

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



3rd Week

December. 2025

Features :

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

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Stepping stone: On nuclear policy, the SHANTI Bill

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Infrastructure (Energy).

Introduction

Nuclear power remains a small but critical part of India's energy mix, contributing **around 3% of electricity generation**. To meet long-term clean energy and climate goals, India plans a major expansion of nuclear capacity. The **SHANTI Bill** marks a structural shift in nuclear policy by opening the sector to private participation, revising liability rules, and restructuring regulation, while keeping **sensitive nuclear activities under state control**.

Current status of India's nuclear power sector

1. Present contribution and installed capacity

- Nuclear power contributes **about 3% of India's electricity** and **around 1.5% of installed power capacity**.
- India currently operates **22 reactors** with an installed capacity of **about 6.8–8.8 GW**, dominated by **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)**.

2. Existing legal and institutional framework

- The sector has been governed by the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, and the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**.
- Only public entities, the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India**, were allowed to own and operate nuclear plants.

3. Long-term expansion targets and missions

- India aims to scale nuclear capacity to **100 GW by 2047** to support **grid stability and decarbonisation**.
- This includes a **₹20,000 crore mission for Small Modular Reactors** and plans for **indigenous Bharat Small Modular Reactors**.

What is the SHANTI Bill?

The **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025**, was introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill seeks to reform India's nuclear energy framework to support the government's goal of achieving **100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047**.

Key Provisions of the SHANTI Bill

1. Repeal of existing nuclear laws

- The Bill proposes the repeal of the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, which currently governs nuclear activities in India.

- It also seeks to repeal the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**, which regulates liability in case of nuclear accidents.

2. New unified legal framework: The Bill establishes a **single framework** to govern the production, use, and regulation of **nuclear energy and ionising radiation** in India.

3. Entry of the private sector

- For the first time, **private companies, joint ventures, and other eligible entities** will be allowed to apply for licences to set up and operate nuclear power facilities.
- Private entities will also be permitted to **transport nuclear fuel**, subject to regulatory approval.
- This marks a **major departure from the public sector monopoly** in civil nuclear power.

4. Activities reserved for the government: Sensitive activities such as **uranium enrichment, spent nuclear fuel management, and heavy water production** will remain under the **exclusive control of the Union government**.

5. Licensing and regulatory oversight

- All nuclear and radiation-related activities will require a **licence from the Central government**.
- Operators must obtain **safety authorisation from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)**.
- The Bill grants **statutory status to the AERB** and clearly defines its regulatory powers.

6. Strengthening nuclear safety regulation

- The AERB is empowered to regulate **radiation exposure, waste management, safety inspections, and emergency preparedness**.
- The Centre can take control of radioactive substances or radiation-generating equipment in situations involving radiation hazards.
- The cost of safe disposal may be recovered from the authorised entity.

7. Liability in case of nuclear accidents

- The **operator** of a nuclear installation will be primarily liable for nuclear damage.
- Exceptions apply in cases of **grave natural disasters, armed conflict, war, civil unrest, or terrorism**.
- If compensation exceeds the operator's liability limit, the **Central government assumes additional liability**.

8. Insurance and financial security

- Nuclear operators must maintain **insurance or other financial security** to cover potential damage.

- The Bill provides for a **Nuclear Damage Claims Commission**, replacing the earlier liability framework.

9. Research and innovation: Research and innovation activities are largely **exempt from licensing**, except where **national security or reserved activities** are involved.

Significance of the SHANTI Bill

1. **Unlocks large capital mobilisation** by expanding the pool of eligible operators for the **100 GW by 2047** target.
2. **Shares construction and commissioning risk** beyond a single public operator.
3. **Ends the operating monopoly** of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India.
4. **Creates a clear licensing pathway** for government entities, joint ventures, and companies.
5. **Retains state control over sensitive fuel cycles**, limiting proliferation risks.
6. **Reduces legal ambiguity** by consolidating safety, enforcement, and dispute resolution in one statute.
7. **Lowers transaction costs and timelines** for site approval and commissioning.

Major concerns related to the SHANTI Bill

1. **Adequacy of liability caps:** The maximum operator liability is capped at **₹3,000 crore**, raising concerns about victim compensation and environmental remediation.
2. **Shift of burden to the State:** Liability beyond the cap shifts to the Centre, transferring long-term financial risk to the State.
3. **Reduced supplier accountability:** Supplier liability is removed except where explicitly provided in contracts or in cases of deliberate intent.
4. **Restricted judicial remedies:** Civil court jurisdiction over nuclear damage claims is barred, limiting legal options for victims.
5. **Regulatory independence concerns:** Despite statutory status, appointments remain Centre-driven, affecting trust and confidence.
6. **Controlled private participation:** Private role is confined to non-sensitive segments.

Way forward

1. **Strengthen regulatory independence** through greater insulation from executive influence.
2. **Review liability caps periodically** to align them with real damage risks.
3. **Standardise supplier contracts** to ensure uniform accountability.

4. Enhance transparency and public participation in safety and compensation systems.

Conclusion

The **SHANTI Bill** represents a decisive shift in India's nuclear policy by enabling private participation, simplifying liability, and consolidating regulation. It supports long-term clean energy goals and capital mobilisation while retaining state control over sensitive activities. Addressing concerns related to liability adequacy, supplier accountability, judicial remedies, and regulatory independence is essential for **safe, trusted, and sustainable nuclear expansion**.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance and major concerns of the SHANTI Bill, 2025 in helping India achieve its target of 100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Trump National Security Strategy, Europe's Existential Crisis

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2 -International Relation

Introduction

The **Trump Administration's second-term National Security Strategy** signals a **sharp break from past U.S. thinking on Europe**. It treats Europe **less as a partner and more as a problem** shaped by **cultural decline, political choices, and dependence on American power**. This shift forces Europe to confront doubts about **U.S. reliability, its own security capacity, and its role in sustaining the post-war international order**.

About Trump Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS)

1. Nature and purpose of the NSS: The **National Security Strategy** is a **Congress-mandated document** that sets the **broad thinking of an administration on threats, allies, and interests**. It guides **defence planning and foreign policy tone**, even though it is **not a binding policy document**.

2. Clear break from earlier Trump term: The **second-term NSS** reflects Trump's worldview more directly than the **2017 version**. Unlike the first term, it is **less shaped by the traditional U.S. strategic establishment** and more aligned with **America First politics**.

3. America First and mercantilist outlook: The NSS promotes **America First approach** focused on **trade imbalances, reindustrialisation, and national sovereignty**. It **rejects global leadership through institutions and treaties** in favour of **narrow national interest**.

