during the pandemic for exporting drugs, medical equipment, and vaccines, now faces a credibility test. Often called the "pharmacy of the world," it confronts a growing crisis driven by counterfeit and substandard medicines. A recent tragedy—the deaths of over twenty children in

Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan after consuming a toxic cough syrup—has intensified scrutiny. Since 2022, similar contamination incidents involving Indian syrups in The Gambia, Uzbekistan, and Cameroon have aggravated concerns. Together, these episodes raise urgent questions about drug regulation in India, especially the adequacy of national safety oversight, quality standards, and enforcement.

### About the drug regulatory system in India

Drug regulation in India involves multiple government bodies and laws, both for domestic and exported drugs. Here are some key points:

#### A. Drug regulation of Domestic Drugs:

1. **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO):** The CDSCO is the primary regulatory body in India that regulates the manufacture, sale, and distribution of drugs in the country. It also conducts periodic inspections of drug manufacturing facilities to ensure compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and other regulations.

2. **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI):** The DCGI is responsible for approving new drugs for marketing in India, and for monitoring their safety and efficacy.

3. **Drug Price Control Order (DPCO):** The DPCO regulates the prices of certain essential drugs in India to ensure they remain affordable to the general public.

4. **State-level drug regulatory bodies:** At the state level, there exist State Drug Regulatory Authorities (SDRAs), which are statutory bodies created under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. They fall under the ambit of the respective Health Departments of each state.

5. **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and its associated rules:** Domestic drugs are regulated under this act.

#### B. Drug regulation of Exported Drugs:

1. **CDSCO:** It is responsible for regulating the export of drugs from India. It issues certificates of pharmaceutical products (CPP) to ensure that drugs exported from India meet the quality, safety, and efficacy standards of the importing country. The CDSCO also regulates the labelling, packaging, and transportation of drugs exported from India.

2. **The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT):** The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) organisation is an attached office of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and is headed by the Director General of Foreign Trade. The DGFT issues guidelines for the export of drugs, including the requirement of obtaining necessary licenses, permits, and certificates. Exporters must obtain an Import-Export Code (IEC) from the DGFT to export drugs.

3. **Export Inspection Council (EIC):** The role of the EIC is to ensure that products notified under the Export (Quality Control and Inspection) Act 1963 are meeting the requirements of the importing countries in respect of their quality and safety.

4. **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** Exported drugs are regulated under the provisions of these two acts.

5. **The World Health Organization (WHO):** It pre-qualifies certain drugs manufactured in India for use in its global health programs.

6. The **United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA)** and the **European Medicines Agency (EMA)** also regulate drugs manufactured in India for export to their respective countries.

### Concerns related to drug regulation in India

1. **Low convictions:** The conviction rate is about 5.9%, and after procedural adjustments it rarely crosses 3%, which shows weak investigations and poor case preparation.
2. **Outdated legal tool:** The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 was designed for a different era and does not address today's transnational, organised counterfeiting networks.
3. **Police exclusion:** Following the *Ashok Kumar* (2020) ruling, only drug control officers can register offences under the D&C Act, which has created an enforcement gap that criminals exploit.
4. **Narrow investigations:** Most cases stop at seizing spurious stock and do not trace the wider network, its finances, or the facilitators behind it.
5. **Weak intelligence and forensics:** Agencies seldom use data analytics, forensic mapping, packaging and ink analysis, digital trails, or CDR analysis, so evidentiary chains remain fragile.
6. **Fragmented agencies:** Drug Control, police, the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax, and GST authorities often work in silos, which limits coordinated action.
7. **Evidence gaps:** Scientific validation is inconsistent, reducing the admissibility and persuasive strength of evidence in court.
8. **Poor pharmacovigilance:** Pharmacovigilance is the process of monitoring the safety of medicines once they are on the market. In India, the pharmacovigilance system is still developing, and there is a lack of awareness among healthcare professionals and patients about reporting adverse drug reactions (ADRs). For example, there have been reports of adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine in India, but these have not been adequately investigated.

### Way forward

1. **Joint jurisdiction:** Parliament should amend the D&C Act to allow both police and Drug Control Officers to register cases and conduct investigations together.
2. **Dual-track cases:** Investigators should add BNS charges—such as Section 318 for cheating and Sections 336–338 for forgery—alongside D&C Act offences, and use Section 111 to designate organised criminal enterprises when warranted.
3. **Constitute SITs:** Governments should form national and state-level Special Investigation Teams that include police, Drug Control, ED, and forensic specialists for end-to-end probes.
4. **Forensic mandate:** Amend the D&C Rules and agency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to require comprehensive forensic protocols in all major counterfeit-drug investigations. These must include chemical and toxicological testing, packaging and ink examination, digital-footprint analysis, and Call Detail Record (CDR) mapping. Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs) and the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU)

should standardise methods, issue certified reports within defined timelines, and provide expert testimony in court.

5. **Follow the money:** The ED should invoke PMLA to trace and freeze illicit assets, while Income Tax and GST departments should dismantle shell entities and fake billing structures.

6. **Capacity building:** Agencies should receive regular joint training on investigation techniques, evidence handling, and real-time intelligence sharing.

7. **Data-driven enforcement:** A shared analytics platform should map supply chains and cross-border links, enabling targeted raids and faster prosecution.

8. **Collaboration with International Bodies:** India should collaborate with international bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO) to adopt best practices in drug regulation. This will help ensure that Indian pharmaceutical companies are following global safety and quality standards. The authorities should also work closely with international bodies to monitor the safety of drugs that are exported from India to other countries.

## Conclusion

India's counterfeit drug problem is both an enforcement failure and a legislative gap. India must integrate regulatory specialisation with criminal investigation. A coordinated, forensic-by-default, multi-agency model—anchored in legislative reform, clear roles, and seamless intelligence sharing—can move enforcement from seizures to network dismantling. With science guiding probes and law ensuring accountability, India can protect patients and rebuild trust in its pharmaceutical ecosystem.

## Question for practice :

Examine how integrating regulatory specialisation with criminal investigation can strengthen India's fight against counterfeit drugs.

Source: Indian Express

## India-U.K. ties

Source: The post “India-U.K. ties” has been created, based on “An anchor for India-U.K. ties, economic partnership” published in “The Hindu” on 09th October 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-International relations

**Context:** Relations between India and the United Kingdom have entered a renewed phase with the signing of the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July 2025**. The recent meeting between the Prime Ministers of both countries signifies a deep commitment to scale up bilateral relations into a true strategic and economic partnership amid a changing global landscape marked by technological competition, geopolitical realignment, and trade shifts.

## Background

1. India's engagement with the U.K. forms part of its broader web of expanding trade partnerships.

2. Recently, **the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with Europe**, which is India's first pact linking market access to investment commitments and Free Trade Association (EFTA,) came into effect, worth \$100 billion over 15 years.
3. Negotiations with the European Union, India's second-largest trading partner, are also advancing.
4. Within this framework, **the CETA with the U.K. serves as a strategic foundation for expanding trade, investment, and cooperation** across multiple sectors.

### Significance of the CETA

1. **Trade and Tariff Benefits:** CETA aims to double bilateral trade by 2030, reducing tariffs on goods such as textiles, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles. For India, it promises market access expansion; for the U.K., it opens India as a manufacturing and export hub.
2. **Mobility and Talent Cooperation:** The Double Contributions Convention (DCC) exempts Indian professionals in the U.K. from double social security payments for up to three years, facilitating easier movement of skilled workers and lowering business costs.
3. **Investment Promotion:** The ongoing bilateral investment treaty alongside CETA aims to boost U.K. investments in India. The U.K. is India's sixth-largest investor, accounting for nearly 5% of FDI inflows, which are set to rise across manufacturing and services.
4. **Technology and Standards Alignment:** CETA promotes technology partnerships, global standards adoption, and smoother access to European markets.

### Strategic and Security Dimensions

1. **Vision 2035 Roadmap for India-U.K. Relations**
  - It focuses on cooperation in defence, technology, climate action, education, and mobility.
  - The Defence Industrial Roadmap emphasises joint development and co-production of advanced defence platforms.
2. **Technology Security Initiative (TSI) – Launched in 2024**
  - It facilitates collaboration in AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, advanced materials, and critical minerals.
  - It also highlights the convergence of economic and security domains.
3. **Geopolitical Cooperation:** Both nations aim to strengthen engagement in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring a free, open, and resilient regional order.

### Challenges in the Partnership

1. **Regulatory barriers and differing standards** can slow the implementation of trade and investment commitments.
2. **Post-Brexit trade policy adjustments in the U.K.** may create uncertainty in tariff regimes.
3. **Balancing labour mobility and domestic workforce protection** could be politically sensitive in the U.K.
4. **Need for alignment on technology transfer, IP protection, and data governance frameworks.**
5. **Ensuring inclusivity and avoiding over-dependence** on specific sectors such as services or defence.

### Way Forward

1. **Swift Ratification and Implementation:** Ensures early operationalisation of CETA and linked investment treaty frameworks.
2. **Regulatory Harmonisation:** Align standards, customs procedures, and digital trade norms for smooth market integration.
3. **Deepen Talent and Education Collaboration:** Expand student and professional exchanges under mutual recognition agreements.
4. **Focus on Green and Digital Economy:** Leverage cooperation in green finance, renewable energy, electric mobility, and digital innovation.
5. **Enhance Defence and Technology Ties:** Accelerate joint R&D, co-development of critical technologies, and defence production partnerships.
6. **Strengthen Strategic Dialogue:** Institutionalise high-level dialogues for consistent monitoring and adaptive policy coordination.

**Conclusion:** The India–U.K. relationship is at a pivotal juncture, poised to evolve into a next-generation economic and strategic partnership. **The CETA, together with the Vision 2035 framework and Technology Security Initiative**, provides the roadmap for enhanced cooperation in trade, innovation, and defence. In an era of fragmented global trade and geopolitical competition, both countries can emerge as co-architects of a resilient, open, and technology-driven global order, turning historic ties into a partnership for the future.

**Question:** In the context of growing geopolitical realignments, evaluate how the India–U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) can serve as an anchor for a next-generation strategic and economic partnership.

### Workers' Rights Amid Factory Hazards in India

**Source:** The post “**Workers’ Rights Amid Factory Hazards in India**” has been created, based on “**Are workers’ rights being eroded?**” published in “The Hindu” on 08th October 2025.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS-3- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

**Context:** Industrial accidents in India continue to expose the grim state of workers’ rights and safety. On **June 30**, the **Sigachi Industries chemical factory explosion in Telangana** killed **40 workers**, followed by accidents in **Tamil Nadu** and **Chennai**, claiming several more lives.

The **British Safety Council** estimates that **one in four fatal workplace accidents worldwide occur in India** — a figure that underestimates the problem due to widespread underreporting, especially among informal and contract labour.

#### Why Do Workplace Accidents Occur?

1. Accidents are **not inevitable** but result from **employer negligence** and weak enforcement of safety laws.
2. **Failures include:**
  - a. Poor workplace design and outdated machinery.
  - b. Inadequate maintenance, non-functional alarms, and a lack of evacuation systems.
  - c. Ignored worker complaints and dismissed safety concerns.
3. The Telangana incident revealed systemic neglect — outdated reactors, ignored warnings, and absence of safety supervision.

#### International Labour Organisation (ILO) Stand

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1. The **ILO** notes that industrial accidents are rarely random — they stem from **management failures** in maintaining safety standards.
2. It criticises employers for blaming “human error” instead of addressing systemic negligence, long working hours, and unsafe environments.
3. The ILO stresses **preventive responsibility**, not post-disaster compensation.

### Legal Framework in India

- **Factories Act, 1948:** First legislation mandating safe and healthy working conditions.
- **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020:** Consolidates 13 labour laws (including Factories Act, Mines Act, Contract Labour Act).
- The OSHWC Code, though currently **in abeyance**, aims to modernise health and safety norms.
- However, **implementation and accountability remain weak**, with most provisions unenforced and employers rarely penalised.

### Challenges in Protecting Workers' Rights

1. **Systematic Dilution of Labour Laws:** Since the **1990s**, labour protections have been weakened in the name of “**flexibility**” and “**Ease of Doing Business.**” Governments reduced inspections and rebranded regulations as “**obstacles to business.**”
2. **Self-Certification and Weak Oversight:** States like Maharashtra allowed **self-certification** of compliance, reducing government monitoring. Violations often go unchecked, and accountability is minimal.
3. **Informalization of Labour:** A large share of India’s workforce is **informal or contract-based**, outside legal protection frameworks. These workers face unsafe environments, irregular pay, and no compensation.
4. **Charity over Justice:** Governments and companies issue **ex gratia payments** instead of enforcing legal compensation, turning accountability into tokenism.
5. **Profit-Driven Work Culture:** India’s business environment prioritizes **productivity and cost efficiency** over worker safety. During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, working hours were extended, and temporary relaxations in labour laws became permanent.
6. **Weak Institutional Mechanisms:** Insufficient factory inspections, lack of data on workplace accidents, and poor inter-agency coordination impede enforcement.

### Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Enforcement:**
  - Reinstate and empower the **labour inspectorate** with digital monitoring and surprise inspections.
  - Enforce accountability through criminal and civil penalties for negligence.
2. **Implement OSHWC Code Effectively:** Operationalise the **Occupational Safety Code, 2020**, with clear rules and real-time reporting mechanisms.
3. **ILO Compliance:** Align national labour policies with **ILO conventions** on workplace safety and decent work.
4. **Empower Workers and Unions:**
  - Encourage **collective bargaining**, representation, and whistleblower protection.
  - Involve workers in safety audits and risk assessments.

5. **Transparency and Data:** Mandate reporting of all industrial accidents and maintain a **national workplace safety registry**.
6. **Shift in Business Culture:**
  - Promote a “**safety-first**” industrial culture that views protection not as a cost but as an investment.
  - Encourage **ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)** compliance and social audits.
7. **Judicial and Administrative Accountability:** Fast-track compensation cases and enforce employer liability to deter future negligence.

**Conclusion:** India's industrial growth cannot come at the cost of human safety. While laws like the **Factories Act** and **OSHC Code** exist, their **implementation gap** and **regulatory dilution** undermine worker protections. As the ILO emphasises, **safe workplaces enhance both productivity and human dignity**. To ensure sustainable and inclusive development, India must move beyond symbolic compensation towards **real accountability, prevention, and respect for workers' rights**.

**Question:** Industrial accidents in India reflect the deep erosion of workers' rights and weak enforcement of safety laws. Discuss the causes, challenges, and measures needed to ensure occupational safety and dignity for workers.

### AI for Inclusive Societal Development

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -growth and development

#### Introduction

India's growth cannot be inclusive if **490 million** informal workers stay outside formal protections, skills, and productivity gains. AI and frontier technologies can help, but change will not happen by itself. Human intent, coordinated investments, and a supportive ecosystem must come together so technology becomes accessible, affordable, and truly useful at the margins. **NITI Aayog's** study *AI for Inclusive Societal Development* (with Deloitte) centres this urgency and proposes a mission-mode roadmap. Without deliberate action, average informal worker incomes could stagnate near **\$6,000** by 2047—well below the **\$14,500** benchmark needed for high-income aspirations.

#### Current State of Informal Workers in India

1. India's informal trade workforce is about **490 million** and remains largely outside core economic gains.
2. Around **90%** of India's labour force works in the informal sector, spanning construction, agriculture, logistics, retail, and artisanal manufacturing.
3. Average productivity of informal workers is **~US\$5/hour**, roughly half the overall average **US\$11/hour**.
4. **Women's participation in the workforce sits at 37 percent**, compared with a **global average of 47 percent**.
5. India's informal sector **contributes around 45 percent of the GDP**, playing a critical role in the economy.

**6. Sectoral spread :** Informal work spans agriculture (46–48%), construction (15–17%), civic/health services (8–10%), retail/food (6–8%), manufacturing (4–6%), artisans (2–4%), logistics (3–5%), and others (7–10%).

### Challenges Faced by Informal Workers

Recurring issues consolidate into **five themes: financial fragility, market access gaps, skilling and adoption problems, social protection and occupational safety deficits, and productivity gaps..**

**1. Financial fragility:** Informal workers face irregular, delayed wages and volatile earnings. Limited savings buffers and unverifiable income histories block access to formal credit, insurance, and emergency finance, deepening vulnerability to illness and demand shocks.

**2. Market access:**

- Workflows depend on intermediaries and word-of-mouth networks, not reliably predictable demand pipelines. Weak discovery on inclusive platforms limits steady orders.
- Migrants lack portable proofs and job-matching, inviting exploitation and downtime between gigs. Opacity keeps prices low and further discourages investment.

**3. Skilling and adoption:**

- Training remains fragmented, generic, and disconnected from real jobs. Digital tools are rarely vernacular, adaptive, or offline-friendly, so last-mile uptake and learning outcomes stay limited.
- Workers cannot easily earn portable credentials that prove competence, making progression, apprenticeships, and credit for skills difficult.

**4. Social protection and safety:**

- Many remain outside health cover, pensions, or income-loss protection. Records are non-portable, applications confusing, and awareness low.
- Hazardous worksites persist without monitoring or protective technologies.
- Occupational injuries, illness, and downtime push households into debt, while compensation mechanisms are slow or inaccessible.

**5. Productivity gaps:**

- Minimal mechanisation and manual processes reduce hourly output. Poor workflow planning, tool unavailability, and lack of performance visibility block continuous improvement.
- Credit constraints delay upgrades to safer, more efficient equipment. Over time, low productivity locks workers into low wages and reinforces informality across sectors.