4. Geographic focus and blind spots: The document **largely ignores Africa, Australia, and New Zealand**, and gives **limited attention to Asia beyond China**. Its main concern is the **Western Hemisphere**, with **Europe portrayed as declining and problematic**.

Core Message of the NSS on Europe

- 1. Europe as a civilizational problem:** The NSS warns of Europe's "civilizational erasure", blaming migration policies, restrictions on free speech, suppression of opposition, and loss of national identity. Cultural decay, not Russian aggression, is framed as the main threat.
- 2. Migration and identity fears:** The document claims that some NATO countries could become majority non-European in the future. This framing suggests that demographic change itself is treated as a security issue.
- 3. Political intervention concerns:** The U.S. promises to support "patriotic European parties" to restore Europe's greatness. Many Europeans see this as interference in domestic politics and even as a form of regime change.
- 4. Reduced role for NATO expansion:** The NSS states that NATO cannot be a perpetually expanding alliance. This implicitly warns Ukraine and overlooks the recent accession of Sweden and Finland after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- 5. Call for Europe to manage Russia:** Europe is urged to assume primary responsibility for its defence and to restore strategic stability with Russia. Russia is treated as a future partner rather than a primary threat.

Europe's Strategic Dilemma

- 1. False comfort in past assumptions:** European leaders long hoped that Trump's statements were tactical and that the U.S. would still stand by Europe. The NSS removes this ambiguity and exposes the limits of that hope.
- 2. Three response options for Europe:** Europe can ignore the NSS, flatter Trump to retain U.S. support, or accept that America may no longer be a reliable ally. Each option carries costs and risks.
- 3. Continued dependence despite warnings:** After earlier U.S. criticism, Europe chose flattery and reassurance over autonomy. Germany reversed talk of strategic independence and ordered more U.S. military equipment dependent on American intelligence.
- 4. Rising defence spending without autonomy:** European states agreed to raise defence spending to 5% of GDP at the NATO summit. This move strengthens NATO budgets but does not solve Europe's reliance on U.S. capabilities.
- 5. Limits of European defence integration:** Europe has never defended itself as a single entity. So, even if it wants to rely less on the U.S., joint defence projects still move slowly, as seen in the stalled Franco-German sixth-generation fighter jet project.
- 6. Manpower and nuclear challenges:** A U.S. troop withdrawal would leave Europe with serious manpower shortages. Voluntary conscription and unresolved nuclear deterrence issues further complicate autonomy, especially after Brexit.

Impact on the Global Order

1. Attack on transnational institutions: The NSS criticises **international organisations** for **undermining sovereignty and political liberty**. It supports reform **only when institutions directly serve U.S. interests**.

2. Retreat from post-war leadership: The U.S. signals **withdrawal from maintaining the global order it once built**. It rejects the role of **global stabiliser** and **shifts responsibility to regional powers**.

3. Risk of power vacuums: A U.S. retreat into its **western hemisphere** may leave space for **China and Russia to expand influence elsewhere**. This **weakens restraints on authoritarian behaviour**.

4. Erosion of rules-based order: The post-war system is **imperfect and outdated**, but it still **limits unchecked power**. Its weakening risks a world where **force replaces rules**.

5. Europe's choice with global consequences: Europe's response will shape whether **liberal rules survive** or give way to **transactional power politics**. The decision affects **global peace, trade, and security norms**.

Conclusion

The **Trump NSS confronts Europe with a hard reality** about **American priorities and reliability**. Europe must decide whether to **depend on a shifting ally** or **build credible autonomy**. This choice will determine **not only Europe's security** but also the **future of the rules-based international order** that has shaped global stability for decades.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Trump Administration's second-term National Security Strategy reshapes U.S. expectations of Europe's defence role and affects the rules-based global order.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

A bill that takes us back to the days before MGNREGA

Source: The post "**A Bill that takes us back to the days before MGNREGA**" has been created, based on "**A Bill that takes us back to the days before MGNREGA**" published in "**Indian Express**" on **17th December 2025**.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Indian Economy

Context: The VB-G RAM G Bill, 2025 seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by aligning rural employment with the vision of *Viksit Bharat @2047*. While the Bill introduces certain administrative and technological changes aimed at efficiency and convergence, it also raises serious concerns regarding dilution of rights, federal balance, and accountability.

Key Provisions

- **Shift From Demand-Driven to Supply-Driven Model:** The Bill marks a fundamental shift from a demand-driven employment guarantee to a supply-driven rural jobs scheme.
- Employment generation under the new framework will be limited by pre-fixed budgetary allocations rather than actual demand from rural households. Unlike MGNREGA, workers will no longer have an enforceable right to demand employment.

- **Increase in Guaranteed Workdays:** The Bill increases the number of guaranteed workdays per rural household from 100 days to 125 days per financial year. However, this increase is subject to budgetary ceilings determined by the Union government.
- **Increased Financial Burden on States:** The financial contribution required from States will rise significantly under the new Bill.
 - For most States and Union Territories with legislatures, the cost-sharing ratio will shift to 60:40 between the Centre and the States.
 - For north-eastern States, Himalayan States, and certain Union Territories, the cost-sharing ratio will remain at 90:10.
 - Under MGNREGA, the effective cost-sharing was approximately 90:10 for all States.
- **Centralised Budget Allocation:** The Bill empowers the Union government to determine State-wise normative allocations for each financial year.
 - These allocations will be based on “objective parameters” that will be prescribed by the Central government.
 - States will no longer be able to seek additional funds based on increased demand for work.
- **Restricted Geographic Coverage:** The Union government will have the authority to notify specific rural areas within States where the scheme will be implemented. This represents a departure from the universal coverage model of MGNREGA, which applied to all rural areas.
- **Control Over Timing of Work:** The Bill allows the programme to be paused during peak agricultural seasons. This provision is intended to ensure the availability of labour for agricultural activities but may reduce employment security for rural workers.
- **Codification of Technological Measures:** Technological interventions previously introduced administratively under MGNREGA are formally incorporated into the new law. These include mobile app-based attendance systems, Aadhaar-based wage payments, and geotagging of worksite

Positive Intentions of the Bill

1. Alignment with Changing Rural Economy: The Bill recognises **socio-economic transformation in rural India**, such as improved connectivity, electrification, housing, and digital access. It seeks to move beyond subsistence employment towards **livelihood creation, infrastructure development, and climate resilience**.

2. Use of Technology for Transparency: Codification of **Aadhaar-based payments, mobile attendance, and geotagging** aims to reduce leakages and ghost beneficiaries. Digital monitoring can potentially improve efficiency and outcome tracking.

3. Higher Notional Employment Days: The proposed **125 days of employment**, compared to 100 days under MGNREGA, signals intent to enhance income support, at least in principle.

Key Challenges

1. Dilution of Rights-based Framework: The Bill replaces a **legal right to demand work** with an allocation-based scheme. Absence of unemployment allowance removes enforceable accountability of the State.

2. Excessive Centralisation: Section 4(5) empowers the Centre to determine **State-wise allocations**, while Section 5(1) allows it to notify specific rural areas. This departs from MGNREGA's **universal and demand-driven nature**, reducing beneficiary agency.

3. Increased Fiscal Burden on States: The **60:40 funding pattern** (90:10 for Himalayan States) shifts significant responsibility to States. States may lack fiscal capacity, leading to uneven implementation and reduced coverage.

4. Technocratic Surveillance and Work Blackout Periods: Pausing employment during peak agricultural seasons may hurt **landless labourers** who depend on MGNREGA as a safety net. Excessive reliance on technology risks **exclusion of digitally marginalised workers**.

Way Forward

1. Retain the Rights-based Core: The **right to demand work and unemployment allowance** must be preserved to ensure accountability.

2. Reform, Not Repeal: Strengthen MGNREGA by enhancing workdays to **125 days**, increasing wages, and linking works to **climate adaptation and asset creation**.

3. Cooperative Federalism: Ensure predictable central funding and greater **state flexibility** in design and implementation.

4. Balanced Use of Technology: Technology should aid transparency without becoming a tool for exclusion; offline safeguards must be ensured.

Conclusion: While the VB-G RAM G Bill reflects aspirations of a transforming rural India, it risks undermining hard-won democratic and constitutional guarantees. A truly *Viksit Bharat* requires strengthening the rights-based employment framework through reform, inclusion, and cooperative governance rather than replacing it with a centrally controlled, budget-capped scheme.

Question: “The proposed VB-G RAM G Bill, 2025 represents a significant shift in India’s rural employment framework.” Critically examine the concerns associated with it, and suggest a balanced way forward.

Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025

Source: The post “Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025” has been created, based on “Explained | New Insurance Bill: What’s in & what’s left out?” published in “Indian Express” on **17th December 2025**.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Polity and Governance

Context: The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025 seeks to modernise India’s insurance framework by amending the Insurance Act, 1938, the LIC Act, 1956, and the IRDAI Act, 1999. The Bill aims to **expand insurance coverage**, attract investment, and strengthen regulatory oversight, but it also leaves out several long-pending structural reforms.

Key Provisions of the Bill

1. Increase in FDI Limit to 100%: The Bill raises the Foreign Direct Investment limit in insurance companies from 74% to 100%. This is expected to attract long-term foreign capital, facilitate technology transfer, enhance

competition, and support the goal of “Insurance for All by 2047.” It will also bring global best practices in underwriting, risk assessment, and claims management.

2. Incentives for Foreign Reinsurers: The Bill reduces the Net Owned Funds requirement for foreign reinsurers from ₹5,000 crore to ₹1,000 crore. This measure is intended to attract more global and niche reinsurers, deepen domestic reinsurance capacity, and reduce excessive dependence on the public sector reinsurer, GIC Re.

3. Enhanced Powers for IRDAI: The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is granted stronger enforcement powers, including the authority to disgorge wrongful gains made by insurers or intermediaries. This aligns IRDAI’s regulatory strength with that of SEBI and improves policyholder protection.

4. Simplification of Regulatory Procedures: The Bill introduces a one-time registration system for insurance intermediaries, reducing repetitive approvals and compliance burden. It also raises the threshold for IRDAI approval for transfer of paid-up equity capital from 1% to 5%, easing routine business transactions.

5. Improved Regulatory Governance: A formal Standard Operating Procedure for regulation-making is proposed to be incorporated into the Act. Clear criteria for penalties are introduced, improving transparency, predictability, and consistency in regulatory enforcement.

6. Greater Operational Autonomy for LIC: The Bill empowers LIC to open new zonal offices without prior government approval and allows restructuring of overseas operations in line with host country regulations. This enhances LIC’s administrative efficiency, competitiveness, and global operational flexibility.

Limitations

1. Absence of Composite Licensing: The Bill does not provide for composite licences that would allow insurers to operate in both life and non-life segments. This maintains rigid segmentation, limits product bundling, and prevents insurers from offering integrated insurance solutions under one roof.

2. No Reduction in Capital Requirements: The Bill retains the existing high minimum paid-up capital requirements for insurers and reinsurers. This discourages small, regional, and niche players, especially those targeting rural areas, micro-insurance, gig workers, and low-income households.

3. No Push for New Entrants and Innovation: By not lowering entry barriers, the Bill misses an opportunity to encourage specialised insurers such as health-only, agriculture-focused, or micro-insurance firms that could improve insurance penetration and financial inclusion.

4. Exclusion of Multi-Product Distribution: Proposals allowing insurers to distribute other financial products like mutual funds, loans, and credit cards have been dropped. This limits integrated financial service delivery and alternative revenue streams for insurers.

5. Restrictions on Insurance Agents Remain: The Bill does not allow individual insurance agents to sell products of multiple insurers. This continues to restrict consumer choice and agent flexibility.

6. No Provision for Captive Insurance Companies: The Bill is silent on permitting large corporations to set up captive insurance entities. This limits advanced risk-management options for Indian corporates and keeps India behind global practices.

Way Forward

1. Introduction of Composite Licensing: The government should consider allowing composite licences to enable insurers to offer life, health, and general insurance products under one umbrella. This would promote integrated insurance solutions, enhance consumer convenience, and align India's insurance framework with global best practices.

2. Rationalisation of Capital Requirements: Minimum paid-up capital norms for insurers and reinsurers should be reviewed and rationalised to encourage the entry of small, regional, and niche players. Lower entry barriers would help expand insurance coverage in underserved and rural areas.

3. Promotion of Specialised and Inclusive Insurers: Policy support should be extended to specialised insurers such as health-only, agriculture-focused, and micro-insurance companies. This would help address the protection gaps faced by informal workers, gig economy participants, and low-income households.

4. Enabling Captive Insurance Companies: The legal framework should permit large corporations to establish captive insurance entities. This would modernise India's risk-management ecosystem, reduce dependence on overseas captives, and retain insurance capital within the country.

5. Greater Flexibility for Insurance Distribution: Insurance agents should be allowed to sell policies of multiple insurers to improve competition, expand consumer choice, and enhance last-mile insurance penetration.

6. Integration with Broader Financial Services: Insurers may be permitted to distribute select financial products such as mutual funds and pension products under a regulated framework. This would promote integrated financial solutions and improve financial inclusion.

7. Strengthening Consumer Protection and Awareness: Alongside regulatory reforms, greater emphasis should be placed on financial literacy, digital grievance redressal, and faster claims settlement to build trust and increase insurance adoption.