### Technology Pathways for Transforming the Informal Workforce

1. **Unified trust layer with verifiable credentials:** Create a **trusted worker profile** where identity, skills, and work history are captured as **Verifiable Credentials (VCs)**—digitally signed, tamper-proof records in a wallet. Because these VCs are **interoperable and instantly verifiable**, employers, lenders, and welfare agencies can trust claims, speeding access to jobs, credit, and benefits.
2. **Smart contracts:** Encode service agreements as **self-executing smart contracts** (including on distributed systems) so wages **auto-release on milestone completion**. This reduces disputes and delays, and the **digital payment trail** that results becomes an auditable record to underwrite future credit.
3. **Frictionless access :** Use **consent-based data sharing** to auto-fill applications from trusted sources (VCs, Aadhaar, e-Shram). Pair this with **multilingual, voice-first AI assistants** that adapt to literacy and local context, guiding workers through schemes, loans, and registrations. This turns 4. **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** into truly usable last-mile delivery.
5. **Market integration:** Integrate worker credentials with **ONDC and GeM** to auto-create micro-storefronts for verified sellers; run **AI-powered local demand matching** to alert nearby gigs, orders, and bulk-buy opportunities.
6. Use **adaptive learning pathways** and **AR/spatial computing** for hands-on practice; pair with **AI tutors** for personalised journeys on low-end phones and kiosks—raising skill relevance and retention.
7. **AI knowledge graphs:** Provide **Generative-AI knowledge assistants** that combine loom blueprints, process recipes, buyer trends, and schemes into a **navigable knowledge graph**, offering real-time, context-aware fixes in local languages.

### Need for Urgent Action

1. **Growth gap to 2047:** If India grows at **6.3%**, GDP will be about **US\$15.3 trillion** by 2047, far below the **US\$30 trillion** aim. At this pace, informal workers' average income reaches only **~US\$6,000**; with **~10%** tech-enabled growth, **~US\$14,500** becomes possible.
2. **Favourable conditions for India:** India has a young population, fast digital adoption, and strong rails—**Aadhaar, UPI, Jan Dhan, BharatNet**—backed by a vibrant AI ecosystem. These conditions allow rapid, inclusive rollout of worker-centric solutions at national scale.
3. **Risk of exclusion:** Without timely action, millions may remain off platforms, credit, insurance, and skilling pathways. Exclusion in a tech-driven economy will deepen inequality and waste India's demographic and digital momentum.

### Key Recommendations

1. **Mission Digital ShramSetu:** NITI Aayog proposes **Mission Digital ShramSetu** to make AI **accessible, affordable, and impactful** for every informal worker. The mission will deploy **AI, blockchain, and immersive learning** to dismantle structural constraints, expand market access, and strengthen social protection.
2. **Using what exists, better:** Multiple programmes already target informal workers: e-Shram, PM Vishwakarma, PM SVANidhi, Ayushman Bharat, NULM, and NRLM. There is need for **convergence and tech-enabled last-mile delivery** rather than creating entirely new silos.

3. **Enable a federated trust and credentialing ecosystem:** Develop a federated trust model to enable entities such as training providers, gig platforms, employers and government bodies to issue verifiable work and skill credentials, with real-time updates through standardised protocols.
4. **Encourage innovation and incentivise adoption of frontier technology:** Support startups developing frontier technology-based solutions through grants, tax breaks, regulatory sandboxes, Research & Development (R&D) incentives and public procurement pathways.
5. **Strengthen AI and digital infrastructure for inclusive access:** Scale vernacular AI through initiatives such as Bhashini and AI4Bharat to support local speech and dialects.
6. **Empower Private Sector ownership:** Create sector-specific incentives for private sector organisations to fund and build digital interventions.
7. **Digitise and standardise informal sector knowledge:** Partner with industry bodies and training institutes to digitise sector knowledge and integrate it into multilingual AI knowledge graphs for different industries.
8. **Invest in affordable tools and local tech workforce:** Promote local R&D and manufacturing of affordable tools under the Make in India initiative, enable tech-rental models via Self Help Groups (SHGs) and trade bodies and train district-level tech operators to drive adoption and support in low-literacy contexts.
9. **Uphold data privacy, AI ethics and user protection:** Implement worker-centric data protections under the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, release edge-compliant platform guidelines and establish clear safety, insurance and liability norms for AI and robotic tool usage. There is a need for organisational discourse and accountability mechanisms to uphold workers' rights and build trust in AI systems.
10. **Drive grassroots innovation and worker outreach:** Incentivise states to launch mission-mode programmes for informal trades, repurpose district infrastructure as digital workforce hubs, enable co-funding by ULBs/ panchayats, strengthen partnerships with local institutions for digital literacy and drive skill enhancement initiatives through targeted incentives.

#### Question for practice:

Discuss how AI-led technology pathways can address the five core challenges of India's informal workforce and explain why urgent action is essential to meet the 2047 goals.

### India has stakes in Gaza's peace

#### Introduction

Israel and Hamas have accepted the first phase of a US-backed ceasefire framework. Key actors—the PA, EU, and major Arab states—offer cautious support; Israel's approval is reluctant, and Hamas questions disarmament. India welcomes the development and calls for a role in reconstruction India's choices now hinge on balancing its principles—Palestinian sovereignty and humanitarian protection—with practical cooperation that can stabilise Gaza and safeguard its own interests.

#### International Responses

**1. Support with conditions:** The **Palestinian Authority (PA)**, the **European Union (EU)**, and **Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE** have offered **cautious backing**. Their main concern is the **absence of a clear timeline for Israeli withdrawal**, which affects sequencing and trust.

**2. Israel:** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offers reluctant support. He accepts the plan's first phase but faces resistance from right-wing partners who reject any Palestinian role in governance. This internal divide may slow decisions.

**3. Hamas:** Hamas signals willingness to engage in talks. It objects to the disarmament requirement. This reservation could challenge the demilitarisation track and the pace of implementation.

**4. United Kingdom:** Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomes the first-phase deal. He urges immediate, full implementation and the removal of all limits on life-saving humanitarian aid to Gaza.

### India's Position

**1. India's stance:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls the development "**decisive progress**" and a "**significant step forward.**" He speaks with **President Trump** and **Prime Minister Netanyahu**, welcoming **hostage releases** and **humanitarian relief**.

2. Since Oct 7, India has **balanced condemnation of terrorism** with **support for Palestinian rights**, consistent with its **long-standing two-state, sovereignty-plus-security stance**.

### India Could Play a Bigger Role Now

**1. Regional stakes :** India's criticism after the **Doha strike** reflects **changing international opinion** and **GCC concerns**. With expanding links under the **Abraham Accords** and the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**, **economic interdependence** strengthens the incentive to **coordinate with GCC partners**.

**2. Diplomatic space :** There is **precedent** for active Indian involvement. **China's critical stance** on the plan creates a **contrast** that can widen space for **constructive Indian participation**, provided India stays aligned with its **core principles**.

**3. Role in reconstruction:** India's envoy to **Israel** suggests **Indian participation in reconstruction**, citing infrastructural expertise and ties with both **Israel** and the **PA**.

**4. Practical steps:** India can support **hostage–detainee exchanges**, push **sustained humanitarian access**, and pursue **targeted investments** that stabilise services. Coordination with the **PA, EU**, and key **Arab states—Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE**—can keep actions aligned and transparent.

### India's stakes

- **Diaspora:** Nearly **90 lakh Indians** live in the Middle East; stability safeguards communities, including **18,000 in Israel** and up to **10,000 in Iran**.
- **Energy:** India relies heavily on Middle Eastern crude; reduced tensions can **stabilise prices**.

- **Connectivity and investment:** Peace can **encourage Arab investment** and create space for projects like the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**.
- **Concern:** Pakistan's visible role in the process is a **strategic concern** for New Delhi.

## India's Historical Engagement

### 1. Consistent diplomatic roles

- In 1947, **Jawaharlal Nehru** pushed for India's place on **UNSCOP**, backing a **single federal state** with Arab and Jewish provinces.
- India **recognised Israel in 1950**, yet sustained **solidarity with Palestine**, including **UNRWA support since 1951**.
- India **recognised the State of Palestine in 1988**, among the **first non-Arab states** to do so.

### 2. Peacekeeping and process participation

- India contributed major contingents to **UNEF I and UNEF II**, patrolling the **Egypt-Israel Sinai** and taking **casualties in May 1967**.
- After establishing diplomatic ties with Israel in **1992** (to avoid exclusion from a widening peace process), India **attended donor conferences and UN forums** on Palestinian rights and provided **developmental aid and technical training** to the PA alongside **strategic ties with Israel**.

## Conclusion

India has stakes in Gaza's peace because security, **economic interdependence with the GCC**, and **historic commitments** converge. A **careful, principle-first, reconstruction-focused** role—aligned with **humanitarian law, Palestinian sovereignty, and mutual security**—can add value. **Clarity on timelines and governance arrangements** is essential. With these safeguards, India can help **stabilise Gaza, support reconciliation, and protect its regional interests** without worsening local labour dynamics or political fault lines.

For detailed information on **The course ahead for Trump's Gaza ceasefire plan** [read this article here](#)

### Question for practice:

Discuss why India has stakes in Gaza's peace and how it could play a constructive role under the proposed ceasefire plan.

**Source:** Indian Express

## India's Mental Health Crisis and the Need for a Unified Response

**Source:** The post "**India's Mental Health Crisis and the Need for a Unified Response**" has been created, based on "**India's mental health crisis, the cries and scars**" published in "The Hindu" on 10th October 2025.

## UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

**Context:** India is facing an unprecedented **mental health crisis**, with nearly **230 million Indians** living with mental health disorders ranging from depression and anxiety to substance use and suicidal tendencies. Despite progressive legal frameworks like the **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**, and initiatives such as **Tele-MANAS** and the **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)**, the country continues to struggle with access, affordability, and stigma in mental healthcare.

### Current Status and Data

1. According to **NCRB's ADSI 2023 report**, India recorded **1,71,418 suicides**, a **3% rise** from the previous year.
2. The **WHO** estimates India's mental illness prevalence at **13.7%**, with **16.3 suicides per 1,00,000 people**.
3. The **National Mental Health Survey (2015–16)** revealed a **treatment gap of 70%–92%** for common mental disorders.
4. India has only **0.75 psychiatrists and 0.07 psychologists per 1,00,000 population**, far below the **WHO norm of 3 per 1,00,000**.
5. **Rural distress**, gender-based violence, unemployment, and financial crises exacerbate psychological vulnerabilities.

### Gaps in the System

1. **Severe Shortage of Professionals:** Inadequate psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses — especially in **rural and semi-urban areas**. There are **only 0.75 psychiatrists per 1,00,000 people**, which is much lower than the global average, leaving vast populations untreated.
2. **Fragmented Institutional Structure:** Ministries handling health, education, labour, and welfare work in **silos**, leading to poor coordination.
3. **Weak Implementation of Policies:** Despite the **Mental Healthcare Act (2017)** guaranteeing the right to mental healthcare, its implementation remains limited due to **underfunding and a lack of accountability**.
4. **Low Public Spending:** Only **1.05% of the total health budget** goes to mental health — much lower than the **WHO-recommended 5%**.
5. **Social Stigma and Lack of Awareness:** Mental illness is often viewed as a personal weakness or shame, discouraging help-seeking behaviour.
6. **Digital and Tele-Health Inequality:** While **Tele-MANAS** has helped over **20 lakh people**, its reach remains **urban-centric**, leaving large rural populations underserved.

### Government Initiatives

1. **Mental Healthcare Act (2017):** Guarantees the right to mental healthcare, decriminalises suicide, and promotes dignity.
2. **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP):** Expands community mental health services to **767 districts**.
3. **Tele-MANAS:** A 24×7 national tele-mental health helpline providing counselling and crisis support.
4. **KIRAN Helpline & Manodarpan:** Support for youth, students, and working professionals.
5. **National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022):** Aims to reduce suicide deaths by 10% by 2030.

### Need for a Unified and Integrated Approach

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1. **Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** India needs an **integrated, multi-sectoral approach** involving health, education, social justice, and labour ministries for coordinated action.
2. **Infrastructure and Workforce:** Government should allocate **at least 5% of the health budget** to mental health, expand **medical training**, and promote **mid-level providers** in rural areas.
3. **Community-Based Interventions:** Establish local **counselling centres**, **school-based awareness programs**, and **farmer distress support units**.
4. **Use of Technology:** **Digital tools** like AI-driven support systems and mobile counselling apps should be strengthened to reach remote populations.
5. **Public Awareness and De-Stigmatisation:** Incorporate **mental health education** into school curricula and public campaigns to normalise help-seeking.
6. **Policy and Data Integration:** Create a **national mental health registry** and **real-time surveillance** for early detection and response.

### Way Forward

1. Adopt **comprehensive and inclusive policies** integrating mental health into **primary healthcare**.
2. Strengthen **public infrastructure**, ensure **universal insurance coverage**, and enhance **research-based policy** formulation.
3. Encourage **public-private partnerships**, NGOs, and community organisations to fill service gaps.
4. Prioritise **preventive mental health**, especially for vulnerable groups — youth, farmers, women, and students.

**Conclusion:** India's mental health challenge is not just a medical concern but a **social, economic, and human rights issue**. A unified, well-funded, and stigma-free mental health ecosystem — integrating community participation, digital innovation, and institutional accountability — is crucial for achieving **holistic well-being and national resilience**.

**Question:** India's growing mental health crisis highlights the urgent need for an integrated and well-funded approach to mental healthcare. Discuss the key challenges and suggest measures to strengthen India's mental health ecosystem.

### Karnataka Gig Workers Act: A Model for India

**Source:** The post "Karnataka Gig Workers Act: A Model for India" has been created, based on "Karnataka Gig Workers Act: A Model for India" published in "The Hindu" on 10th October 2025.

### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

**Context:** The gig economy in India has expanded rapidly in recent years, driven by platforms such as **Ola, Uber, Swiggy, and Zomato**. However, gig workers classified as **independent contractors**—remain outside the protection of traditional labour laws, leaving them without access to **social security, healthcare, insurance, or job stability**. Recognising this gap, the **Government of Karnataka** enacted the **Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025**, becoming the first Indian state to create a **comprehensive legal framework** for the welfare of gig workers.

### Need for the Act

1. According to **NITI Aayog (2022)**, India's gig workforce is expected to grow from **8 million in 2020–21 to 24 million by 2029–30**.
2. Despite their growing role in the digital economy, gig workers face **income insecurity**, lack of **health benefits**, and **no protection** against arbitrary terminations.
3. The **COVID-19 pandemic** exposed the vulnerability of this workforce, highlighting the urgent need for **formal recognition and social protection**.
4. The Karnataka Act aims to address these issues through a structured and transparent system of welfare and accountability.

### Key Features of the Karnataka Gig Workers Act, 2025

1. **Welfare Fund Creation:** The Act mandates all **aggregator platforms** to contribute **1–5% of each transaction's payout** to a **Gig Workers Welfare Fund**. This fund will finance **healthcare, accident insurance, and financial protection** for gig workers.
2. **Establishment of a Welfare Board:** A **Gig Workers Welfare Board** based in **Bengaluru** will manage the fund and oversee implementation. The Board is chaired by the **State Labour Minister** and includes officials from labour, IT, taxation, and civil society.
3. **Transparency and Accountability:** Platforms must maintain transparency regarding **payments, deductions, and incentives**. Companies are required to disclose **algorithmic decision-making processes** and provide a **human grievance contact** for workers.
4. **Registration and Identification:** All platform-based workers will be **registered** and assigned **unique identification numbers** to access welfare schemes.
5. **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** The Act introduces a **two-tier dispute resolution system**:
  - **Internal Dispute Committee** within platforms.
  - **Gig Workers Welfare Board** for appeals and independent review.
6. **Compliance and Penalties:** Companies must file **quarterly compliance reports**. Non-compliance can lead to **penalties up to ₹1 lakh**.
7. **Administrative Efficiency:** Administrative expenses are capped at **5% of the welfare fund**, ensuring that most contributions go directly to worker benefits.
8. **Fair Work Standards:** The Act mandates **rest breaks, payment timelines**, and basic working condition standards for gig workers.

### Significance of the Act

1. The law provides **legal recognition and protection** to gig workers for the first time in India.
2. It establishes a **structured welfare mechanism** ensuring access to **social security, insurance, and healthcare**.
3. It promotes **transparency and fairness** in the gig economy by regulating payments and algorithmic decisions.
4. The Act enhances **accountability of aggregator platforms**, making them responsible for worker welfare.
5. It serves as a **replicable model** for other Indian states and could inform a **national policy** for gig worker protection.
6. By institutionalising welfare contributions, Karnataka has taken a **progressive step in labour reform** in the digital era.

### Challenges and Concerns

1. **Compliance Issues:** Ensuring all platforms, including **small and informal aggregators**, follow the law may be difficult.
2. **Sustainability of the Welfare Fund:** The long-term financial viability of the fund depends on **regular contributions** from platforms.
3. **Industry Resistance:** Platforms may view mandatory contributions as a **financial and administrative burden**, leading to potential **non-compliance** or **delays**.
4. **Impact on Consumers:** Companies may **pass on costs** to customers, increasing service prices and slowing growth.
5. **Exclusion of Informal Gig Workers:** The law may not cover workers employed by **unregistered or semi-formal platforms**, creating a **two-tier system** of protection.
6. **Administrative Bottlenecks:** Effective monitoring, registration, and grievance resolution will require **strong institutional capacity**.

### Way Forward

- The state must ensure **strict enforcement** of the Act across all types of gig platforms.
- The **Welfare Fund** should be monitored regularly to ensure **transparency, sufficiency, and accountability**.
- The government should include **informal and unregistered platform workers** within the Act's ambit.
- A **national framework for gig worker welfare**, aligned with the Karnataka model, should be developed for uniform protection across states.
- **Periodic stakeholder consultations** involving gig companies, workers, and policymakers can strengthen cooperation and implementation.