8. Phased and Consultative Reform Approach: Future amendments should be introduced in a phased manner after wider stakeholder consultations to balance industry growth, consumer protection, and systemic stability.

Conclusion: The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025 marks an important step towards liberalisation and regulatory strengthening of India's insurance sector, particularly through 100% FDI and enhanced IRDAI powers. However, the exclusion of composite licences, capital norm rationalisation, and captive insurance reflects a cautious reform approach. To truly deepen insurance penetration and promote inclusive growth, these structural reforms may need to be revisited in future amendments.

Question: "The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025 seeks to modernise India's insurance sector but stops short of key structural reforms." Discuss the major provisions of the Bill and critically examine its limitations in achieving inclusive insurance growth.

About Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Introduction

India's overseas labour migration has expanded rapidly, driven by **limited domestic opportunities** and **strong demand for low-skilled workers abroad**. Millions of Indian workers migrate to the **Gulf, Southeast Asia, and other regions**, often facing **unsafe recruitment, weak legal protection, and exploitation**. The **Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025** seeks to replace the **Emigration Act, 1983**, but raises concerns about whether **facilitation is being prioritised over migrant welfare**.

About Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025

The **Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025** is proposed by the **Ministry of External Affairs** to replace the **Emigration Act, 1983**. It aims to establish a **comprehensive framework for managing overseas employment of Indian nationals**. The Bill focuses on **safe and orderly migration** while **promoting overseas opportunities**. It also seeks to ensure **policy coordination** and **welfare-related actions across ministries**.

Key Features

- 1. Overseas Mobility and Welfare Council:** The Bill proposes the establishment of an **Overseas Mobility and Welfare Council**. The council aims to ensure **greater convergence among ministries** involved in migration and overseas employment policy.
- 2. Balancing opportunities and protection:** The Bill seeks to strike a **balance** between **promoting overseas opportunities** and establishing a **regulatory framework for protection and welfare of vulnerable categories**.
- 3. Oversight of international migration agreements:** The Bill creates a mechanism to oversee the **administration and implementation of international agreements** on migration and mobility.
- 4. Data-driven policy management:** The Bill emphasises **data-driven policymaking** based on **labour studies** and **coordinated actions across different ministries and departments**.

Major Concerns Related to the Proposed Bill

- 1. Weakening of enforceable migrant rights:** The Bill removes provisions that allowed migrants to **directly initiate legal action** against exploitative recruiters or employers. This increases **dependence on state authorities** and weakens **access to timely justice**.
- 2. Dilution of protections for women and children:** Specific safeguards and **higher penalties for crimes against women and children** are replaced by a broad reference to **"vulnerable classes."** This reduces **legal clarity** and weakens **enforcement**.
- 3. Absence of a clear framework on human trafficking:** The Bill remains **silent on labour-related human trafficking** despite **high-risk migration corridors**. This creates space for exploitation that can slide into **modern-day slavery**.

4. Removal of recruitment fee transparency: Earlier requirements for **transparent disclosure of recruitment fees** are dropped. This exposes migrants to **debt bondage before departure**.

5. Reduced accountability of recruitment agencies: Responsibilities such as **post-arrival support, dispute resolution, and document renewal** are no longer clearly imposed on recruitment agencies. These duties are shifted to **government bodies** that may be **overburdened and under-resourced**.

6. Over-centralisation of migration governance: The Bill concentrates authority at the **central level** and sidelines **state governments**. States with **high levels of overseas migration** have **no formal role** in the Overseas Mobility and Welfare Council.

7. Exclusion of civil society and trade unions: The Bill does not include **trade unions, migrant organisations, or rights groups** in decision-making bodies. This removes **ground-level oversight** and weakens **feedback from affected communities**.

8. Surveillance risks linked to data systems: The **Integrated Information System** collects **extensive migrant data** without clear safeguards for **consent and use**. While monitoring increases, **direct welfare benefits** for migrants remain unclear.

9. Neglect of illegal online recruitment: The Bill does not address **fraudulent online recruitment** through social media and messaging platforms. Migrants remain exposed to **fake job offers** and **digital scams**.

10. Inadequate reintegration and return support: Reintegration measures such as **skill training, counselling, and livelihood support** are weakly addressed. Migrants deported or forced to return within **182 days** are excluded from **returnee benefits**.

11. Weak penalties for serious violations: Penalties mainly target **recruitment agencies through fines**. **Traffickers, abusive foreign employers, and overseas exploiters** remain largely outside the law's **effective reach**.

Way Forward

1. Restore migrant self-advocacy rights: Allow migrants to **directly initiate legal proceedings** against exploiters through a **clear and time-bound process**.

2. Reinstate strict recruitment fee regulation: Make **fee disclosure mandatory** and enforce limits to prevent **debt bondage** and **contract substitution**.

3. Define trafficking and address modern-day slavery: Explicitly define **labour trafficking** and link it to **strong penalties** and **compensation mechanisms**.

4. Strengthen federal and participatory governance: Include **migrant-sending states, trade unions, and civil society organisations** in key decision-making bodies.

5. Provide universal and funded reintegration support: Ensure **skill training, counselling, and livelihood assistance** for **all returning migrants** without restrictive cut-offs.

Conclusion

The **Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025** prioritises **administrative facilitation over worker protection**. By **weakening enforceable rights, centralising authority, and limiting accountability**, it risks **deepening migrant vulnerability**. A **rights-based framework with federal participation, clear action against trafficking, recruitment transparency, and assured reintegration support** is necessary to protect the **dignity, safety, and livelihoods** of Indian labour migrants abroad.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025 may prioritise facilitation over migrant welfare, and discuss the key concerns and way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Changing Patterns of India's Student Migration

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 - Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Introduction

India's student migration has moved beyond **elite universities or programmes that are fully funded** to become a **mass, self-financed movement** driven by **middle-class aspirations**. Students now migrate not only for education but also for **social mobility, global exposure, and permanent settlement**. While rising numbers suggest **wider access to foreign education**, this shift also exposes **serious risks** related to **education quality, employment outcomes, financial stress, and long-term economic consequences**.

Current Status of Indian Student Migration

1. **Rapid growth in student numbers:** Indian students abroad crossed **13.2 lakh in 2023**, increased to **13.35 lakh in 2024**, and are projected to reach **13.8 lakh in 2025**, spread across **more than 70 countries**.
2. **Major destination countries:** The **United States and Canada** together host about **40%** of Indian students, followed by the **United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany** as preferred destinations.
3. **Recognition as a diaspora category:** Students are now formally recognised as a major part of India's diaspora, as reflected in the **Parliamentary Committee on the Welfare of Indian Diaspora (2022)**.
4. **Shift towards self-financed migration:** Student migration is no longer limited to **funded programmes**. It is increasingly supported by **family savings, loans, and private financing**.

Reasons for the Changing Pattern in India's Student Migration

1. **Middle-class aspirations and social mobility:** Foreign education is seen as a pathway to **better wages, higher status, and improved living standards** for middle-class households.

2. **Education as a route to settlement:** For many students, studying in **OECD countries** is closely linked to hopes of **permanent residency and long-term security**.
3. **Limited domestic opportunities:** Concerns about **education quality** and **well-paid employment within India** push students to look for opportunities abroad.
4. **Influence of recruitment agents:** Education agents play a central role in guiding student choices, often directing them towards institutions with **easier entry requirements**.
5. **Expansion of an unregulated education market:** The foreign education industry has grown rapidly with **limited oversight**, enabling **profit-driven admissions** rather than outcome-based selection.

Major Concerns Related to Indian Student Migration

1. **Entry into lower-tier institutions:** Many students are channelled into **lower-ranked universities or vocational colleges** instead of strong academic institutions.
2. **Mismatch between courses and skills:** Students often enrol in programmes **unrelated to their academic background**, reducing their employability after graduation.
3. **Commission-driven admissions:** Tie-ups between recruitment networks and less credible colleges are driven mainly by **commissions** rather than student outcomes.
4. **Deskilling and weak career progression:** A large number of graduates fail to move into **skilled employment**, resulting in **underemployment** and wasted qualifications.
5. **Declining academic standards in some destinations:** In the U.K., what were once polytechnics have become universities post **1992** that cater primarily to **international students**, sometimes waiving entry requirements and triggering controversy due to **declining academic standards**.
6. **Poor transition to skilled visas:** In the U.K., reports suggest that approximately **only one in four** Indian postgraduates secures a **sponsored skilled visa**.

Living, Work and Visa-Related Challenges

1. **High cost of overseas education:** Students often spend **₹40–50 lakh** on tuition and living expenses, creating **long-term financial pressure** on families.
2. **Rising living costs and restricted work hours:** **High rents, limited work hours, and visa caps** make it difficult for students to manage daily expenses.
3. **Dependence on low-wage employment:** Many students take up **unskilled and low-paid jobs**, often juggling **multiple part-time roles** to survive.
4. **Risk of exploitation and informality:** **Long working hours, weak protections, and undocumented work** expose students to exploitation and stress.

5. **Shrinking visa pathways:** In the U.K., the **student-to-care visa route** that existed until 2024 has been closed, reducing short-term survival options.

Impacts of the Changing Student Migration Pattern

1. **Reverse remittances and household burden:** Many students fail to recover education costs and return in debt, leading to **reverse remittances** where Indian households subsidise foreign economies.
2. **State-level impact:**
 - The **Kerala Migration Survey 2023** shows student migration doubling from **1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.5 lakh in 2023**, forming **11.3% of total emigrants**.
 - Outward student remittances from Kerala are estimated at **₹43,378 crore**, nearly **20% of inward remittances** from labour migrants.
3. **Economic gains for host countries:** International students contributed **\$30.9 billion** to Canada's GDP in 2022 and supported over **3.61 lakh jobs**, while Indian students formed about **45% of enrolments in 2023**.
4. **Creation of a new low-cost labour pool:** Student migration has become a source of **cheap labour** for OECD economies, funded through **debt** rather than employer demand.

Way forward

1. **Stronger regulation of education agents:** Education agents need stricter regulation to stop **misleading practices** and unchecked recruitment.
2. **Pre-departure counselling for students:** Students should receive clear guidance before migration on **education quality, costs, and realistic outcomes**.
3. **Bilateral frameworks for institutional accountability:** India needs agreements with destination countries to ensure foreign institutions remain accountable for **student welfare and outcomes**.
4. Encourage every student to register on the **MEA student registration system** and use **MADAD** for support and grievance redressal
5. **Verify accreditation and recognition before admission:** Make accreditation checks a compulsory step so students do not land in **low-quality institutions** with weak outcomes.
6. Update counselling regularly because rules on **dependants and work hours** can change and directly affect survival strategies and finances.

Conclusion

India's student migration reflects **strong aspirations but weak outcomes**. Rising numbers conceal **deskilling, debt, and reverse remittances** that benefit host economies more than families at home. Without **better regulation, counselling, and institutional accountability**, this trend risks deepening **brain waste** instead of delivering genuine social mobility or national benefit.

Question for practice:

Discuss the changing nature of India's student migration and the key concerns, challenges, and impacts associated with it.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Demographic Dividend' of Elders

Source: The post “**Demographic Dividend' of Elders**” has been created, based on ‘**Demographic Dividend' of Elders**” published in “**The Hindu Business**” on 18th December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

Context: India's demographic policy has largely focused on the youth dividend, while neglecting the potential contribution of experienced and capable elderly citizens. A subset of retirees, termed “rewirees,” represents an untapped demographic dividend as they seek meaningful and productive engagement after retirement.

Meaning and Significance of Rewirees

1. Rewirees are retired individuals who wish to reorient their lives by undertaking work that is different from their earlier careers.
2. Rewirees possess valuable experience, maturity, and problem-solving ability, which distinguishes them from younger workers.
3. The engagement of rewirees does not reduce employment opportunities for the youth because their skills, expectations, and work roles differ significantly.
4. Many rewirees are willing to work for lower wages or even voluntarily, especially in socially meaningful roles.
5. The primary limitation of rewirees is their reluctance to accept rigid and physically punishing work schedules.

Retired Defence Personnel as a Key Resource

1. Retired Defence personnel form a highly prepared and immediately usable group of rewirees.
2. Senior retired officers have expressed willingness to work on civilian-led social impact initiatives in collaboration with civilians.
3. These senior officers can mobilise large numbers of retired Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs).
4. Many JCOs and NCOs retire at relatively young ages ranging from 45 to 54 years, which is too early for complete withdrawal from productive work.
5. Retired Defence personnel are widely distributed across small towns and villages, increasing their relevance for grassroots development.

Limitations of Existing Rehabilitation Mechanisms

1. Existing pre-retirement training and job fairs organised by the Defence forces mainly connect retirees with urban corporate employment.

2. Such initiatives fail to reach retired JCOs and NCOs living in small towns and rural areas where corporate jobs are scarce.
3. Therefore, alternative mechanisms are required to utilise the productive potential of rural Defence rewirees.

Rewirees as Agents of Local Change

1. Social impact organisations can engage Defence rewirees as agents of social, economic, and technical transformation in their local areas.
2. The participation of family members, especially women, can significantly enhance the developmental impact of such initiatives.
3. Rewirees require practical and hands-on training tailored to local needs and organisational objectives.
4. The involvement and endorsement of senior Defence rewirees would assure legitimacy and motivate participation at the grassroots level.
5. Senior officers can provide guidance remotely while making periodic field visits to maintain trust and effectiveness.