**Conclusion:** The **Karnataka Gig Workers Act, 2025**, marks a historic step toward recognising the rights and welfare of India's gig workforce. By creating a dedicated welfare fund, establishing accountability mechanisms, and ensuring transparency in platform operations, the state has set a **progressive benchmark for digital labour reform**.

For the Act to truly succeed, consistent enforcement, adequate funding, and cooperative participation between the government, platforms, and workers are essential. If implemented effectively, Karnataka's model could pave the way for a **national policy framework** that ensures **fairness, dignity, and social security** for millions of gig workers across India.

**Question:** The Karnataka Gig Workers Act, 2025 seeks to provide social security and legal recognition to platform-based workers. Discuss its significance and challenges as a model for labour reform in India.

## Relooking at Kabul

### Introduction

Afghanistan links South and Central Asia and often draws great-power rivalry. In 2021, the Taliban took power after a change of government. India then reset its approach: humanitarian aid first, a small technical team in Kabul, and no formal recognition—aimed at protecting interests and historical ties without overreach. After Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit on **10 October 2025**, India seeks forward engagement that is people-centric and interest-driven: practical cooperation, a restored diplomatic presence via a chargé d'affaires, expanded trade through the air-freight corridor, and quiet, issue-based security coordination—while avoiding premature recognition and navigating shifting regional pressures.

## India's Diplomatic Strategy

1. **Embassy status (Kabul):** India is preparing to reopen its embassy in Kabul, beginning with a chargé d'affaires rather than a full ambassador.
2. **Recognition signal:** This step indicates engagement without formal recognition. In New Delhi, the Afghan mission will likely be run by Taliban-appointed staff and fly the Emirate flag, reflecting de facto dealings and not de jure recognition.
3. **Policy principles:** India is underscoring that Afghans should decide their own security and foreign policy. It is also aligning with the position that Afghanistan should host no foreign military structures.
4. **Public messaging:** In current remarks, India has not foregrounded human-rights conditionality. The emphasis is on practical channels, steady contact, and continuity of essential cooperation.

## Regional Geopolitics & Security Calculus

### 1. Great-power setting:

- The regional landscape is shifting, as the United States **encourages** a larger Pakistani role across India's immediate and extended western neighbourhood..
- China is widening its reach through its Pakistan axis and expanding stakes in Iran and the Gulf.
- Russia has recognised the Taliban and is tightening coordination with Tehran. India must read its west through these intersecting pressures..

### 2. India- Afghans security overlap:

- India and the Afghans now describe cross-border terrorism as a shared threat.
- This creates room for discreet, issue-based coordination on threat assessment and deconfliction, without any formal alliance or recognition.

### 3. Pakistan factor

- Afghans are asserting autonomy on India policy and has also refused to hand over leaders of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to Pakistan.
- These actions show that Pakistan's leverage over the Taliban is limited, despite its past support and sanctuary..

4. **Coordination platforms:** India participates in the Moscow-led Afghanistan consultations to exchange assessments and shape regional consensus—most notably the line that **no foreign military bases or structures** should be present in Afghanistan.

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

## 1. Developmental Assistance

### Infrastructure Projects:

- **Zaranj-Delaram Highway:** Connects Afghanistan to the Iranian border.
- **Salma Dam:** Provides irrigation and electricity.
- **Afghan Parliament Building:** A symbol of bilateral cooperation.

### Healthcare:

- India is setting up a **Thalassemia Centre** and a Modern Diagnostic Centre in Kabul.
- A **30-bed hospital in Bagrami, an Oncology Centre, a Trauma Centre** (both in Kabul), and five Maternity Clinics are planned. India gifted 20 ambulances.
- About 75 prosthetic limbs have been fitted for Afghan nationals.

**Education:** India offers e-ICCR scholarships to Afghan students. More avenues for study in Indian universities are under consideration.

## 2. Trade and Economic Relations

**Air Freight Corridor:** The India–Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor has started. It will streamline connectivity and raise bilateral trade.

**Chabahar Port:** Enhances Afghanistan's connectivity to global markets.

**Mining and Investment:** Afghanistan has invited Indian companies to invest in the mining sector.

## 3. Regional Security and Counterterrorism

**Capacity Building:** India trains Afghan security forces to counter terrorism.

**Taliban Dynamics:** India cautiously engages with the Taliban, focusing on its security concerns.

## 4. Humanitarian Assistance

**Crisis Support:** India has provided food grains and COVID-19 vaccines to Afghanistan.

**Community Projects:** Over 200 programs, including schools and water supply systems, have been implemented.

**Disaster Relief and Reconstruction:** India acted as a first responder after the Nangarhar and Kunar earthquake. India is willing to help reconstruct residential buildings in affected areas.

## 5. Sports and Culture

1. Both sides will strengthen **cooperation in sports**, especially cricket.

2. **Visa liberalisation** : Afghanistan seeks greater visa liberalisation for students and patients. India can expand access subject to security checks. **Easier mobility strengthens societal ties.**

## Conclusion

India's Afghanistan policy must blend realism with restraint. Engage the de facto authority to protect core interests, but avoid premature recognition. Prioritise people-centric cooperation—food, health, education, visas—and complete stalled projects that deliver quick benefits. Build quiet security coordination against cross-border threats, while signalling support for Afghan sovereignty and “no foreign bases.” A calibrated, sustained presence in Kabul will help India manage great-power competition, balance Pakistan-linked risks, and create stable avenues for long-term partnership.

## Strengthening Startup Ecosystem through Prompt Biz Registration

### Introduction

India's transformative decade has unleashed strong entrepreneurial growth. Company registrations are high, and new sectors—AI, drones, space, and clean tech—are rising. Yet progress slows due to manual registration and limited use of **AI, blockchain, APIs, and cloud**. With the **₹1 lakh crore RDI Scheme** and a **DeepTech Fund of Funds**, the foundation is set **to convert innovation into enterprises and jobs**. The next unlock is **fast, reliable business registration** as the first step from idea to enterprise.

### Current Status of Entrepreneurship (Startups) in India

1. India is the **third-largest startup hub**, with over **1,30,000 recognized startups**, compared to just 400 in 2015-16.
2. **Startup funding grew 15 times** since 2015-16, with private equity and venture capital playing significant roles.
3. In 2024, startups raised over **\$12 billion**, with **75% coming from international sources**.
4. **Substantial Growth**: Around **1.65 to 1.70 lakh startups** are registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
5. **Regional Growth**: Nearly **50% of startups** now come from **Tier II and Tier III cities**, such as Indore, Jaipur, and Ahmedabad, offering untapped growth potential.

### Government Initiatives for Entrepreneurship (Startups) Growth

1. **Digital shift** : The **SPICE+ incorporation system** and digitised portals have made starting up easier. **Over 80% of registrations happen online**. This shows strong progress toward a tech-enabled, founder-friendly state.
2. **RDI push**: Recently government has launched **₹1 lakh cr Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme, along with DeepTech Fund of Funds**.
3. **New Sectors**: Policies now allow startups to operate in **space, geospatial technology, defence, and drones**, enabling ventures into cutting-edge domains.

4. **Startup India:** Launched on 16th January 2016, Startup India is a flagship initiative by the Government of India to foster innovation and create a thriving startup ecosystem. Its goal is to drive economic growth and generate large-scale employment opportunities

5. **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS):** Launched in 2021 with a corpus of ₹945 crore, the SISFS supports startups at various stages, including proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialisation. The scheme, operational since 1st April 2021, is overseen by the Experts Advisory Committee (EAC), which evaluates and selects incubators for fund allocation.

6. **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) Scheme:** Launched in June 2016 with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore, the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) aims to boost access to domestic capital for startups. Managed by SIDBI, it funds SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), which then invest in startups through equity and equity-linked instruments.

7. **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS):** The Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS) provides credit guarantees for loans to DPIIT-recognised startups from Scheduled Commercial Banks, NBFCs, and Venture Debt Funds. Implemented by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC), it aims to offer credit guarantees up to a specified limit, easing access to funding for startups.

8. **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** Launched in 2016 by NITI Aayog, the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) aims to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across India. It includes initiatives like Atal Tinkering Labs at the school level to foster creativity, Atal Incubation Centres to build a robust startup ecosystem, and Atal Community Innovation Centres to serve unserved and underserved regions.

9. **MeitY Startup Hub (MSH):** The MeitY Startup Hub (MSH) aims to foster a vibrant innovation and startup ecosystem by uniting technology innovation stakeholders and promoting economic growth through innovation and technological advancement.

### Challenges to Entrepreneurship (Startups) Growth

1. **Limited Domestic Spending:** India's per capita GDP is around \$3,500, far lower than China's \$12,000–15,000, restricting market demand.

2. **Access to Patient Capital:** Deep tech startups struggle with long-term funding. Despite raising \$12 billion in 2024, 75% came from international sources. A specialised domestic fund is needed..

3. **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Complex regulations and approval delays hinder startup growth and operations.

4. **Regulatory Concerns:** Corporate mismanagement in startups like Byju's highlights the need for better governance and self-regulation.

5. **Skill Gaps:** Curricula lack focus on emerging skills like AI and data science, slowing innovation.

6. **IPR Challenges:** India paid \$14.3 billion in IPR royalties in 2024 but earned only \$1.5 billion, indicating innovation gaps.

7. **Geographic Disparity:** Startups in Tier II and III cities need better infrastructure, education, and inclusivity to unlock potential.

### Global Best Practices for Entrepreneurship (Startups) Growth

1. **Estonia's e-Residency** lets anyone register an company within hours. The process is fully paperless and supported by blockchain. Its cloud-based, distributed setup provides both transparency and strong cybersecurity.

2. **New Zealand** uses a **New Zealand Business Number** to unify all business data. Name reservation usually takes about two hours, and incorporation is finished in one to two days. Application Programming Interface (API) -linked, machine-readable data lowers errors and reduces manual checks.

3. **Singapore's Bizfile** completes registration in minutes. It uses AI for name checks and sets up tax and compliance instantly. The "register once, update everywhere" approach cut licensing from 14 forms with 800 fields to a single form with 90 fields.

4. **Global trend :** More than **41 countries** now offer digital registration with AI support, real-time tracking, and blockchain security.

### Way forward

1. **Limited time:** Set **24 hours** as the standard for completing company registration. Time certainty sends a strong signal to founders and investors.

#### 2. Use of AI:

- Use **AI-driven document validation** and **automated name screening**.
- Apply **risk scoring** and **auto-approval** so most applications finish within a day, and only exceptions need review.
- Leverage **IndiaAI Mission** and **regional-language chatbots** to guide applicants end-to-end.

4. **Parallel approvals :** Enable seamless, automated data sharing between **MCA, CBDT (PAN/TAN), CBIC (GST), DPIIT (Startup India)**, and the **Ministry of MSME (Udyam)**. Move from **sequential** to **parallel** approvals to shorten timelines.

5. Make **international and domestic processes identical** in timelines and documentation. **Singapore** and the **UAE** show that simple, predictable onboarding accelerates **capital and technology inflows**.

6. **Incorporate proven global practices:** Estonia's paperless, blockchain-backed cloud; New Zealand's single business ID and API data flows; Singapore's real-time cross-agency integration with AI name checks and "register once, update everywhere."

### Question for practice:

Discuss how adopting AI, blockchain, APIs, and parallel inter-agency approvals can achieve 24-hour business registration and strengthen India's startup ecosystem.

Source: The Economic Times

### Curbing Cyber Frauds in Digital India

Source: The post “Curbing Cyber Frauds in Digital India” has been created, based on “Curbing Cyber Frauds in Digital India” published in “PIB” on 11th October 2025.

#### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

**Context:** India’s cyberspace has expanded rapidly with over **86% of households now connected to the internet**, reflecting the transformative progress under the *Digital India* initiative. However, the rise in digital penetration has also led to an unprecedented increase in **cyber frauds** such as phishing, unauthorized access, data theft, and online scams targeting individuals and institutions. The number of cybersecurity incidents has surged from **10.29 lakh in 2022 to 22.68 lakh in 2024**, highlighting both increased reporting and growing vulnerability in the digital ecosystem.

#### Cyber Laws and Legal Safeguards

1. The **Information Technology Act, 2000** forms the legal backbone of India’s cyber law framework, covering offences like identity theft, impersonation, and cyber fraud.
2. The **Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code, 2021** ensures accountability of digital intermediaries and curbs the dissemination of harmful content.
3. The **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** mandates lawful, consent-based processing of personal data, protecting citizens from misuse and unauthorized access.
4. These frameworks collectively enabled the blocking of **94.28 lakh SIM cards** and **26,348 IMEIs** linked to fraudulent activities.
5. Over **1.08 lakh police officers** have been trained in cyber investigation, and **82,704 certificates** have been issued to strengthen cyber forensic capacity.

#### Key Measures and Institutional Framework

1. The **Union Budget 2025–26** has allocated **₹782 crore** for cybersecurity projects, emphasizing the government’s commitment to digital resilience.
2. The **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal ([www.cybercrime.gov.in](http://www.cybercrime.gov.in))** enables citizens to lodge online complaints and facilitates fund freezing in financial frauds.
3. A **dedicated helpline (1930)** provides immediate support to victims of online financial crimes.
4. The **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)** acts as the national nodal agency for cyber incident response. It has conducted **109 mock drills** and engaged **1,438 organizations** to assess cyber preparedness.
5. The **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)** safeguards critical sectors such as banking, telecom, and power through sector-specific security audits.

6. The **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)** under the Ministry of Home Affairs coordinates law-enforcement efforts and has successfully blocked **3,962 Skype IDs** and **83,668 WhatsApp accounts** linked to cyber fraud.
7. To regulate emerging threats, the **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025** was enacted to govern online money gaming and its associated financial transactions.
8. The **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS)** has strengthened the grievance-redressal mechanism for online financial crimes.
9. Through the **Cybercrime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC)** scheme with an outlay of **₹132.93 crore**, cyber forensic labs have been set up across **33 States and Union Territories**, and **over 24,600 personnel** have been trained in cyber investigation.
10. The **Manthan Platform** and over **205 workshops** have enhanced inter-agency collaboration, awareness, and training on cyber governance.

### Emerging Trends in Cyber Frauds

1. The pattern of frauds has become more sophisticated, with the rise of **AI-driven deepfakes** and **social engineering scams**.
2. Fraudsters exploit **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** by cloning or misusing virtual numbers, leading to unauthorized fund transfers.
3. **Phishing, pig-butcher, phantom hacking, and instant loan app scams** are among the fastest-growing digital crimes.
4. The **financial losses** from **online betting apps** alone are estimated to exceed **₹400 crore**, illustrating the economic dimension of cyber threats.
5. Organised crime networks, often based in **Southeast Asian “fraud factories,”** are increasingly involved in transnational cyber-fraud operations.

### Challenges in Curbing Cyber Frauds

1. **Rapid Technological Evolution:** The fast pace of artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and quantum technologies outpaces the capability of enforcement and regulation.
2. **Low Cyber Awareness:** A large segment of citizens lacks digital literacy and are unaware of basic cyber hygiene practices.
3. **Jurisdictional and Cross-Border Barriers:** Many frauds originate overseas, complicating investigation and extradition.
4. **Under-Reporting of Cases:** Victims often refrain from reporting due to fear of embarrassment or lack of faith in grievance systems.
5. **Limited Skilled Workforce:** Shortage of trained digital forensic professionals in small towns and districts delays timely response.

6. **Fragmented Institutional Coordination:** Overlaps between agencies like CERT-In, I4C, and NCIIPC can hinder real-time information exchange.
7. **Implementation Gaps:** Enforcement of the *Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023* and related frameworks remains nascent.
8. **Financial Inclusion Risks:** First-time digital users and senior citizens remain the most vulnerable to UPI and SMS-based scams.

### Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Legal Architecture:** Amend and modernize the *IT Act, 2000* to include AI-related, blockchain-based, and cross-border cyber offences.
2. **Integrated Cyber Defence:** Establish a unified *National Cyber Defence Architecture* to synergize CERT-In, I4C, and NCIIPC operations.
3. **Capacity Building:** Incorporate cyber law, digital forensics, and ethical hacking modules in police and judicial academies.
4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch a nationwide *Cyber Suraksha Abhiyan* focusing on rural areas and vulnerable populations.
5. **Technological Innovation:** Employ AI-driven fraud detection, blockchain for transaction traceability, and predictive analytics for threat forecasting.
6. **International Collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships with INTERPOL, ASEAN, and the *Budapest Convention on Cybercrime* for intelligence sharing and extradition mechanisms.
7. **Gender and Child-Sensitive Approach:** Expand the CCPWC programme and create safe online environments through parental control tools and awareness education.
8. **Regular Cyber Audits:** Mandate annual cybersecurity audits for all government departments and financial institutions.

**Conclusion:** India's Prime Minister envisions "*a Digital India where cybersecurity becomes an integral part of national security.*" With comprehensive frameworks like CERT-In, I4C, and the Data Protection Act, India is building robust digital defence mechanisms.

The convergence of **strong laws, institutional coordination, public awareness, and technological innovation** will help India emerge as a **digitally secure and resilient nation**, ensuring that the benefits of digitalization are not undermined by the perils of cyber fraud.

**Question:** India's vision of Digital India can only be achieved when cybersecurity becomes an integral part of national security. In this context, discuss the measures undertaken to curb them, challenges and the way forward.

### Need to reposition SEZs for integrated national development

**Source:** The post "**Need to reposition SEZs for integrated national development**" has been created, based on "**Reposition SEZs for integrated national development**" published in "Business Line" on 11th October 2025.

## UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

**Context:** The **Special Economic Zones Act, 2005** was enacted to promote exports, attract foreign investment, generate employment, and develop world-class infrastructure. Two decades later, despite several successes, SEZs have not fully realised their transformative potential. With India's renewed focus on *"Aatmanirbhar Bharat"* and *"Viksit Bharat @2047"*, a strategic repositioning of SEZs is essential for integrated and inclusive national development.

### Current Status of SEZs

1. SEZs replaced **Export Processing Zones (EPZs)** in 2000.
2. As of **June 30, 2025**, **370 SEZs have been notified**, out of which **276 are functional**, comprising **6,279 approved units**.
3. Around **60% of exports** originate from **services sectors** like IT/ITeS, while manufacturing SEZs remain underperforming.
4. Nearly **200,000 hectares** of developed land and **100 million sq. ft.** of built-up space remain partially utilised.
5. Hence, while SEZs have created pockets of excellence, the national spillover effects are limited.

### Need for Repositioning

1. **Underutilisation of Potential:** A significant portion of the developed land within Special Economic Zones (SEZs) remains unutilised, indicating a gap between planned infrastructure and actual industrial activity.
2. **Skewed Sectoral Growth:** The overwhelming dominance of the services sector, as opposed to manufacturing, has reduced the employment intensity of SEZs and limited their contribution to large-scale job creation.
3. **Global Supply Chain Realignment:** In the post-pandemic world, there is a growing need for diversified and resilient production bases. India must reposition its SEZs to attract global investors seeking alternatives to concentrated manufacturing hubs.
4. **Alignment with National Schemes:** SEZs need to be strategically integrated with national flagship initiatives such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, Industrial Corridor Projects, and the 'Vocal for Local' campaign to maximise synergies and policy coherence.
5. **Export Competitiveness:** Comprehensive reforms are essential to sustain and enhance India's export competitiveness, especially in light of tightening global trade norms and the evolving framework of free trade agreements.

### Key Policy Recalibrations Proposed

#### 1. Permit Sale to Domestic Tariff Area (DTA)

- Adopt the **"Duty Foregone" principle**, already used in EOU/MOOWR schemes.
- Enables SEZ products to enter the domestic market on a level playing field.

2. **Allow Sub-Contracting for Domestic Production:** Permit SEZ units to **sub-contract production for DTA use**, promoting value-chain integration.
3. **Strengthen Single Window Mechanism:** Empower **BoA and UAC** for **time-bound approvals** to reduce delays in clearances.
4. **Enhance State-Level Participation:** States should play an **active role in UACs**, grant exemptions, and facilitate labour and utility permissions locally.
5. **Allow Dual-Use Land:** Permit **partial non-SEZ use** (for DTA units and social infrastructure) to optimise utilisation of idle land.
6. **Revive Offshore Banking Units (OBUs):** Reinstate OBUs within SEZs to support trade finance and global competitiveness.
7. **Align SEZs with PLI and Industrial Corridors:** PLI incentives for SEZ-based units can **encourage manufacturing synergies** and **deepen localisation**.
8. **Rationalise Net Foreign Exchange (NFE) Norm:** Remove obsolete NFE earning obligations; focus instead on **value addition and domestic linkages**.
9. **Infrastructure Integration:** Develop **multi-modal logistics and port connectivity** to reduce transaction costs.
10. **Promote Skill Development and MSME Linkages:** Link SEZs with **district-level skill ecosystems** to generate inclusive employment.

#### Challenges in SEZ Functioning

1. **Policy Uncertainty:** Frequent amendments and unclear taxation regimes discourage long-term investments.
2. **Sunset Clause Impact:** Phasing out of tax benefits reduced investor enthusiasm.
3. **Limited Domestic Integration:** Rigid NFE norms prevent SEZ units from selling to domestic markets.
4. **Infrastructure Bottlenecks:** Many SEZs lack adequate last-mile connectivity to ports and industrial corridors.
5. **Land Utilisation Issues:** Large tracts remain unutilised due to poor planning and lack of flexibility in land use.
6. **Lack of State Ownership:** Over-centralisation limits State participation and responsiveness to local industrial needs.
7. **Global Competitiveness:** Emerging global trade blocs (ASEAN, Vietnam, Mexico) offer more attractive SEZ regimes.
8. **Weak Manufacturing Base:** Manufacturing SEZs lag behind service SEZs in export and employment potential.

#### Way Forward

1. **Comprehensive SEZ (Amendment) Policy:** Introduce a “**Development of Enterprise and Services Hub (DESH)**” framework to replace rigid SEZ boundaries and integrate with the domestic economy.
2. **Domestic Value-Chain Integration:** Create linkages between SEZs, MSMEs, and DTA industries to promote inclusive industrial ecosystems.
3. **Incentive Rationalisation:** Replace blanket exemptions with **performance-linked benefits** tied to exports, employment, and domestic value addition.
4. **State Empowerment:** Decentralise SEZ management and empower States to design region-specific incentives.
5. **Infrastructure and Connectivity Upgradation:** Link SEZs with **Gati Shakti corridors**, dedicated freight networks, and port-led logistics clusters.
6. **Sustainability and Green SEZs:** Promote **renewable energy, zero-discharge, and circular economy practices** to make SEZs environmentally compliant and globally competitive.
7. **Integrated Governance Mechanism:** Establish a **National SEZ Council** for coordination among Central, State, and local agencies to streamline clearances.
8. **Export Diversification:** Encourage high-value sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, and defence manufacturing within SEZs.

**Conclusion:** Two decades after the SEZ Act, India stands at a critical juncture. With pragmatic policy recalibrations — particularly in **DTA integration, decentralisation, and alignment with national industrial schemes** — SEZs can emerge as “**Integrated National Development Zones.**” Their revival will not only accelerate exports and employment but also strengthen India’s ambition of becoming a **\$5 trillion economy** and achieving **Viksit Bharat @2047.**

**Question:** Despite two decades of operation, India’s SEZ policy has not fully realised its transformative potential. In the context of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat @2047, critically examine the need for repositioning SEZs as Integrated National Development Zones.

## Reforming India’s Arbitration Landscape

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -Dispute Redressal Mechanisms**

### Introduction

India is trying to become a trusted seat for high-value commercial arbitration while moving carefully to protect its legal ecosystem. Courts, government, and institutions are taking steps, yet gaps persist. Momentum is visible in the growing global interest in India, the rapid scaling of domestic law firms, and clearer entry rules for foreign lawyers. At the same time, persistent frictions—such as judicial delays, inconsistent policy signals across government, and difficulties in enforcing and executing arbitral awards—continue to constrain confidence and slow India’s progress toward arbitration hub status.

### Evolution of Arbitration in India

#### Origins:

1. Arbitration ideas trace back to the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**, which refers to community dispute bodies like **puga, sreni, and kula**.
2. The formal trajectory runs through the **Arbitration Act, 1899** to the **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996**, with **2015, 2019, 2021** amendments aimed at speed and global alignment

### Foreign law firms and court line

- **2009 (Lawyers Collective, Bombay HC):** It barred foreign firms from practising in India.
- **2012 (A.K. Balaji, Madras HC):** It reaffirmed the bar and allowed **temporary foreign-law advice**.
- **2018 (SC):** It permitted “**fly-in, fly-out**” advice but **no permanent offices** without enrolment.

### Issues with Arbitration in India:

1. **Over-reliance on retired judges:** There is a tendency to appoint retired judges, assuming their judicial training is sufficient for arbitration, but this can lead to court-like delays and practices.
2. **Neglected arbitrator development:** There is a lack of focus on developing a pool of skilled arbitrators, which weakens the overall arbitration ecosystem.
3. **Growing judicial interference:** Courts frequently intervene in arbitral awards, undermining the purpose of arbitration as an alternative to the judiciary.
4. **Bias concerns:** There are concerns that government expectations for arbitrators to favor its stance can compromise impartiality, and the government sometimes prefers settlements over awards.
5. **Capacity-building challenge:** India aims to be a trusted seat for high-value disputes, which needs strong institutions, trained professionals, and efficient processes. Building and maintaining this capacity is a continuing task as volumes and complexity grow.
6. **Appeal-driven litigation:** The availability of numerous grounds for appeal encourages challenges to awards, which can lead to long and drawn-out legal battles.
7. **Limited global presence:** Indian arbitrators are often absent in international disputes without an Indian element, showing a disconnect from global arbitration networks.

### India initiative for the development of arbitration

#### 1. Bar Council of India Rules, 2025:

- Under this, foreign lawyers and foreign law firms may **register** to operate in India.
- Once registered, they may **advise on their home-country law and on international law** in India, and they may **appear in international arbitrations seated in India**.
- They are **not permitted to practise Indian law or appear in Indian courts** unless they are **formally enrolled in India**.

- The framework is **reciprocal**, so entry is allowed only if Indian lawyers receive comparable rights in the foreign jurisdiction.
- It also requires **registrations, periodic filings, and ministry certifications**, and it places a **60-day cap** on **unregistered “fly-in” work**.
- The overall **purpose** is to **open India to foreign expertise while complementing—not eclipsing—the domestic legal profession**.

2. **Commercial Courts Act, 2015:** This act, with amendments in 2018, mandates a pre-institution mediation and settlement (PIMS) mechanism for certain commercial disputes before parties can approach the courts.

3. **Mediation Act, 2023:** This standalone law for institutional mediation further strengthens the overall alternative dispute resolution (ADR) framework by encouraging out-of-court settlements.

4. **India International Arbitration Centre (IIAC):** Established under the India International Arbitration Centre Act, 2019, as a world-class, autonomous body to promote institutional arbitration and make India an arbitration hub. The IIAC conducts training, workshops, and has its own Conduct of Arbitration Regulations, 2023.

5. **Arbitration Council of India (ACI):** An autonomous body created by the 2019 amendments to oversee the grading of arbitral institutions and recognize accreditation of arbitrators.

6. **Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA):** One of India's oldest arbitral institutions, established in 1965, the ICA actively promotes arbitration through its own rules, panel of arbitrators, and training programs.

7. **Indian Arbitration Forum:** An association of practitioners focused on improving legislative standards, promoting best practices, and broadening the base of experienced arbitrators from various fields.

### Role of institutions

- MCIA's India ADR Week catalysed best-practice exchange with global counsel.
- **Indian law firms** have scaled dramatically (from 15–20 lawyers to 1,000+), gained global exposure, opened offices abroad, and now possess the capacity to benefit from calibrated openings.

### Way Forward

#### 1. Calibrated liberalisation (the “Golden Mean”)

- India should open its legal market step by step. Welcome foreign expertise, but use clear safeguards so Indian firms are not pushed aside.
- Keep **reciprocity** as the guiding rule—foreign firms get in only if Indian lawyers get similar access abroad.
- Retain basic **compliance checks** (registration, filings, time limits) so the system grows in an organized way while India steadily builds its own capacity.

## 2. Practical scope of participation

- Define a clean boundary for roles. Let foreign firms **advise on their home-country law and on international law**, and let them **appear in international arbitrations seated in India**.
- At the same time, keep **Indian law practice** and **appearances in Indian courts** limited to lawyers who are properly enrolled in India.
- This preserves opportunities for learning and collaboration without diluting control over core Indian

**3. Strengthening Arbitration:** Enhancing the arbitration process, including timely appointment of arbitrators and enforcement of awards, can make arbitration a more robust dispute resolution method.

### Question for practice:

**Q.** Examine the main concerns in India's arbitration system and propose actionable steps to make India a credible seat for high-value commercial arbitration.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Great Nicobar revives the issue of nature's legal rights

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 - Ecology and Environment And Infrastructure**

### Introduction

Great Nicobar lies in a fragile island ecosystem that is a global biodiversity hotspot and carbon reservoir. A mainland-driven mega development plan— will affect about 13,000 hectares of forest. The project is also of critical importance for defence, logistics, commerce and industries, and eco-tourism. Therefore the core issue is how to pursue development without harming the island's ecology and communities.

### About Great Nicobar Island Development Project

1. **The Great Nicobar Island Development Project** involves a comprehensive Rs 72,000-crore infrastructure upgrade on Great Nicobar Island. It is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO).

2. The Great Nicobar Island Development project includes development of following:

An International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)

A greenfield international airport

Two greenfield cities

A coastal mass rapid transport system

A free trade zone

International cruise terminal (New addition)

A ship breaking yard (New addition)

### Significance of Great Nicobar Island Development Project

- 1. Geo-strategic benefit:** Great Nicobar Island is located close to the Malacca Strait, which is the main waterway connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. The Great Nicobar Island Project aims to take advantage of this strategic position to enhance India's role in the regional and global maritime economy.
- 2. Geo-Security Concerns:** The Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region are vital for India's strategic and security interests, especially with the Chinese naval expansion. The project will strengthen India's maritime security and deterrence capabilities.
- 3. Upgradation of military infrastructure:** The Great Nicobar project also helps in the upgradation of military infrastructure by the establishment of airfields, jetties, and surveillance facilities.
- 4. Economic Boost:** The project includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), which can make Great Nicobar a significant player in cargo trans shipment. The ICTT is expected to boost economic activities in the region.
- 5. Creation of job opportunities for locals:** The Nicobar plan involves the creation of infrastructure (ports, airportsetc.). This will help in creation of job opportunities for the locals.
- 6. Tourism Development:** It helps in creation of tourism prospects in the region. This will aid the income generation in the region. The per capita income in Andaman & Nicobar Islands for the year 2015-16 was Rs. 1,24,361. This was much lower than the per-capita income of other Union Territories (Chandigarh, Delhi, and Puducherry.)
- 7. Social Benefits:** The Project would help in the creation of affordable state-of-the-art facilities for healthcare, quality education, and adequate air, sea and web infrastructure. It will also facilitate the delivery of e-governance services such as telemedicine and tele-education, as a part of the Digital India initiative.

### Major concerns related to the Great Nicobar Island Development Project

- 1. Ecological risk:** The Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a major global biodiversity hotspot and a carbon reservoir; the mega-plan will affect **13,000 hectares of pristine forests**, threatening island ecology.
- 2. Mainland-driven planning:** Development has been shaped by mainland priorities that are **far removed from island needs**, risking ecological mismatch.
- 3. Forest rights & due process:** Serious doubt whether the **Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar** was allowed to certify settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act **before** forest diversion; a report alleges **false representation** that rights were settled.
- 4. Pattern of "planned disasters":** The project echoes a wider pattern where **big multipurpose projects** proceed despite environmental law **failing to protect ecology**.

5. **Governance gap:** Without community-centred decision-making, the project risks **harming culture, religion, and environment**, as seen in conflicts like Niyamgiri (as referenced).

6. **Seismic Vulnerability:** The proposed port which is an integral part of this project, is located in a seismically volatile zone, which experienced permanent subsidence of around 15 feet during the 2004 tsunami. This raises concerns about the safety and viability of constructing such a large-scale infrastructure project in a high-risk, disaster-prone area.

7. **Undermining international obligations:** The Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary located in the Great Nicobar Island forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence the preservation of this pristine biodiversity is an International Obligation of India.

### Way Forward

1. **Apply the Niyamgiri precedent (2013):** Follow *Orissa Mining Corporation Ltd. vs Ministry of Environment & Forests & Ors.* in the **Niyamgiri Hills** case. Ensure **prior recognition and settlement of forest rights**; allow **gram sabha/Tribal Council** to exercise competence and decide after informed consultation.

2. **Center bio-cultural rights (Atrato River, Colombia, 2016):** Use the **Atrato River** judgment's idea of **bio-cultural rights** to recognise the authority of indigenous communities to autonomously protect their territories and resources.

3. **Consider rights of nature / earth jurisprudence :** Draw on the **Uttarakhand High Court's 2017 ruling** in *Mohd. Salim vs State of Uttarakhand & Others* that conferred legal personhood (though later stayed) on the **Ganga, Yamuna, Gangotri and Yamunotri**. Explore tailored **legal personhood** for key natural entities in Great Nicobar, with a designated **guardianship body** to speak for them and receive remedies.

4. **Clarify the legal design:** Before proceeding, study and define which natural entities hold rights, what rights they have, who speaks for them, and who bears responsibility to uphold those rights.

5. **Verify FRA compliance claims :** In light of the report "**Forest rights of tribal people were not settled for Nicobar project: council**" (August 23, 2025), re-examine whether **Forest Rights Act** claims were accurate **before** diverting forest land, and take corrective action if misrepresentation occurred.

6. **Learn from past "planned disasters" :** Keep in view the cautionary examples of **Tehri, Koel Karo, and Sardar Sarovar**. Do not proceed without **community-centered decision-making and strong ecological safeguards suited to island conditions**.

7. **Re-assessment of economic feasibility of the project-** The project lies equidistant (1,300 km) from established transshipment hubs and bunkering ports of Singapore, Port Klang (Malaysia) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka). Hence the economic viability of yet another transshipment terminal in Great Nicobar Island needs to be reassessed, especially since India inaugurated its own transshipment terminal in Vizhinjam in Kerala.

8. **Eco-friendly Construction:** The construction of infrastructure should be done using eco-friendly practices like strict adherence to GRIHA code for building construction.

9. **Transparency in Data and Report-** NITI Aayog and the agencies participating in planning should maintain transparency in data. The government should release the data on the rationale, the process of creation, consulted groups etc. in public domain. This will give a holistic view to critics and supporters.

## Conclusion

Protecting Great Nicobar demands settling forest rights, respecting Tribal Council authority, and adopting guardianship models that give nature a voice. Without community consent, legal clarity, and island-specific ecological limits, the project risks repeating planned disasters. Development must proceed only if it demonstrably preserves culture, biodiversity, and resilience in this uniquely fragile ecosystem.

## Question for practice:

**Q.** Discuss the key benefits and the major concerns of the Great Nicobar Island Development Project, and suggest a balanced way forward.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

## Radio reforms

**Source:** The post “**Radio reforms**” has been created, based on “**Radio reforms**” published in “Businessline” on 13th October 2025.

## UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

**Context:** While India has rapidly digitised sectors such as payments, cinema, and governance, FM broadcasting continues to operate in an analogue format. The first proposal to digitise FM radio was introduced in **2018**, but no significant progress has been made since. The **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** is now attempting to revive the process through fresh recommendations.

## Need for Digital Transformation

1. Analogue FM suffers from **poor audio quality, limited channel capacity, and outdated user interfaces.**
2. A digital transition is essential to modernise India’s radio infrastructure and align it with 21st-century communication standards.
3. Digitalisation will improve **sound clarity, signal reach, and overall user experience.**

## TRAI’s Key Recommendations

1. **Mandatory integration of digital FM chips** in all new smartphones and car radios to ensure universal receiver availability.
2. **Spectrum auctions in 13 major cities**, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, are offering **15-year licences** to winning operators.
3. Adoption of a **simulcast mode**, allowing operators to broadcast both analogue and digital content simultaneously on the same frequency.
4. Proposal for “**nil**” **bid amounts** during the first **five years**, with flexible payment mechanisms for later instalments to reduce initial cost burdens.

## Advantages of Digital FM

1. **Higher spectrum efficiency:** One digital frequency can transmit **three to four channels.**

2. **Diverse and niche content:** Enables targeted programming and **segmented advertising** for specific audiences.
3. **Revenue potential:** Expands inventory, allowing broadcasters to **charge premium rates** for differentiated content.
4. **Gradual transition:** Simulcast ensures minimal disruption during migration from analogue to digital.

### Implementation Challenges

1. The radio industry has remained **commercially stagnant**, contributing only **2% of total media ad revenue**.
2. **High transition costs**, including spectrum acquisition and equipment upgrades, deter investment.
3. **Lack of receiver devices** and **consumer inertia** limit adoption potential.
4. **Unclear profitability** in the initial rollout phase due to low digital listenership.
5. **Industry disagreement** over which digital standard to adopt – DAB+, DRM, or HD Radio.

### Global and Technical Considerations

1. Globally, multiple digital standards exist: **DAB/DAB+ (Digital Audio Broadcasting)**, **DRM (Digital Radio Mondiale)** and **HD Radio**
2. TRAI recommends **adopting a single national standard**, preferably **DRM**, as it is open, royalty-free, and cost-effective.
3. A unified standard is vital to provide **certainty for manufacturers** and to enable **single-chip receiver solutions** across devices.

### Way Forward

1. **Government decision on standardisation** is critical to prevent delays and market fragmentation.
2. **Fiscal incentives** should be offered to device manufacturers to install digital FM chips.
3. **Public awareness campaigns** can promote adoption among consumers.
4. Integration of **digital radio with Digital India and Smart Mobility initiatives** will enhance reach and relevance.
5. A **public-private partnership model** can reduce financial risks and accelerate implementation.

**Conclusion:** Digital FM broadcasting represents a necessary evolution for India's communication landscape. It promises **better sound quality**, **efficient spectrum use**, and **diverse content opportunities**. With TRAI's roadmap and strong policy intent, **decisive government action and industry collaboration** are now needed. The shift to digital FM is **long overdue** and deserves a **national push**.

**Question:** Discuss the significance of digitising FM radio in India and highlight the key challenges in its implementation.

### Reforming Public Service Recruitment Exams in India

**Source:** The post "**Reforming Public Service Recruitment Exams in India**" has been created, based on "**To mend a broken system**" published in "Indian Express" on 13th October 2025.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance**

**Context:** Trust is the bedrock of a functioning democracy. A society's faith in its institutions, especially recruitment systems, ensures accountability, meritocracy, and stability. However, recurring examination scams across states have eroded this trust, endangering both administrative integrity and public confidence.

## Background

In recent years, multiple recruitment scandals have surfaced:

- **Punjab (2021):** Paper leaks in the **Punjab Public Service Commission (PPSC)** revealed systemic failures.
- **Uttar Pradesh & West Bengal:** Widespread examination malpractices showing favouritism over merit.
- **Uttarakhand:** Staff Selection Commission's junior-level recruitment scam involved allegations of paper leaks and corruption, leading to a **CBI inquiry**.

These incidents highlight a persistent pattern where merit is compromised, transparency is lacking, and accountability is absent.

## Issues and Challenges

1. **Erosion of Public Trust:** Repeated examination scandals have severely eroded citizens' confidence in the merit-based recruitment system, weakening faith in the fairness and integrity of public institutions.
2. **Politicisation of Commissions:** Appointments to Public Service Commissions (PSCs) are often influenced by political considerations rather than competence and integrity, which compromises the impartiality and professionalism of these institutions.
3. **Systemic Vulnerabilities:** The recruitment process suffers from structural weaknesses such as insecure question-paper handling, inadequate digital safeguards, and the absence of encrypted delivery systems, making it prone to leaks and manipulation.
4. **Lack of Transparency:** There is minimal public disclosure of exam syllabi, evaluation methodologies, and performance statistics, resulting in opacity and suspicion among candidates regarding the fairness and consistency of the recruitment process.
5. **Inadequate Legal Framework:** Existing laws dealing with examination malpractices are often outdated or weak, failing to provide stringent punishment or timely judicial intervention, which allows offenders to escape accountability.
6. **Poor Accountability Mechanisms:** Officials responsible for lapses or irregularities in recruitment processes are rarely held accountable, resulting in a culture of impunity and recurring administrative failures.
7. **Autonomy without Oversight:** While PSCs enjoy significant constitutional autonomy and privileges, there is a lack of robust external oversight or citizen scrutiny, leading to misuse of authority and limited transparency in decision-making.

## Consequences

1. **Disillusionment among youth:** Honest and hardworking candidates who prepare rigorously for years lose faith in the system when merit is compromised, leading to widespread frustration and disillusionment.
2. **Financial and emotional distress:** Candidates often face severe financial losses and emotional exhaustion due to repeated exam cancellations, delays, and uncertainty caused by malpractices.

3. **Social unrest and protests:** The perception of injustice and favouritism in recruitment has triggered public protests, reflecting the deep sense of betrayal among the aspirant community and eroding public order.
4. **Administrative inefficiency:** The selection of undeserving candidates undermines the efficiency and credibility of the bureaucracy, as capable individuals are sidelined, leading to long-term governance deficits.

### Measures and Way Forward

#### 1. Technological Overhaul

- a. **Biometric identification & unique candidate IDs** to prevent impersonation.
- b. **Encrypted digital question-paper delivery systems** to prevent leaks.
- c. **Transparent online evaluation systems** publish syllabus, marking scheme, and anonymised results.
- d. **Real-time monitoring dashboards** for accountability at each recruitment stage.

#### 2. Legal and Institutional Strengthening

- a. **Fast-track courts** for exam fraud to ensure swift justice.
- b. **Strengthening laws** governing exam malpractices—Uttarakhand model cited as one of the strictest (2022).
- c. **Setting up an independent regulatory authority** to audit, review, and monitor recruitment processes across states.
- d. **Empowerment of the UPSC or the central oversight body** to ensure uniform standards and integrity.

#### 3. Governance and Accountability Reforms

- a. **Transparent appointment process** for PSC members with public disclosure of selection criteria.
- b. **Performance audit of commissions** through annual reports and external review panels.
- c. **Accountability mechanism** holding officials liable for recruitment failures.
- d. **Citizen representation and watchdog engagement** in oversight committees to enhance credibility.

#### 4. Collaborative Mechanisms

- a. **Inter-agency coordination** between governments and civil society for monitoring.
- b. **Review panels and grievance redressal cells** for complaints and appeals.
- c. **Public dashboards** showcasing recruitment timelines, pending cases, and disposal rates.

**Conclusion:** A robust and transparent recruitment system is a constitutional necessity for an inclusive and merit-driven India. Technology, legal reforms, and participatory oversight together can rebuild trust.

**Question:** Recurring examination scams across states have eroded public trust in merit-based recruitment, undermining administrative integrity and democratic legitimacy. Analyse the causes and suggest reforms to ensure transparency and accountability in public recruitment.

### A green transition accelerating at express speed

#### Introduction

Indian Railways' green transition is **accelerating from pilots to platform-level change**. The July 2025 hydrogen-coach trial, near-universal electrification, and rapid renewable integration signal a shift to cleaner traction, efficient assets, and freight rebalancing. Backed by sovereign green bonds, IRFC financing, and multilateral support, the programme targets net-zero by 2030. The agenda spans infrastructure, operations,

and finance, with system-wide implications for emissions, logistics costs, and **India's broader "Panchamrit" climate commitments.**

### Initiatives taken for Indian Railways' green transition

#### A) Infrastructure & operations initiatives

- 1. Near-universal electrification:** In the last decade, Indian Railways has electrified about **45,000 km** of track, and **over 98%** of the broad-gauge network is now electrified, which sharply reduces diesel use and emissions.
- 2. Renewables on the system:** The Railways has commissioned **756 MW** of renewable capacity (**553 MW solar, 103 MW wind, and 100 MW hybrid**), and **more than 2,000 stations and service buildings** now operate on solar power.
- 3. Energy-efficient buildings:** Several railway buildings, including in the **Northeast Frontier zone**, have earned the **BEE "Shunya" (net-zero)** label, showing improved energy performance.
- 4. Clean traction innovation:** In **July 2025**, the Railways successfully tested a **hydrogen-powered coach** at the Integral Coach Factory, as part of the **"Hydrogen for Heritage"** plan that aims to **deploy 35 such units**.
- 5. Freight shift to rail:** The Railways is working to **raise freight's rail modal share to 45% by 2030**. The **Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs)** are already operational and are **expected to avoid 457 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over 30 years**.
- 6. Other greening measures:** The Railways is introducing **biofuel blends**, applying **green building standards**, and **redesigning infrastructure, operations, and processes** to lower energy consumption.
- 7. Mission 41K (2017):** The Ministry of Railways launched Mission 41K to save ₹41,000 crore in energy costs over a decade by accelerating electrification, expanding renewable energy use, and improving efficiency through energy-efficient locomotives and LED lighting.

#### B) Finance & institutions initiatives

- 1. Sovereign Green Bonds:** Since **FY2023**, the government has issued **₹58,000 crore** in sovereign green bonds, of which **about ₹42,000 crore** has been allocated to **electric locomotive procurement** and **metro/suburban rail expansion**, integrating climate goals into core capital spending.
- 2. IRFC's green financing role:** The **Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC)** began with a **\$500 million green bond in 2017** to refinance the procurement of **electric locomotives**, and most recently it **extended a ₹7,500 crore loan to NTPC Green Energy** to develop additional renewable power capacity, demonstrating cross-sector low-carbon financing.
- 3. Multilateral support:** In **June 2022**, the **World Bank** approved a **\$245 million** loan for the **Rail Logistics Project**, which supports better rail freight infrastructure, reduces corridor congestion, and **lowers greenhouse gas emissions**.

### Impact of Indian Railways' green transition

**1. Alignment with India's "Panchamrit" goals :** A larger rail share powered by clean electricity advances India's COP26 "Panchamrit" targets: **500 GW non-fossil capacity, 50% electricity from renewables by 2030, 1-billion-ton CO<sub>2</sub> reduction by 2030, ≤45% emissions-intensity cut by 2030, and net-zero by 2070.** Rail is a major, durable demand anchor for clean power.

**2. Lower logistics cost:** A greener rail system **lowers logistics costs**; this directly **improves India's export competitiveness**. At the same time, Dedicated Freight Corridors **attract industries to set up near rail nodes, creating regional manufacturing and logistics clusters**.

**3. Fuel savings:** Electrification and efficiency measures can **save over ₹1 lakh crore cumulatively by 2030, easing fiscal pressure**.

**4. Macro co-benefit: shifting trips away from the dirtiest mode share:** With **road transport responsible for the bulk of transport CO<sub>2</sub> in India**, every sustained percentage-point shift of passenger and freight demand to rail bends the national emissions curve and reduces externalities (air pollution, congestion, accidents).

### Way forward

**1. Electrification with truly green power:** Directly procure large-volume solar/wind via long-term contracts (PPAs) so traction demand is met by renewables, not a coal-heavy grid..

### 2. Green last-mile, passenger & freight

- Major stations should be redesigned as multi-modal green hubs that integrate electric buses, bicycle-sharing, and safe, pedestrian-first access.
- For freight, the first and last mile should use cleaner options such as electric trucks, LNG vehicles, and emerging hydrogen mobility so that rail's low-carbon advantage is not lost at the edges.

### 3. Accelerate rolling-stock & efficiency innovation

- **Pilot hydrogen fuel-cell trains on non-electrified branch/heritage lines** where full electrification is uneconomic.
- Adopt **lightweight coaches, aerodynamic locomotive designs, and AI-driven energy optimisation** to lower traction energy.

**4. Data transparency:** The Railways should publish route-level energy use, emissions factors, and savings through robust measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV). **Open dashboards and third-party audits will build credibility, enable better planning, and help attract green finance.**

### 5. Financing & value capture for green expansion:

Rail projects should use **land-value capture around stations, station redevelopment revenues, and blended finance** (sovereign green bonds, multilateral lines, and private capital) **to fund electrification, renewables, and network upgrades**. Clear green-taxonomy criteria and performance-linked financing can lower cost of capital and speed deployment.

**6. Behavioural change:** Introduce **green certification for trains, carbon labelling for freight services**, and **public awareness** campaigns so users actively choose low-carbon options.

**Question for practice:**

**Discuss** the key initiatives driving Indian Railways' green transition and outline the way forward to ensure truly green traction power.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### Emerging Challenges to RTI Act

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -Governance**

#### Introduction

Right to Information transforms subjects into citizens by opening the state to scrutiny. In October, as the RTI Act turned 20, Beawar—"RTI City"—marked 30 years of grassroots struggle with a memorial, museum, and RTI Mela. Yet the Digital Personal Data Protection Act's amendments, alongside institutional and judicial trends, now risk hollowing RTI's accountability power, making renewed safeguards and public vigilance essential.

#### About Right to Information

**Right to Information:** The right to information is the right which ensures that the public become 'citizens' rather than becoming 'subjects' in a democratic state, by having unhindered access to the flow of information regarding the functioning of the different arms of the government- legislature, executive and judiciary.

#### Recognition in International Law-

**a. Recognised as Foundational Principle of UN:** The United Nations (UN) recognised this right from the start, in 1946. The General Assembly resolved that Freedom of Information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone for all freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated.

**b. Recognition in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:** The right to Information was made a legally binding obligation after its affirmation in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As a result, the right to access information has been firmly **enshrined in international human rights law**.

#### Recognition of Right to Information in India

- **Constitutional recognition:** The Right to information has not been mentioned explicitly as a fundamental right in the constitution. SC has held Right to Information (RTI) to be a derivative of Article 19 (1) (a) which grants the freedom of speech and expression. RTI is also linked to the Indian constitution's Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21).

- **Legislative Recognition:** The RTI movement by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), and judicial emphasis on RTI, compelled the Parliament to enact the Right to Information Act in 2005.

- RTI Act 2005 aims to provide a practical regime for citizens to obtain information from public authorities, as well as to promote transparency and accountability in the work of all public authorities.

## Emerging challenges to RTI act in India

### A. Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) Restrict Access

1. **Blanket “personal information” shield:** Section 44(3) of the DPDPA alters Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act so broadly that authorities can now refuse disclosure by labeling even information linked to public functions as “personal information.”
2. **End of the citizen–Parliament parity proviso:** By deleting the proviso that “information which cannot be denied to Parliament cannot be denied to a citizen,” the amendment weakens the principle that ordinary citizens enjoy parity of access with their elected representatives.
3. **State-centric discretion:** Although Section 8(2) retains a public-interest override, the power to apply it rests with the public authority, which means citizens cannot require disclosure even when the public interest is compelling.
4. **No names, no accountability:** When names of officials, contractors, or decision-makers are withheld, citizens lose the ability to trace responsibility for actions or omissions, undermining efforts to expose corruption and maladministration.
5. **Chilling effect of penalties:** The DPDPA’s very high financial penalties—reportedly up to ₹250 crore—and its consent-first approach are likely to deter journalists, researchers, and RTI users from sharing or publishing information even when disclosure serves the public interest.

### B. RTI Amendment, 2019- Affect Independence

1. **Govt control over tenure & pay:** The 2019 law lets the Central Government set the tenure, salary and service conditions of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) by rules, instead of the earlier fixed safeguards.
2. **Shorter, variable tenure in rules:** The 2019 RTI Rules fixed a shorter 3-year term for many commissioners and gave the Centre broad interpretive powers, raising fears of influence and uncertainty.
3. **Status downgraded in effect:** By delinking salaries/tenure from constitutional benchmarks (like Election Commissioners), commissioners risk being seen as less autonomous.

### C. Judicial interpretations narrowing RTI

1. In **2011**, the **Supreme Court ruled in *CBSE vs Aditya Bandopadhyay*** that RTI should not burden the administration. It said indiscriminate RTI requests could slow governance. This decision discouraged information sharing and painted RTI users as troublemakers.
2. In **2012**, the **Supreme Court ruled in *Girish Ramchandra Deshpande vs CIC*** that personal information could be denied under **Section 8(1)(j)** of the RTI Act. The Court ignored the part of the law that required officials to prove why the information should be denied. This ruling became a precedent, making it easier to reject RTI requests.