Implementation Strategy

1. The integration of rewirees should begin with small-scale and low-cost pilot projects.
2. Such initiatives can be gradually expanded with necessary modifications based on experience and local conditions.
3. The disciplined background of Defence personnel can ensure accountability and sustainability of these efforts.

Conclusion: By productively engaging retired Defence personnel, India can effectively harness a neglected rewiree demographic dividend. This approach can accelerate inclusive economic and social development without undermining youth employment. Success in this model can pave the way for systematically utilising the broader civilian rewiree population.

How is the Aravalli range to be protected?

Source: The post “How is the Aravalli range to be protected?” has been created, based on ‘How is the Aravalli range to be protected?’ published in “**The Hindu**” on 18th December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Environment

Context: The Aravalli range is India’s oldest mountain system and plays a critical ecological role in preventing desertification and maintaining environmental stability. The Supreme Court has recently intervened to ensure uniform identification and sustainable protection of the Aravalli hills across multiple States.

Ecological Significance of the Aravalli Range

1. The Aravalli hills act as a natural barrier that prevents the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.
2. The range helps regulate local climate, supports rich biodiversity, and aids in groundwater recharge.
3. The Aravallis are the source of important rivers such as the Chambal, Sabarmati, and Luni.

4. The hills contain key aquifer recharge zones that sustain agriculture and drinking water needs in surrounding regions.
5. India is internationally obligated under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification to protect ecosystems such as the Aravalli range.

Threats to the Aravalli Range

1. Excessive and often illegal mining of stone and sand over the past four decades has severely degraded the hills.
2. Mining has contributed to declining groundwater levels, increased air pollution, and habitat fragmentation.
3. Weak enforcement of environmental regulations has allowed continued ecological damage.

Recommendations of the Central Empowered Committee

1. The CEC recommended comprehensive scientific mapping of the Aravalli range across all States.
2. It proposed a macro-level environmental impact assessment of cumulative mining activities.
3. The committee advised a strict ban on mining in ecologically sensitive zones such as protected forests, water bodies, tiger corridors, aquifer recharge areas, and the National Capital Region.
4. It recommended stringent regulation of stone-crushing units.
5. The committee advised that no new mining leases or renewals should be allowed until mapping and assessments were completed.

Need for a Uniform Definition of the Aravalli Hills

1. States were using inconsistent and selective criteria to define the Aravalli hills, enabling mining in ecologically fragile areas.
2. Expert bodies, including the Forest Survey of India, had differing definitions based on slope, buffers, and valley width.
3. To resolve this confusion, the Supreme Court constituted a multi-agency committee to arrive at a scientifically sound definition.
4. The committee concluded that hills above 100 metres should be classified as part of the Aravalli range.
5. While concerns were raised that this definition could allow mining in lower hills, the Court accepted it as more inclusive and administratively workable.

Other Directions Issued by the Supreme Court

1. The Court directed the preparation of a comprehensive Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM).
2. The plan must identify no-go zones where mining is permanently prohibited.
3. It must also identify areas where limited and strictly regulated mining may be allowed.
4. The plan must assess cumulative ecological impacts and define restoration and rehabilitation measures.

Conclusion: The protection of the Aravalli range requires a science-based, coordinated, and regulated approach rather than absolute prohibition. The Supreme Court's directions aim to balance ecological conservation with controlled economic activity. Effective implementation of these measures is essential to prevent desertification and ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

A Bold Step Amid an Ambitious Nuclear Energy Target

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Infrastructure (Energy)

Introduction

A bold step amid an ambitious nuclear energy target reflects India's effort to align **human development goals** with **long-term energy security**. Human development rises with energy use, and India's aspiration to reach high development levels requires **massive, reliable, and clean energy generation**. **Decarbonisation pressures, limits of renewables, and rising digital and industrial demand** make **nuclear energy central** to India's future energy strategy.

Why energy matters for development?

- 1. Energy and development link:** In early stages, humans needed energy only for food. With hunting, agriculture, industry, and transport, **energy demand expanded steadily**.
- 2. Digital era energy demand:** The present phase of development is driven by **digital technologies**. Digitalisation increases **electricity demand across services, industry, and infrastructure**.
- 3. HDI as a yardstick:** The **Human Development Index** combines **income, education, and health**. Higher HDI levels require **higher per capita final energy consumption**.
- 4. HDI-energy correlation:** Using the correlation between **HDI and final energy consumption**, energy needs can be estimated for **specific development levels**.

India's Energy Gap and Decarbonisation Challenge

1. High Development Requires Massive Energy Generation:

- To reach an **HDI of 0.9**, India needs to generate about **24,000 Terra-Watt-Hours (TWh) per annum**, a level associated with **very high human development**.
- About **60%** of this energy will be used as **electricity**, while the rest will be used to produce **hydrogen in electrolyzers**.
- Hydrogen is required to decarbonise sectors such as **steel, fertilisers, and plastics**, although future technologies may reduce electricity needs.

2. Large gap between current and required generation: India generated about **1,950 TWh in 2023-24**, with a recent growth rate of **~4.8% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)**. At this pace, reaching **24,000 TWh** will take **four to five decades**, making **long-term energy planning essential**.

3. Decarbonisation alongside expansion: Electricity generation must expand while **carbon emissions decline**. This requires **end-use electrification** and a shift away from a **fossil-fuel-heavy energy mix** towards **cleaner sources**.

4. Low role of electricity in energy use: Electricity is only about **22% of India's final energy consumption** today. This share must rise because India has to **electrify end uses** and also **redesign its energy mix** away from fossil fuels towards **hydro, nuclear, solar, and wind** to reduce carbon emissions.

Why Renewables Alone Are Not Enough

1. **Physical and geographical limits:** India has **limited hydro and wind potential**. Its **dense population** makes it difficult to divert large areas of land for **solar photovoltaic deployment**.
2. **Inadequate energy supply for high development:** Even if the full potential of **hydro, solar, and wind** is used, these sources cannot provide the energy level needed to achieve an **HDI above 0.9**. Until **nuclear capacity is expanded, fossil fuels will continue** to be used.
3. **Intermittent nature of renewable power:** Electricity from solar and wind varies with **time of day and season**. This makes it difficult to match electricity supply with demand.
4. **High cost of large-scale storage:** Balancing variable renewable generation requires storage. Storage is **expensive**, and providing storage for **seasonal variations** is **prohibitively costly**.
5. **Need for reliable baseload generation:** To provide **affordable electricity**, the power mix must include generation that is not dependent on seasons or time of day. **Nuclear power plants provide such baseload electricity** and are therefore essential for a **decarbonised energy mix**.