### Way forward

1. **Re-affirmation of the right to information as a cardinal virtue of democracy:** The SC through its verdicts, like in the case of electoral bonds, must re-affirm the right of information as a cardinal virtue of democracy.
2. **Making the information available in local languages:** The information associated with the RTI Act and its functioning must be made available in the local language, considering the diverse nature of our country.
3. **Education about the right:** Education about the right to know should be made mandatory at the school level in our new education policy to develop a sense of responsibility and vigilant citizenship in the forthcoming generation.
4. **Making RTI applicable on Political parties:** The parliament must bring the Political parties under the ambit of RTI to ensure proper functioning of the Great Indian democracy.
5. **Code of Conduct:** A code of conduct must be evolved for the Central and State Information Commissioners. It is imperative for the commissioners to keep a strict distance from government heads and officialdom.
6. The **Supreme Court's guidelines in *DDA vs Skipper Construction (P) Ltd* should be followed** in letter and spirit. The SC ruled that (a) High Courts must resist the temptation to exercise their writ jurisdiction in order to correct errors made by the SICs/CICs; (b) If the High Court quashes a CIC/SIC order, it must categorically find that the order was without jurisdiction or palpably erroneous.
7. **Institutionalise participatory law-making:** Before any change affecting transparency, run time-bound public consultations with users, media bodies, academics, and civil society; publish the summary of feedback and a regulatory impact note.
8. **Scale the Beawar model of public culture:** Replicate the Beawar **RTI Museum** and annual **RTI Mela** through state/district cultural budgets to celebrate real cases, teach filing skills, and keep the transparency movement alive at the grassroots.

For detailed information on **Right to Information Act** [read this article here](#)

#### Question for practice:

Examine the emerging challenges to the Right to Information in India in light of the DPDPA, the 2019 RTI amendments, and key Supreme Court rulings.

Sources: [Indian Express](#)

### All ethical expectations cannot become a Constitutional mandate

**Source:** The post “All ethical expectations cannot become Constitutional mandates” has been created, based on “All ethical expectations cannot become Constitutional mandates” published in “The Hindu” on 14th October 2025.

#### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Indian Constitution- Significant Provisions

**Context:** The **130th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2025** proposes that the **Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, or Ministers** must resign if arrested and detained for **30 consecutive days** on charges punishable with imprisonment of five years or more. While the intent is to promote **integrity in public life**, it raises serious

questions about **constitutional morality**, **presumption of innocence**, and the **balance of powers** within the Westminster parliamentary system.

### Constitutional Context

- **Article 75(1)** and **Article 164(1)** provide that Ministers hold office **during the pleasure of the President or Governor**, acting on the **advice of the Prime Minister or Chief Minister**.
- In **Manoj Narula v. Union of India (2014)**, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that **appointment or removal of Ministers** is a matter of **political discretion**, not judicial or constitutional compulsion.
- Hence, mandatory resignation upon detention undermines the **political accountability framework envisioned by the Constitution**.

### Ethical Intent vs. Constitutional Overreach

- The Bill converts **ethical expectations** into **legal obligations**, eroding the distinction between **moral accountability** and **constitutional disqualification**.
- As **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** warned in the Constituent Assembly (1948), ethical ideals must not be mechanically translated into constitutional commands, lest the Constitution lose its flexibility.
- Parliamentary democracy relies on **public judgment** and **legislative scrutiny**, not automatic legal consequences for political morality.

### Major Concerns

- **Presumption of Innocence:** Detention without conviction cannot justify disqualification; it presumes guilt before trial.
- **Separation of Powers:** Empowers **investigating agencies** to indirectly unseat Ministers, risking **politicisation of law enforcement**.
- **Undermines Legislative Supremacy:** Transfers power from the **legislature** to **executive or judicial agencies**, disturbing democratic accountability.
- **Procedural Overreach:** Converts moral judgment into a **mechanical rule**, weakening the discretion essential to parliamentary governance.

### Impact on the Westminster Model

- The Westminster model emphasises **collective responsibility** and **political morality judged by the electorate**.
- By mandating disqualification based on detention, the Bill **disrupts constitutional balance** and converts **political confidence** into a **procedural test**.
- It risks turning **constitutional morality** into **moral legalism**, thereby weakening democratic deliberation.

### Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Political Accountability Mechanisms:** Political parties should adopt **internal codes of ethics** ensuring that Ministers facing serious charges voluntarily step aside, rather than through compulsion.
2. **Judicial Safeguards:** Any restriction on holding office should arise **only after conviction**, ensuring alignment with the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** and **Article 102**.

3. **Reinforce Institutional Independence:** Ensure **autonomy of investigative agencies** to prevent misuse of detention as a political weapon.
4. **Public Transparency and Scrutiny:** Encourage **mandatory disclosure of criminal proceedings** and empower the public and media to hold leaders accountable through informed debate.
5. **Constitutional Prudence:** Reforms should preserve the **spirit of parliamentary democracy**, emphasising **political ethics through persuasion and convention**, not through rigid constitutional compulsion.

**Conclusion:** The 130th Amendment Bill's intent to uphold integrity is laudable, but its design risks undermining the **presumption of innocence**, the **separation of powers**, and **democratic accountability**. Ethical governance cannot be legislated into existence through constitutional mandates. In a true democracy, **political morality must be enforced by public conscience and political responsibility**, not by legal coercion.

**Question:** All ethical expectations cannot become Constitutional mandates. Discuss in the context of the 130th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2025.

### Estimating India's potential growth rate

**Source:** The post "Estimating India's potential growth rate" has been created, based on "Estimating India's potential growth rate" published in "The Hindu" on 14th October 2025.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

**Context:** The potential growth rate represents the **maximum rate of economic expansion** that an economy can sustain without generating inflationary pressures. For India, it has traditionally been estimated around **6.5%**, though recent data suggests it may currently be higher at **7–7.8%**, based on the first quarter GDP performance for 2025–26.

#### Recent Growth Performance

- The **first quarter real GDP growth** of 2025–26 is estimated at **7.8%**, compared to an average of **9.9%** between 2022–23 and 2024–25 (post-COVID recovery years).
- Average real GDP growth for the last three years stood at **7.6%, 9.2%, and 6.5%**, respectively.
- On the output side, **real GVA growth** for Q1 of 2025–26 was **7.6%**, lower than the 9.5% average for the previous three years.
- Growth was driven largely by **manufacturing and services** (especially transport, trade, and finance).

#### Potential Growth and ICOR Relationship

- The **Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR)** is crucial in determining potential growth.
- Real **GFCF** averaged **33.5%** of GDP between 2022–23 and 2024–25.
- Assuming an **ICOR of 5.2**, potential growth stands at around **6.5%**.
- Therefore, maintaining or raising potential growth requires **higher GFCF** or **lower ICOR** (more efficient investment).

#### Trends in Capital Formation and Investment

- The **Gross Fixed Capital Formation Rate (GFCFR)** in Q1 2025–26 was **34.6%**, marginally above the recent three-year average.
- **Public sector investment has risen**, especially in infrastructure, but **private investment remains tepid**.
- The **public sector's share** in total GFCF has risen from **21.6% in 2021–22 to 25.1% in 2023–24**, while **private investment slowed down**.
- Sustained growth needs a **revival of private capital formation**, supported by conducive policies.

#### Policy Implications of a 6.5% Potential Growth Rate

- A **6.5% potential growth rate** may seem modest, but it remains realistic under present global conditions.
- To lift potential growth above 6.5%, India must:
  - Raise **GFCFR** by at least **2 percentage points**.
  - Increase **corporate sector share in total investment** from **37% to 34.4%** (2021–24) levels.
  - Ensure **efficient use of capital** (reducing ICOR).

#### Prospects and Influencing Factors

##### Positive Influences:

- **Technological innovations** such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **Gen AI** can raise productivity and reduce ICOR.
- Continued **public investment in infrastructure** enhances supply-side potential.
- **Structural reforms in logistics, energy, and manufacturing** may boost long-term capacity.

##### Negative Influences:

- Rising **capital intensity** and rapid technological changes may cause **jobless growth**.
- **Tariffs and supply chain uncertainties** could constrain exports.
- **Global slowdown** and **geopolitical tensions** may depress external demand.

#### Challenges

1. **Weak Private Investment Sentiment:** Private firms remain cautious due to policy uncertainty, cost of capital, and global demand slowdown.
2. **High ICOR (Low Investment Efficiency):** Inefficient use of capital leads to lower returns on investment, limiting productivity growth.
3. **Slowing Global Demand and Export Weakness:** Net exports contributed only –0.4% to growth in Q1 2025–26. Global supply chain disruptions and tariff uncertainties persist.
4. **Overreliance on Public Investment:** Excessive dependence on government capital spending risks crowding out private investment.
5. **Technological Displacement:** AI and automation may reduce employment elasticity, making growth less inclusive.
6. **Structural Bottlenecks:** Land acquisition hurdles, regulatory delays, and inadequate infrastructure impede investment cycles.
7. **Macroeconomic Risks:** Persistent fiscal deficits, inflationary pressures, and geopolitical uncertainties constrain policy flexibility.

## Way Forward

1. **Boost Private Investment:** Strengthen investor confidence through regulatory stability, faster project clearances, and credit access.
2. **Enhance Capital Efficiency:** Focus on productivity-enhancing investments in manufacturing, digital infrastructure, and R&D to lower ICOR.
3. **Balanced Public Investment:** Maintain public spending on infrastructure while catalysing private sector participation through PPP models.
4. **Export Diversification:** Reduce dependence on select markets; expand trade partnerships and improve global competitiveness.
5. **Macroeconomic Stability:** Maintain inflation control and fiscal prudence to ensure sustainable capital formation.

**Conclusion:** India's **potential growth rate** currently hovers around **6.5%**, with possibilities of rising to **7%** if investment efficiency improves. While the post-pandemic recovery has been robust, sustaining higher growth requires **reviving private investment, improving productivity, and strengthening capital efficiency.** Achieving this balance will ensure **inclusive, non-inflationary, and sustainable long-term growth.**

**Question:** What is India's potential growth rate and what factors influence it? Discuss with reference to recent trends in GVA and investment.

## A Green Advantage in Tractor Exports

### Introduction

**Lowering GST on tractors to 5%** cuts costs, speeds mechanisation, and strengthens the home base for exports. At the same time, **rich-country emission rules are tightening fast.** India now faces a clear choice: stay only **low-cost**, or **move up to cleaner, higher-value tractors** that meet global norms and win premium markets.

### Overview of the tractor market

- India is a leading supplier, with **\$1.15 billion in tractor exports to 162 countries in 2024–25.**
- **India tractor market** is projected to witness a 5.97% CAGR (FY2026–FY2033F), from USD 11.41 billion (FY2025) to USD 18.15 billion (FY2033F)

### Reasons behind the momentum

1. **Policy push and cost alignment:** The **GST cut to 5%** lowers ownership costs. A strong home market supports scale for exports. Reliability and affordability also lift sales in places without emission norms, including Bangladesh, South Africa, and Thailand.

### 2. Regulatory alignment as a trade lever

- India jumped to **Bharat Stage (TREM) IV in 2023**, cutting particulate limits by **up to 94%** and narrowing gaps with the U.S. and EU.

- **TREM V by April 2026** will align most tractors with **U.S. Tier 4f/EU Stage V**. Alignment lets firms sell common models at home and abroad and enables scale.

### 3. Early signals in key destinations

- **United States:** Overall tractor exports declined by **40% in 2023–24** and **10% in 2024–25**. However, exports in the **75–130 kW** category—where India's and U.S. standards align—**increased** during this period.
- **Europe (Belgium):** Following the rollout of **TREM IV**, exports jumped sharply. Shipments of **37–75 kW** tractors in **2023–24** were **nearly 200 times** those in **2022–23**, and **large-segment** exports reached **\$28 million in 2024–25**.
- **Brazil:** Because Indian models already met **MAR-I (2017/2019)**, exports rose from **\$4.5 million in 2017–18** to **\$88 million in 2024–25**, implying a **~65% CAGR**.

### 4. Technology development

- **Precision tools** like **GPS guidance and telematics** are spreading, improving efficiency and reducing downtime.
- **Digital platforms** for sales, service, and support make ownership easier.
- **Electric and hybrid models** are emerging, while rental and leasing expand access.
- **Platform standardisation** helps manufacturers share components and speed compliant upgrades.

### 5. Rising domestic demand

- **Mechanisation needs** are growing across crops and terrains. Farmers want timely field operations, especially in monsoon-dependent regions, to protect yield and food security. **This steady on-farm demand supports scale and product upgrades.**
- **Rising farmer incomes** are improving willingness to invest in better machines. **Compact models and higher-horsepower options** both see interest as users match machines to field size and tasks.

### Major Concerns

1. **Emissions externality:** **International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT)** projects emissions from tractors and other non-road equipment in India could **surpass road vehicles by 2030**.
2. **Protectionism and positioning:** **Rising U.S. tariffs** strain a pure low-cost strategy. Staying only low-cost risks missing premium, regulated segments in the U.S./EU.
3. **Compliance & transition risks:** Upgrading to cleaner tech requires investment, certification capacity, and supply-chain readiness; delays could erode market access.
4. **Affordability and access constraints:** Small and fragmented landholdings limit the practicality of larger machines. **High-interest financing** and upfront costs make purchases difficult for small and marginal farmers. Ownership and upkeep expenses can strain cash flows.

5. **Environment degradation:** Heavy machines can cause **soil compaction** and increase fuel use, adding to environmental costs

#### Way forward

1. **Advance regulatory alignment:** Ensure the move to **TREM V** to smooth entry into **Europe and the U.S.** while extending leadership in emerging markets.

2. **Move up the value chain:** Prioritise **medium/large segments** where alignment already helps; keep serving price-sensitive markets with reliable, efficient models.

3. **Targeted incentives for clean tech:** Use **GST relief** and **focused incentives for electric/cleaner-technology tractors** to accelerate adoption and scale.

4. **Build certification and R&D depth:** Strengthen testing, compliance, and design capabilities to reduce transition costs and speed market entry.

5. **Evidence-led export plan:** Track destination-wise outcomes (U.S., Europe, Brazil, and non-norm markets) and continually align product mixes with evolving standards.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

### Banks and ECL norms

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Indian economy.

#### Introduction

RBI has proposed a shift to a forward-looking **Expected Credit Loss (ECL)** regime for banks and financial institutions from **April 1, 2027**. Draft Directions issued on **October 7** align asset classification, provisioning, and income recognition with **Ind AS 109**. The move keeps the **90-day NPA** trigger, introduces model-based loss estimates, and offers a phased capital cushion till **March 31, 2031**. The aim is earlier recognition of stress, stronger risk management, and better comparability across institutions.

#### Expected Credit Loss framework

1. ECL asks banks to estimate losses **before** loans turn bad. Banks forecast expected cash shortfalls using **Probability of Default (PD)**, **Loss Given Default (LGD)**, and **Exposure at Default (EAD)**. 2. A credit loss equals the gap between **contractual cash flows due** and **cash flows expected to be received**. This is a shift from recognising losses only after default.

#### 3. Three-stage approach and SICR

- Assets move through **Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3** based on credit quality at initial recognition and at each reporting date.
- **Lifetime ECL** is recognised when there is a **Significant Increase in Credit Risk (SICR)** since initial recognition.

- This promotes **early provisioning** when risk rises, not only when default occurs.

## Key features of RBI's draft guidelines on ECL

### 1. Scope and timeline

- Applies to **Scheduled Commercial Banks** (excluding **Small Finance Banks, Payment Banks, Regional Rural Banks**) and **All India Financial Institutions**.
- Effective from **April 1, 2027**.
- A **glide path till March 31, 2031** will smooth any one-time increase in provisioning.

### 2. Asset classification rules

Asset type	Time	Rule (what to check)
<b>Term loans; bills purchased &amp; discounted; OD/CC</b>	<b>&gt; 90 days</b> overdue	Classify as <b>NPA</b> if <b>interest and/or principal</b> remains <b>continuously overdue</b> for <b>more than 90 days</b> .
<b>Credit cards</b>	<b>&gt; 90 days</b> from statement due date	If <b>minimum amount due</b> remains <b>unpaid within 90 days</b> from the <b>payment due date</b> on the statement → <b>NPA</b> .
<b>Agricultural loans</b>	<b>Crop-season based</b>	Classification and provisioning <b>as per crop-season duration</b> .
<b>NPA categories</b>	<b>Time category</b> in	Once NPA, classify as <b>Sub-standard, Doubtful, or Loss, based on period</b> the asset remains in that category.

### 3. Model governance and prudential floors

- If a bank **cannot** estimate LGD reliably from its own data, it must use **regulatory backstops** (minimum LGD values): **65%** for **secured** exposures and **70%** for **unsecured** exposures.
- Provisioning will use **12-month ECL** or **lifetime ECL** depending on the **stage**, with **prudential floors** to ensure **minimum buffers** across asset classes.

### 4. Capital transition and CET1 add-back

- If, at transition, the ECL required (as on April 1, 2027, based on March 31, 2027 figures) exceeds provisions held under current norms, the difference (transitional adjustment amount) may be added back to CET1 capital up to March 31, 2031;
- Banks may choose a **shorter** transition..

## 5. Broader regulatory alignment (related measures)

- From **April 1, 2027**, revised **Basel III capital adequacy norms** will apply to eligible commercial banks.
- A **draft Standardised Approach for Credit Risk** will be issued. It proposes **lower risk weights** for **MSMEs** and **residential real estate**, which can **reduce capital needs**.
- **Risk-based deposit insurance premiums** are proposed, with the **current flat rate as the ceiling**, to **reward sound risk management**.
- **IRDAI** is expected to issue **similar guidelines** for insurers, signalling **system-wide convergence**.