Nuclear Energy as the Development Anchor

1. **Need for Baseload:** A reliable energy system needs generation that runs continuously. **Baseload power keeps electricity affordable**.
2. **Stable Power Supply:** Nuclear plants operate independent of weather or time of day. They provide **steady electricity supply**.
3. **Clean Growth Support:** Nuclear power reduces emissions while meeting rising demand. It allows development without energy shortages.
4. **Fossil Bridge Needed:** Until nuclear capacity expands, **fossil fuels will continue** to bridge the gap between demand and clean energy.

India's Nuclear Readiness and Policy Push

1. Indigenous capability and reactor readiness

- **Indigenous supply chain:** India has indigenised the nuclear supply chain. Only **uranium is imported** due to limited domestic availability.
- **PHWR capability (700 MW):** India has mastered **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR)** design and operation up to **700 MW**. **Three units are working** and more are under construction.
- **Expansion sanctioned (2017):** The government sanctioned **ten 700 MW PHWRs** in **2017**. Work on these units is progressing.

2. Regulation, safety, and waste handling capacity

- **Regulatory strength:** A regulatory body exists since the **1980s**. It has the capacity to regulate nuclear plants.
- **Fuel reprocessing:** India has developed technologies to reprocess spent fuel. This helps recover valuable materials.

- **Waste management:** Systems exist to handle nuclear waste. This supports safe nuclear operations.

3. Fuel security and long-term sustainability

- **New uranium discovery and Jaduguda:** New discoveries improve fuel security. A major find extends **Jaduguda mine life by over 50 years**.
- **Closed fuel cycle and PFBR:** Progress in the closed fuel cycle has been made. **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** milestones support sustainable fuel supply.

4. Policy target and enabling law

- **100 GW target:** The government targets **100 GW nuclear installed capacity by mid-century**. This reflects scale-up ambition.
- **SHANTI Bill, 2025:** The **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025** merges key provisions of earlier nuclear laws. It provides an overarching legal framework.
- **AERB legal status:** **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** is deemed constituted under the new Act. This gives legal clarity to regulation.
- **Licensee responsibility:** **Safety, security, and safeguards** are assigned to the licensee. This fixes responsibility clearly.

5. Institutional mechanism for faster expansion

- **ASHVINI joint venture:** **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** and **NTPC** formed **ASHVINI**. It aims to develop nuclear power plants within the existing legal framework.

Conclusion

India's development goals need a huge rise in **clean and reliable energy**. Renewable sources alone cannot meet this scale due to **land limits** and **intermittency**, and storage is costly. Nuclear power gives **steady baseload electricity** and supports **decarbonisation**. India's proven **PHWR capability** and the **SHANTI Bill** strengthen the push towards the **100 GW target by mid-century**.

Question for practice:

Discuss why nuclear energy is essential for India's long-term development and clean energy transition.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India–Russia Logistics Agreement, with Eye on Arctic and Indo-Pacific

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -International Relation

Introduction

India and Russia have moved to institutionalise their long-standing defence cooperation through the **Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS)** agreement. Signed into Russian federal law days after

President Vladimir Putin's December 4–5 visit to New Delhi, the agreement establishes a formal framework for mutual logistical support. Beyond routine military cooperation, RELOS strengthens India's operational reach across the Indo-Pacific and Arctic regions while reinforcing Russia's presence in the Indian Ocean.

Understanding RELOS

RELOS is a formal logistics arrangement between India and Russia that tells both militaries **how they can support each other during military activities**.

It creates a clear system for **moving troops, warships, and military aircraft** between the two countries and for giving **basic operational support** when one side's forces are operating on the other side's territory.

Under RELOS, both countries can provide **refuelling, repairs, maintenance, and other support services** to each other's forces.

It also lays down rules for the **mutual use of airspace** by military aircraft and for **port calls** by warships. This means Indian and Russian forces do not have to depend only on informal arrangements each time they need such support.

The agreement is meant to be used mainly during **joint military exercises and training**. It also applies during **humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations**.

At the same time, RELOS is flexible, because it allows both sides to use its provisions in other situations too, but only when **both countries agree**.

Strategic Significance for India

1. Access to Russian military bases: RELOS provides India with institutional access to Russian air and naval bases. These extend **from Vladivostok in the Pacific to Murmansk in the Arctic**.

2. Extended operational reach: Access to **more than 40 Russian bases** allows Indian naval and air forces to operate farther from home. This supports long-range deployments and sustained operations.

3. Support for Russian-origin platforms: A large share of India's military inventory is of Russian origin. RELOS **ensures refuelling, repairs, and maintenance support** for these platforms during overseas operations.

4. Indo-Pacific and Arctic linkage: The agreement strengthens **India's Indo-Pacific strategy by leveraging Russia's geographic reach**. It also opens **pathways towards Arctic operations and northern maritime routes**.

5. Operational readiness and continuity: By formalising logistics support, **RELOS boosts readiness and reduces uncertainty during deployments**. It replaces informal arrangements with predictable institutional mechanisms.

Strategic Significance for Russia

1. Access to Indian ports and airfields: Russian forces gain **access to Indian ports and airfields** for refuelling, repairs, and operational support. This strengthens **Russia's military footprint in the Indian Ocean**.

2. Institutionalised presence in the Indian Ocean: RELOS formalises logistical backing for Russian naval operations in the region. It allows **sustained engagement rather than ad hoc arrangements**.

3. Reinforcing multipolar positioning: The agreement supports Russia's effort to **strengthen defence partnerships outside Western alliances**. It aligns with **Russia's pursuit of a multipolar global order**.

India's Wider Logistics Agreement Network

1. Multiple logistics partners

- India has signed logistics agreements with the **United States, France, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, and Japan**. India has also **nearly finalised** a similar agreement with the **United Kingdom**.

- This wider set of agreements shows **India is building logistics access with several partners**, so it can support deployments through more than one set of facilities.

2. India's Strategic Autonomy: India maintains logistics agreements with several countries while avoiding formal alliances. **RELOS fits into this broader strategy of diversified partnerships**.

RELOS in Relation to India's US Defence Agreements

Comparison : RELOS is often compared with India's agreements with the United States because all of them support military operations in different ways. However, the purpose of each agreement is different.

COMCASA: The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) allows the US to provide India encrypted communication equipment and systems. It helps Indian and US military leaders, ships, and aircraft communicate through secure networks in peace and conflict.

BECA: The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) supports information sharing linked to high-end military technology. It includes access to United States geospatial, satellite, and drone data.

RELOS: The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS) sets procedures for the movement of troops, warships, and military aircraft between India and Russia. It provides a framework for refuelling, repairs, maintenance, mutual use of airspace, and port calls, based on the India–Russia defence relationship.