Stage	Norms	Rule (guidelines; pointers)	Time/Rates
<b>Stage 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No <b>Significant Increase in Credit Risk (SICR)</b> since initial recognition.</li> <li>• Use <b>PD-LGD-EAD</b> model; credit loss = PV of <b>due cash flows</b> – <b>expected cash flows</b>.</li> <li>• <b>LGD backstops</b> apply if bank cannot estimate reliably.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep in Stage 1 if credit quality broadly unchanged.</li> <li>• Assess at each reporting date using forward-looking data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>12-month ECL provisions</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Provisioning floors</b>:  <b>0.40%</b> general floor.  <b>0.25%</b> for <b>small &amp; micro enterprises</b>.  <b>1%</b> for <b>unsecured retail</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SICR</b> since initial recognition (risk has risen).</li> <li>• <b>30+ days past due</b> is a <b>presumption</b> of SICR; <b>rebuttal allowed</b> with evidence.</li> <li>• <b>PD-LGD-EAD</b> with governance; <b>LGD backstops</b> available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move to Stage 2 when SICR is observed (including 30+ Days Past Due presumption).</li> <li>• If improving after irregularities, remain <b>at least 6 months</b> before any move to Stage 1.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lifetime ECL provisions</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Provisioning floors</b>:  <b>5%</b> general floor.  <b>1.5%</b> for <b>home loans, loans against property, gold loans</b>.</li> </ul>

<b>Stage 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Credit-impaired</b> assets (aligns with NPA condition).</li> <li>• PD-LGD-EAD; apply <b>LGD backstops</b> if needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classify as Stage 3 when credit-impaired.</li> <li>• <b>Upgrade path:</b> Stage 3 → Stage 2 <b>only after all irregularities are rectified</b>; then <b>stay in Stage 2 for ≥6 months</b> before eligible for Stage 1.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lifetime ECL provisions</b></li> <li>• <b>Provisioning:</b> “in line with current NPA norms.”</li> <li>• <b>LGD floors (backstops)</b> if not reliably estimated:</li> <li>• <b>65%</b> for <b>secured</b> exposures.</li> <li>• <b>70%</b> for <b>unsecured</b> exposures.</li> </ul>
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Table : ECL Staging &amp; Provisioning (Draft RBI Directions)

**Impact of ECL****Positive:**

1. **Earlier recognition and stronger buffers:** Early detection of stress through **SICR** and staging leads to **timely provisioning** and **cleaner books**. **Prudential floors** and **LGD backstops** add consistency and resilience.
2. **Comparability and alignment with Ind AS:** Alignment with **Ind AS 109** improves **comparability** across institutions and brings banks close to the standard already adopted by **India Inc**. Reporting becomes more **risk-sensitive** and transparent.
3. **Orderly transition and credit flow stability:** The **CET1 add-back** and **glide path to FY31** **smooth** the one-time capital impact. This reduces the risk of abrupt **credit tightening** as banks adapt to higher upfront provisioning.
4. **Ecosystem readiness and spillover benefits:** Branch-level provisioning and upgraded **CBS/MIS** improve **data quality** and **risk analytics**. **Auditor upskilling** supports better assurance.

**Negative / Challenges:**

1. **Initial capital and provisioning strain:** There can be a **one-time rise** in provisions at transition. Some banks may face **capital pressure** despite the CET1 add-back window.
2. **Model risk and operational load:** ECL needs **robust models**, **quality data**, and **governance**. Weak models or data gaps create **estimation risk**. Upgrading **systems**, training **branches**, and **auditor** reorientation add **operational burden**.
3. **Execution complexity :** Under ECL, **each branch must compute provisions for its own loan accounts** using expected cash-flow estimates. This **account-level calculation at every branch** adds operational load and requires **standardised methods, consistent assumptions, clean data, and strict controls** so results are

**uniform across the network.** Coordination with head office systems and reviews is essential to keep calculations consistent.

### Conclusion

From April 1, 2027, the ECL regime—using staging/SICR, prudential floors, and LGD backstops—will drive earlier and consistent provisioning. A CET1 add-back until March 31, 2031 will smooth the transition. Banks must upgrade CBS/MIS, enable branch-level execution, and upskill auditors. Related measures, including revised Basel III norms, will strengthen system-wide resilience

Source - [TH Business Line](#)

### Wage Trends: A Complex Picture

**Source:** The post “Wage Trends: A Complex Picture” has been created, based on “Wage Trends: A Complex Picture” published in “Business Line” on 15th October 2025.

### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Indian Economy

**Context:** Global wage growth continues to lag behind GDP growth, even though recent data indicates that **wage inequality has declined across most regions**. According to the **International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) Global Wage Report 2024–25**, global wage patterns are showing both progress and persistent challenges. The report finds that, contrary to widespread perception, **wage inequality has actually been decreasing worldwide** since the early 2000s, with **China playing a dominant role** in this positive shift.

### Findings of the ILO Global Wage Report 2024–25

1. The ILO study is based on **hourly wage data** from **82 countries**, covering around **76% of the world’s wage employees**.
2. It analyses both **average wage trends** and **wage distribution** across regions and genders.
3. The findings reveal that **wage inequality has declined** globally since 2006, though **regional variations persist**.
4. Despite this, **real wage growth remains slower than GDP growth**, indicating that **workers’ income shares are shrinking** in national economies.

### The Growth–Wage Gap

1. **Real GDP growth** has consistently outpaced **real wage growth** between **1999 and 2024**.
2. The report highlights that **labour productivity in high-income countries** increased by **29%**, while **real wages rose only by 15%** during this period.
3. This gap demonstrates a **declining wage share in national income**, showing that economic gains are not being equitably distributed between capital and labour.
4. The continued fall in wage share points to structural inequalities in income distribution and a global trend of **decoupling between productivity and compensation**.

### China’s Influence on Global Wage Growth

1. The **global wage growth picture** is heavily influenced by **China’s exceptional performance**, which has outperformed the rest of the world by a wide margin.

2. China accounts for **around one-third of the world's wage workers (32%)** included in the ILO survey.
3. Over the period **2006 to 2024, real wages in China grew more than twice as fast** as in the rest of the world.
4. This strong and sustained wage growth in China has **pushed up global averages**, creating the impression of significant worldwide wage improvement.
5. The report stresses that the **overall global trend would look much weaker without China's data**, reflecting the country's dominant contribution to global wage progress.

### Comparative Wage Growth Analysis

1. Even though the **wage growth gap** between China and the rest of the world has **narrowed in recent years**, it remains **more than double**.
2. While global real wage growth excluding China has been subdued, **China maintained steady and exceptional increases** throughout 2006–2024.
3. This pattern underscores China's role as a **driver of global wage equality** and an example of how sustained productivity gains can raise workers' real incomes.
4. China's real wage growth is compared with that of other Asian economies such as **India, Thailand, and Vietnam**.
5. Data showed that **China's wage growth has been exceptional**, far outpacing other so-called "Asian success stories."
6. Among these countries, only **Vietnam** shows real wage trends **approaching Chinese levels**, though its data exhibits **greater volatility**, possibly due to **data gaps or uneven growth patterns**.
7. Wage growth in **India and Thailand** has been **moderate and inconsistent**, reflecting differences in industrial structure, labour regulation, and productivity gains.

### Broader Insights from the ILO Report

1. **Global wage inequality** has been **declining since 2006**, a positive development attributed largely to **Asia's performance**, particularly China.
2. Despite this, **regional disparities persist**, with low-income and developing countries still showing slower wage growth.
3. The report reveals that **labour productivity gains** continue to **outstrip wage increases**, meaning workers are receiving a **smaller share of economic output**.
4. The **decline in wage share** is a concern for global income equality, as it reflects a growing gap between productivity and pay.
5. The findings highlight the need for **inclusive labour policies**, **stronger social protection**, and **collective bargaining mechanisms** to ensure fair wage growth.

### Implications for Global and National Policy

1. The global economy faces a dual challenge of **sluggish real wage growth** and **persistent wage inequality across regions**.
2. Policymakers need to focus on **linking wages to productivity growth**, ensuring that workers benefit equitably from economic expansion.
3. Countries should strengthen **labour market institutions**, encourage **fair wage negotiations**, and promote **minimum wage policies** aligned with living costs.

4. For developing economies, **investment in skill development and industrial upgrading** is crucial to sustain long-term real wage growth.
5. China's experience offers a model for **translating productivity gains into tangible wage improvements** through coordinated industrial and labour policy.

**Conclusion:** The ILO's findings reveal a **complex global wage landscape**. While wage inequality has declined—mainly due to China's exceptional performance—**global wage growth still lags behind GDP growth**. This indicates that economic gains are not being evenly shared with workers. Ensuring **inclusive wage policies, strengthening labour rights, and linking productivity to real income growth** remain essential for achieving equitable economic development.

**Question:** Despite sustained global GDP growth, real wage growth has lagged behind, although wage inequality has declined in recent years. Discuss the reasons behind this divergence and examine the role of China in shaping global wage trends.

### Australia-India Clean Energy Partnership

**Source:** The post “Australia-India Clean Energy Partnership” has been created, based on “Powering up the Australia-India clean energy partnership” published in “The Hindu” on 15th October 2025.

#### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – International Relations

**Context:** India and Australia are both pursuing ambitious clean energy targets to address climate change and ensure energy security. **The India-Australia Renewable Energy Partnership (REP), launched in 2022 by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Anthony Albanese**, marks an important framework for cooperation in this sector. The recent visit of Australian Climate and Energy Minister Chris Bowen to India provides a key opportunity to move this partnership from vision to implementation.

#### Climate Change and the Need for Clean Energy Transition

1. The Indo-Pacific region **faces severe climate challenges**, with **nearly ten climate-related disasters per year** between 1970 and 2022, leading to major human and economic losses.
2. **By 2050, around 89 million people in the region could be displaced** due to climate change impacts.
3. India has **pledged to achieve 500 GW of non-fossil electricity capacity** by 2030, and it has already achieved nearly half of this target.
4. Australia has **committed to reducing emissions by 62–70% below 2005 levels by 2035**, aligning itself with global net-zero ambitions.

#### The Challenge of Supply Chain Vulnerabilities and Overdependence

1. The global clean energy transition depends heavily on **critical minerals, solar components, batteries, and hydrogen technologies**.
2. At present, **China dominates the global supply chain**, refining over 90% of rare earth elements and producing nearly 80% of global solar modules.
3. This **concentration creates a strategic risk**, as disruptions such as those during the COVID-19 pandemic can impact global renewable energy production.
4. India's dependence is visible in **electric mobility and wind power sectors**, where imports of rare earth magnets and batteries are unavoidable.

5. Australia, though rich in lithium and rare earths, **lacks large-scale refining and downstream processing capabilities.**

#### The India–Australia Renewable Energy Partnership (REP)

1. The REP aims to **convert climate ambition into actionable cooperation** between India and Australia.
2. It focuses on **joint projects, critical mineral collaboration, capacity building, and knowledge sharing.**
3. The **partnership promotes cooperation** in areas such as solar photovoltaic technology, green hydrogen, energy storage, circular economy, and two-way investments.
4. It also **proposes the establishment of a 1.5 Dialogue** involving policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders to facilitate practical and institutional collaboration.

#### Strengths of Both Partners

1. Australia's strengths lie in its **vast reserves of critical minerals** like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths, as well as in its strong regulatory framework and research capacity.
2. The **Net Zero Jobs Plan of Australia** emphasizes developing skilled workers required for the clean energy transition.
3. India's **strengths include its large domestic market, manufacturing capacity, and demographic advantage** with nearly two-thirds of its population under 35 years of age.
4. Government initiatives such as the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and Skill India program** enhance India's ability to manufacture, install, and maintain clean energy systems.

#### Potential Benefits of the Partnership

1. The **collaboration can help diversify global supply chains** and reduce dependence on a single country.
2. It can **create a regionally anchored and resilient clean energy ecosystem** in the Indo-Pacific.
3. **Joint investment in processing infrastructure** can strengthen the clean energy value chain in both countries.
4. The **partnership can generate green jobs and enhance energy security** for both economies.
5. It demonstrates **how democratic nations can cooperate** to achieve shared climate and sustainability goals.

#### Challenges in the Australia–India Clean Energy Partnership

1. **Overdependence on a single country:** Both nations rely on China for critical minerals, solar components, and batteries, creating vulnerabilities in supply chains.
2. **Lack of downstream processing capacity:** Australia has abundant raw materials but limited refining and manufacturing facilities, while India's battery and component industries are still developing.
3. **Technology and R&D gaps:** High-end technologies such as green hydrogen and energy storage are capital-intensive, and both nations need to bridge innovation gaps through joint research.
4. **Regulatory and policy divergence:** Differences in energy policy frameworks, environmental regulations, and investment rules can slow down collaboration.
5. **Financing constraints:** Clean energy projects require long-term affordable finance, and private investment remains limited due to high risks and uncertain returns.

6. **Geopolitical factors:** Strategic tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and dependence on global maritime routes can affect energy security cooperation.
7. **Skill and capacity limitations:** Both nations must strengthen training programmes to develop skilled manpower for clean energy manufacturing and maintenance.
8. **Implementation and coordination issues:** Without strong institutional mechanisms, the REP risks remaining declaratory rather than outcome-oriented.

### Way Forward

1. Both nations should **prioritize joint R&D initiatives in hydrogen, battery storage**, and renewable technologies to close innovation gaps.
2. Australia can **invest in critical mineral processing facilities in India** to develop resilient supply chains and value addition.
3. There is a **need for harmonized regulatory frameworks and green finance mechanisms** to facilitate private investment and long-term sustainability.
4. **Institutionalizing an annual India–Australia Clean Energy Dialogue** can ensure policy continuity, monitoring, and effective project execution.
5. **Strengthening skill development collaborations** under Skill India and the Net Zero Jobs Plan can build a competent workforce for the clean energy transition.

**Conclusion:** The Australia–India clean energy partnership has the potential to transform shared climate ambitions into tangible results. By combining Australia's resource base and technological capacity with India's scale and skilled workforce, both countries can drive a sustainable energy transition. Effective implementation of the REP can build diversified, stable, and secure clean energy supply chains, contributing to regional stability and global climate action.

**Question:** Powering up the Australia–India clean energy partnership can create a resilient and regionally anchored clean energy ecosystem. Discuss.

## Navigating the Global Economic Transformation

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper - International relation

### Introduction

**The U.S. and China are shaping rival geo-economic systems.** Trade, finance, and strategy are being rewired. This disruption threatens open flows but **creates a window to build a fairer order**. Choices by India and the Global South will decide whether the future is more equitable or more extractive.

### New economic paradigms

#### 1. Populist-autocracy and the state–capital knot

- Populist-autocracy means **power-centric governance fused with big business**. States place **loyal oligopolies** above competitive markets and public interest. Policy bends to private gain, public assets are pledged, and the **social contract weakens** as citizen welfare is sidelined.

- **In practice**, Policy concessions and public-asset deals increasingly serve oligopolies, not citizens, tightening a **state–capital Gordian knot**.

## 2. Return of raw statecraft

- Raw statecraft means **security-first economics**. States put **power, control, and leverage** above open markets and multilateral rules. They **weaponise supply chains, technology, finance, and geography** to shape outcomes. Efficiency yields to **strategic control**, and cooperation gives way to **managed dependence**.

For **Example**, the United States is pulling chip capacity from Taiwan, securing rare-earth supply chains in Central Asia and Africa, and pressing Arctic-rim states to align with its interests.

## 3. Big Tech, cloud capital, and digital colonialism

- Digital colonialism means **platform and cloud owners extracting value and influence** across borders. **Data control and algorithmic reach shape public opinion** and reward leaders who curb digital rights. This trend deepens with **AI action plans, the CLOUD Act, SWIFT weaponisation, and state-backed digital currencies** (piloted by ~100 central banks).

## 4. Retreat of development aid

- Aid retreat means **shrinking support for vulnerable populations** and **vacuum-creating cutbacks** that open space for undemocratic forces. Welfare cushions thin out, **distress migration rises**, and conflicts find new recruits as safety nets fray.

- For **Example**: A **\$44 billion** reduction by the G-7 could push **5.7 million Africans into poverty by 2026**. In Nepal, falling grants triggered an exodus of **8 lakh** people. **WFP cuts hit 16.7 million** in 2023, fuelling distress migration and militia recruitment in the Sahel.

## 5. Tariffs, sanctions, and fragmented flows

- Coercive economics means **using tariffs and sanctions to steer trade, capital, people, and ideas**. Openness narrows as surplus-producers face barriers and dependencies are punished, prompting **self-reliance and bloc formation**.

- For **Example**, **US** has tariffs on more than 70 countries and sanctions on more than 30 countries, which is pushing parts of the Global South toward bilateral deals, localised production, higher gold reserves, and currency alternatives.

## Concerns

**1. Structural imbalances:** Neoliberal globalisation relied on **cheap labour, environmental extraction, and trickle-down claims**. This model prioritised efficiency over equity and left many economies exposed to external shocks and political capture.

**2. Crony concentration:** Sovereign debt became **unsustainable**, shrinking fiscal space for **developmental and welfare goals**. Public assets and policies shifted toward **crony interests**, weakening the social contract and public trust.

**3. Poverty and hunger pressures:** 47% of the world's population lives below \$6.85/day, and 735 million people face hunger. These strains push societies toward identity-based cohesion, which **autocrats exploit** to mobilise support and undermine democracies.

**4. Volatile partnerships:** When ties rely on one leader or one party, they become **unstable**. **Lack of bipartisan bridges** has strained ties with **the U.S., Bangladesh, and Nepal**, reducing room for steady, long-term cooperation.

**5. Gap in digital governance:** There is no **common framework** for **digital-currency interoperability** and **political-funding transparency**. Without such rules, **sovereignty and oversight are at risk**, and vulnerabilities in Anti-Money Laundering (AML)/ Financial Action Task Force (FATF) safeguards can widen.

### Way forward

#### 1. Reform the global financial architecture

- **New Economic Deal for the Global South:** Seek fairer representation in international financial institutions.
- **Debt-relief framework:** Replace austerity-heavy adjustments that trigger democratic backsliding with solutions that free fiscal space for development and welfare.
- **Rules-based fairness:** There is a need for fair trade that protects domestic sectors while keeping markets open to genuine competition, not cronyism.

#### 2. Build strategic alliances

- Form new economic alliances that **reduce over-dependence on any single bloc** (use BRICS and South-South platforms)

#### 3. Recalibrate the Indian economy at home

- **Strategic state leadership:** The state should lead in energy, infrastructure, data/digital finance, defence, space, water, education, health care, and agriculture—areas vital for security and for serving all citizens.
- **Check concentration of power:** Enforce **anti-monopoly** rules and establish **sovereign wealth funds** (Norway model) to channel national resources into long-term public goals.
- **Invest in knowledge:** Fund science, universities, and pedagogic autonomy to build true competitiveness.
- **Redeploy PSUs smartly:** Do not privatise by default; Use PSUs like strategic tools (as China does with SOEs, or as development agencies) to earn revenue, advance technology, and serve geopolitical aims—rather than defaulting to privatisation.
- **Aligned digital finance:** Any **Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)**, and the wider data/finance stack around it, must protect privacy, have clear audit trails and independent oversight for accountability, and include strict safeguards so it cannot be misused for political funding.

#### 4. Practice principled diplomacy

- **Substantive non-alignment (not performative):** Take positions case by case. Put India's interests first. Do not take sides because of party politics. Say the same thing on similar issues every time.
- **Common plan at home:** Get major parties to agree on long-term foreign policy goals and how to achieve them. This keeps India's external policy stable and believable even when governments change.

#### Question for practice:

**Examine** the new economic paradigm and discuss its implications for India's economic and foreign-policy choices.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### The Future of the IMEC

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper - International relation**

#### Introduction

**India seeks to diversify economic links amid friction with the U.S.** Alongside bilateral pacts with the U.K. and talks with the EU, India is backing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The plan connects India, West Asia, and Europe through upgraded sea lanes, high-speed rail from UAE ports to Haifa via Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and cross-border energy-digital links (clean hydrogen, power cable, undersea data cable) to cut time, costs, and risk.

#### About the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

1. It is a network of transport corridors comprising railway lines and sea lanes to promote economic integration between Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe. The project aims to integrate India, Europe, Middle East through UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and European Union.
2. It upgrades maritime links between India and the Arabian Peninsula and runs **high-speed trains from UAE ports to Haifa via Saudi Arabia and Jordan**, with onward shipping to and from Europe.
3. It also **plans a clean hydrogen pipeline, an electricity cable, and a high-speed undersea digital cable**, while consolidating port infrastructure.
4. It was unveiled at **the G20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023**. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Governments of India, the US, Saudi Arabia, the European Union (EU), the UAE, France, Germany and Italy to establish this economic Corridor.
5. The corridor aims to reduce transit times by 40% and transportation costs by 30% as compared to the Suez Canal route.

#### Significance of the IMEC

**1. Resilient connectivity:** Sea-lane security is uncertain. **Red Sea disruptions** pushed ships around the **Cape of Good Hope**, raising costs and time. IMEC offers **alternative, faster, diversified routes**.

**2. Mediterranean relevance:** **Arctic routes** may shift trade northward. **Mediterranean economies**, especially **Italy**, see IMEC as a way to **preserve maritime centrality**. This keeps Europe–West Asia–India links strong.

**3. Flexible cooperation:** As a **multi-member initiative**, IMEC allows **adaptive routing and coordination** when geopolitics changes.

**4. Counter to China :** It is an ambitious counter to China's BRI project. BRI has created a 'debt trap' and has diminished the sovereignty of member countries. It will be a counter to the expansionist policies of China. It also provides an opportunity to counter the growing Chinese geopolitical influence in Middle East.

**5. Stability in Middle East –** This Corridor aims to bring countries in the Middle East together and establish that region as a hub for economic activity instead of as a "source of challenge, conflict or crisis" as it has been in recent history.

**6. Normalisation of Diplomatic Relations-** It also aims to help normalise diplomatic relations in the Middle east with possibility of establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia both of which are part of the project.

**7. Expansion of G20 role from purely economic grouping to geo-political grouping-** This project is also an attempt to further strengthen the G20 group by expanding the role of G-20 to geo-political domain to counter the dominance of China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

#### Concerns and constraints of the IMEC

**1. Security risk in West Asia:** The **October 7 attacks** and subsequent **Israeli military actions** strained regional ties and **cast doubt on feasibility**. It is still unclear whether the Gaza peace plan will succeed, so long-term stability for corridor projects is not assured.

**2. Competing routes:** Climate change is opening a new Arctic sea route. Ships can move between Asia and Europe faster through northern waters. This mainly benefits the U.S., Russia, China, and northern Europe. If trade shifts north, Mediterranean ports lose traffic. That directly weakens a Mediterranean-based IMEC.

**3. Non-binding MoU-** MoU of IMEC does not create any rights or obligations under international law. The memorandum only sets forth political commitments of its participants which are non-binding.

**4. Finance-** The Corridor requires massive finance for its construction. Arrangement of such funds is a challenge considering the recession that has been creeping in US and other advanced economies. Scale of investments that can be raised by China is higher than that of the G7. Mobilisation of Private-sector finance also remains a major challenge.

**5. Chinese Resistance-** This economic corridor also faces the challenge of Chinese pushback as China has already invested heavily in BRI project. It has been making considerable investments in the middle eastern economies like Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

#### Significance of the IMEC for India

### 1. Market access and diversification:

- IMEC gives **India a stable bridge to Europe** at a time of friction with the U.S. Europe matters for its high incomes, advanced technology, and scale. The **EU is India's largest trade partner (over \$136 billion)**.
- Using the **Mediterranean route** keeps access short and predictable even when other sea lanes face shocks.
- IMEC links—sea, rail, energy, and digital—**reduce dependence on any single partner** and keep trade flowing when routes elsewhere are disrupted.

### 2. Regional balance:

- IMEC also **strengthens India's position in West Asia**. Deeper **economic ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia** turn political goodwill into concrete trade and connectivity.
- This **blunts Pakistan's attempts** to build alignments that undercut India.
- With IMEC, **India and Europe act as "bookends"**: both ends invest and coordinate so that the corridor supports **steady trade, investment, energy, and data flows** across the region. This shared anchoring improves stability and India's leverage without overextension.

3. **Reduced dependence on Iran**- It also provides India an alternate transport corridor route for Europe by reducing over dependence on Chabahar Port and INSTC.

4. **Opportunity to join Trans-African Corridor**-Trans-African corridor is an envisaged US and the EU plan to build a corridor connecting Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zambia. Effective implementation of Indian Middle East Europe Corridor project would increase India's chances of getting an opportunity to join Trans-African corridor.

### Way forward

1. **Broaden nodes and routes**: Use IMEC's flexibility to **add commercial centres and ports in Saudi Arabia and Egypt** and reduce single-point risks.

2. **Strengthen Europe links**: **Scale corridors and logistics** with Europe to build **resilient supply chains**, while monitoring Arctic impacts without over-reliance on them.

3. **Establishment of IMEC Secretariat**- IMEC secretariat should be established to create structured processes and conduct evidence-based research on project benefits.

4. **Establishment of Virtual Trade Corridor**- Virtual Trade Corridor like the India-UAE Virtual Trade Corridor can serve as an operational model for other IMEC countries. It would help in reducing administrative burdens, lowering costs, and fostering efficient trade.

5. **Strengthening of infrastructure along the eastern corridor**- Countries along the eastern route could use the time of West Asian instability to strengthen infrastructure, enhancing regional connectivity and preparing for future IMEC integration.

6. **Avoiding the problems created by BRI**- The speed of implementation of the corridor and its ability to avoid the problem of financial and ecological sustainability faced by BRI will determine the success of IMEC.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

### The 'critical factor' in India's clean energy ambitions

Source: The post "The 'critical factor' in India's clean energy ambitions" has been created, based on "The 'critical factor' in India's clean energy ambitions" published in "The Hindu" on 16th October 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Indian Economy

**Context:** India's aspiration to become a **global leader in clean energy and sustainable growth** depends heavily on the **availability of critical minerals** such as **lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements (REEs)**. These minerals are vital for technologies like **electric vehicles (EVs), solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage systems**, forming the backbone of India's **energy transition** and **net-zero ambitions** by 2070.

#### Importance of Critical Minerals in India's Clean Energy Transition

1. **Critical minerals form the backbone of clean technologies**, enabling electric mobility, renewable energy generation, and efficient storage solutions.
2. India's target of achieving **500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030** requires a steady and secure supply of these minerals.
3. **Lithium and cobalt are vital for EV batteries**, while **rare earths are used in wind turbines, solar panels, and electronic components**.
4. India's EV market is projected to grow at a **compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 49% from 2023 to 2030**, supported by government initiatives like the **Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS) 2024**.
5. In 2023, the **battery storage market** in India was valued at **\$2.8 billion**, and it is expected to expand rapidly as renewable adoption accelerates.
6. These minerals are thus indispensable to India's **long-term clean energy goals** and **industrial competitiveness**.

#### Challenges

1. **Import Dependence:** India is **heavily dependent on imports**, sourcing nearly **100% of lithium and cobalt** and over **90% of REEs** from other countries. A large share of global production and processing is concentrated in **China**, which controls **60% of global REE output** and **85% of refining capacity**, creating strategic vulnerabilities.
2. **Limited Domestic Mining:** Domestic mining of critical minerals remains limited, even though India has **5.9 million tonnes of inferred lithium reserves** identified by the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** in Jammu and Kashmir.
3. **High Extraction Costs:** Extraction and processing costs in India are **significantly higher** compared to countries like Australia, reducing commercial viability.
4. **Environmental Concerns:** Mining projects often face **environmental concerns, regulatory hurdles, and infrastructure gaps**, slowing development.
5. **Low Recycling Rate:** India also faces a **low recycling rate**, with only **10% of the 4 million tonnes of e-waste** recycled annually, leading to loss of valuable minerals.

#### Government Initiatives

## 1. Policy and Institutional Framework

1. The **National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP), 2016** promotes **private sector participation** in mineral exploration to accelerate the discovery and mapping of critical mineral resources in India.
2. The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 2021** enables the **commercial auction of critical mineral blocks**, allowing both domestic and international companies to participate in exploration and mining activities.
3. The **National Mineral Policy, 2019** focuses on ensuring **sustainability, environmental responsibility**, and improving the **ease of doing business** in the mining sector.
4. The proposed **National Critical Mineral Mission** aims to **coordinate exploration, processing, and recycling efforts** to build an integrated and resilient supply chain for critical minerals.

## 2. Domestic Exploration and Production

1. The **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** has discovered **5.9 million tonnes of inferred lithium reserves** in **Jammu and Kashmir**, marking a significant step toward domestic resource development.
2. The government has conducted **auctions for critical minerals** such as **lithium and rare earth elements (REEs)**, which have attracted bids from both **domestic firms** and **multinational corporations** eager to invest in India's mineral sector.

## 3. Strengthening Public Sector and Global Partnerships

1. **IREL (India) Limited**, formerly known as Indian Rare Earths Ltd, is engaged in **extracting monazite-derived rare earth elements** such as **neodymium, praseodymium, and dysprosium**, which are vital for clean-energy technologies.
2. **KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Limited)**, established in **2019**, was created to **secure overseas mineral assets** through **joint ventures and acquisitions**, ensuring a stable and diversified supply of critical minerals for India.

## 4. Circular Economy and Recycling

1. The **E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022** have been strengthened to promote **domestic recycling and recovery mechanisms**, enabling better extraction of valuable minerals from discarded electronic products.
2. The **Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022** set **specific recycling and collection targets** for used batteries, particularly those used in electric vehicles and energy storage systems.
3. The government has encouraged **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** to establish **automated recycling plants** and **mechanised e-waste management facilities**, aiming to create a modern circular economy that reduces waste and recovers critical resources efficiently.

## Way Forward

1. India must **operationalise the National Critical Mineral Mission** with clear objectives, dedicated funding, and coordination between ministries.
2. **Private investments** should be encouraged through **tax incentives, subsidies, and ease of doing business** reforms in exploration and processing.
3. The government should **enhance R&D** in advanced extraction, green mining, and mineral recycling technologies.

4. Strengthening **international partnerships** for mineral imports can diversify supply sources and reduce strategic dependence.
5. India must build a **robust recycling and waste management infrastructure** to recover minerals domestically.
6. A **comprehensive circular economy policy** should be implemented to integrate mining, manufacturing, and recycling under one ecosystem.

**Conclusion:** Critical minerals are the **lifeblood of India's clean energy transition**. Securing their supply through **domestic mining, strategic global tie-ups, and a robust circular economy** will be crucial for achieving **energy independence, economic growth, and climate resilience**. With the right policy execution, India can transform its **critical mineral ecosystem** into a pillar supporting its **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and **net-zero 2070 goals**.

### Gender equity in courts

**Source:** The post “**Gender equity in courts**” has been created, based on “**The road to gender equity in courts**” published in “The Hindu” on 16th October 2025.

#### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity- Judiciary

**Context:** Women's under-representation in India's higher judiciary remains a **persistent and serious concern**. According to the **India Justice Report 2025**, women constitute only **14% of judges in the High Courts** and a mere **3.1% in the Supreme Court**. Among the **34 judges of the Supreme Court**, only **one is a woman**, highlighting the severe **gender imbalance at the top** of the judicial hierarchy. This lack of representation undermines the constitutional vision of **equality, diversity, and inclusiveness** in India's justice system.

#### Status of Women in Judiciary

1. **High Courts:** Out of 25 High Courts, only **one is headed by a woman Chief Justice**.
2. **Supreme Court:** There is **only one woman judge**, and unless another is appointed soon, India will have a Supreme Court **without a single woman judge** before the expected elevation of the current woman judge as the **first woman Chief Justice of India**.
3. **Lower Judiciary:** The situation is comparatively better; **nearly 38% of judges** in the subordinate judiciary are women.
4. According to a **2023 report by the Centre for Research and Planning of the Supreme Court**, **around 20% of district court complexes** have separate toilets for women, indicating poor infrastructure that also hinders women's professional growth.

#### Reasons for Gender Imbalance

1. **Collegium System of Appointment:** The current system of judicial appointments in High Courts and the Supreme Court through the **Collegium** is an **elitist and closed network**. It limits entry to those within select professional and social circles, **disadvantaged women and underprivileged groups**.
2. **Lack of Institutional Mechanism for Diversity:** There is **no structured policy** to ensure gender balance in appointments to higher courts. The process is **opaque** and based on **subjective recommendations**, rather than merit-based open competition.

3. **Social and Structural Barriers:** Women lawyers face challenges such as **bias, lack of mentorship, and unequal work opportunities** in the legal profession. Limited facilities, safety issues, and poor work-life balance discourage many from pursuing higher judicial positions.

### Need for Reform

1. There is an urgent need to make the **judicial selection process more transparent, inclusive, and merit-based**.
2. Similar to recruitment in **IAS, IPS, and IFS**, there should be a **national-level competitive examination for judicial appointments**.
3. Such a process would **reduce biases, nepotism, and patronage**, while ensuring **diversity and equal opportunity**.
4. The **All-India Judicial Service (AIJS)** has been suggested by several stakeholders, including the **President of India, Droupadi Murmu**, who in her **Constitution Day address (2023)** proposed the creation of this service to ensure fairness and inclusivity in recruitment.

### UPSC as a Model

1. The **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** model demonstrates how **competitive examinations can bring transparency and diversity** in recruitment.
2. For example, among the **UPSC Civil Services 2024** results, **11 out of the top 25 candidates were women**, showing improved gender representation.
3. The Civil Services have also witnessed **greater social and regional diversity**, with candidates from **OBC, SC, ST**, and **economically weaker backgrounds** achieving top ranks.
4. A similar system for the judiciary would help **broaden representation** and ensure **merit-based selection**.

### Concerns and Counterarguments

1. Critics argue that an **All-India Judicial Service** may undermine the **independence of the judiciary** and invite **executive interference**.
2. However, the article clarifies that if such recruitment is conducted **by the UPSC**, based on **standards prescribed by the Supreme Court in consultation with High Courts**, judicial independence can be preserved.
3. A **uniform, merit-based recruitment system** would, in fact, **strengthen transparency and accountability** in judicial appointments.

### Way Forward

1. **Constitutional Backing:** Article 312 of the Constitution already empowers Parliament to create **All-India Services**, including an **All-India Judicial Service**.
2. **Transparent Selection:** Recruitment should be **open to all eligible Indians** and conducted by an **independent constitutional body** such as UPSC, with **judicial oversight**.
3. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** The system must ensure **representation of women, minorities, and marginalized groups** through fair and inclusive criteria.
4. **Training and Professional Development:** Selected judges should undergo **structured induction and training** to ensure judicial competence and ethical integrity.

5. **Gender-Friendly Infrastructure:** Improving court infrastructure, providing **safe workplaces and better amenities** for women, will encourage more women to join and remain in the judiciary.

**Conclusion:** Justice and equality are too vital to be left to a limited few; the judiciary must reflect the **diversity of the society it serves**. Establishing a **transparent, merit-based, and inclusive judicial selection process** through an **All-India Judicial Service** is the most effective way to ensure **gender equity and institutional integrity** in India's higher judiciary.

**Question:** In the light of this statement, critically examine the proposal for establishing an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS) as a means to ensure transparency, diversity, and gender equity in judicial appointments.