Key difference: The United States agreements strengthen India as a key United States partner in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) to balance Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific. RELOS is tailored to the India–Russia dynamic and focuses on institutional logistics support between the two sides.

Conclusion

RELOS represents a decisive step in formalising India–Russia defence logistics cooperation. It expands India's operational reach from the Indo-Pacific to the Arctic while ensuring sustained support for Russian-origin military platforms. For Russia, it institutionalises access to the Indian Ocean and strengthens its role in a

multipolar global order. The agreement reflects India's strategy of maintaining strategic autonomy through diversified defence partnerships.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the strategic significance of the India–Russia Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS) agreement in the context of India's wider logistics partnerships and its approach to strategic autonomy.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Demographic Dividend' of Elders'

Source: The post 'Demographic Dividend of Elders' has been created, based on "Demographic Dividend of Elders" published in "The Hindu Business" on 18th December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

Context: India's demographic policy has largely focused on the youth dividend, while neglecting the potential contribution of experienced and capable elderly citizens. A subset of retirees, termed "rewirees," represents an untapped demographic dividend as they seek meaningful and productive engagement after retirement.

Meaning and Significance of Rewirees

1. Rewirees are retired individuals who wish to reorient their lives by undertaking work that is different from their earlier careers.
2. Rewirees possess valuable experience, maturity, and problem-solving ability, which distinguishes them from younger workers.
3. The engagement of rewirees does not reduce employment opportunities for the youth because their skills, expectations, and work roles differ significantly.
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Retired Defence Personnel as a Key Resource

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5. Retired Defence personnel are widely distributed across small towns and villages, increasing their relevance for grassroots development.

Limitations of Existing Rehabilitation Mechanisms

1. Existing pre-retirement training and job fairs organised by the Defence forces mainly connect retirees with urban corporate employment.
2. Such initiatives fail to reach retired JCOs and NCOs living in small towns and rural areas where corporate jobs are scarce.
3. Therefore, alternative mechanisms are required to utilise the productive potential of rural Defence rewires.

Rewirees as Agents of Local Change

1. Social impact organisations can engage Defence rewirees as agents of social, economic, and technical transformation in their local areas.
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3. Rewirees require practical and hands-on training tailored to local needs and organisational objectives.
4. The involvement and endorsement of senior Defence rewirees would assure legitimacy and motivate participation at the grassroots level.
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Implementation Strategy

1. The integration of rewirees should begin with small-scale and low-cost pilot projects.
2. Such initiatives can be gradually expanded with necessary modifications based on experience and local conditions.
3. The disciplined background of Defence personnel can ensure accountability and sustainability of these efforts.

Conclusion: By productively engaging retired Defence personnel, India can effectively harness a neglected rewiree demographic dividend. This approach can accelerate inclusive economic and social development without undermining youth employment. Success in this model can pave the way for systematically utilising the broader civilian rewiree population.

How is the Aravalli range to be protected?

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UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Environment

Context: The Aravalli range is India’s oldest mountain system and plays a critical ecological role in preventing desertification and maintaining environmental stability. The Supreme Court has recently intervened to ensure uniform identification and sustainable protection of the Aravalli hills across multiple States.

Ecological Significance of the Aravalli Range

1. The Aravalli hills act as a natural barrier that prevents the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.
2. The range helps regulate local climate, supports rich biodiversity, and aids in groundwater recharge.

3. The Aravallis are the source of important rivers such as the Chambal, Sabarmati, and Luni.
4. The hills contain key aquifer recharge zones that sustain agriculture and drinking water needs in surrounding regions.
5. India is internationally obligated under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification to protect ecosystems such as the Aravalli range.

Threats to the Aravalli Range

1. Excessive and often illegal mining of stone and sand over the past four decades has severely degraded the hills.
2. Mining has contributed to declining groundwater levels, increased air pollution, and habitat fragmentation.
3. Weak enforcement of environmental regulations has allowed continued ecological damage.

Recommendations of the Central Empowered Committee

1. The CEC recommended comprehensive scientific mapping of the Aravalli range across all States.
2. It proposed a macro-level environmental impact assessment of cumulative mining activities.
3. The committee advised a strict ban on mining in ecologically sensitive zones such as protected forests, water bodies, tiger corridors, aquifer recharge areas, and the National Capital Region.
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Need for a Uniform Definition of the Aravalli Hills

1. States were using inconsistent and selective criteria to define the Aravalli hills, enabling mining in ecologically fragile areas.
2. Expert bodies, including the Forest Survey of India, had differing definitions based on slope, buffers, and valley width.
3. To resolve this confusion, the Supreme Court constituted a multi-agency committee to arrive at a scientifically sound definition.
4. The committee concluded that hills above 100 metres should be classified as part of the Aravalli range.
5. While concerns were raised that this definition could allow mining in lower hills, the Court accepted it as more inclusive and administratively workable.

Other Directions Issued by the Supreme Court

1. The Court directed the preparation of a comprehensive Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM).
2. The plan must identify no-go zones where mining is permanently prohibited.
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Conclusion: The protection of the Aravalli range requires a science-based, coordinated, and regulated approach rather than absolute prohibition. The Supreme Court's directions aim to balance ecological

conservation with controlled economic activity. Effective implementation of these measures is essential to prevent desertification and ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

Disability rights: Behind bars, but not barred

Source: The post 'Disability rights: Behind bars, but not barred' has been created, based on "Disability rights: Behind bars, but not barred" published in "New Indian Express" on 20th December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

Context: Persons with disabilities constitute one of the most vulnerable groups within the criminal justice system, particularly in Indian prisons where pre-trial incarceration is widespread. In 2025, the Supreme Court delivered two landmark judgements such as **L. Muruganantham v. State of Tamil Nadu** and **Sathyan Naravoor v. Union of India** which significantly expanded the rights of disabled prisoners. These judgements reinforce constitutional morality and bridge the gap between disability law and prison administration.

Background and Context

1. The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016** was enacted to ensure dignity, equality, and accessibility for persons with disabilities, but its application within prisons remained largely neglected.
2. Disabled prisoners often face denial of basic necessities such as medical care, assistive devices, accessible infrastructure, and personal assistance.
3. The Supreme Court intervened through social action litigation to address this systemic exclusion.

Key Features of the Muruganantham Judgement (2025)

1. The Court directed the **identification of disabled prisoners** and assessment of their special needs.
2. It mandated provision of **medical care, physiotherapy, psychotherapy, and personal assistance**.
3. The judgement ordered **revision of Prison Manuals** in line with the RPwD Act.
4. It required **training of prison officials** on disability rights and sensitisation.
5. It provided for **periodic audits, monitoring committees, and inspections** to ensure compliance.
6. Initially, these directives were applicable only to Tamil Nadu.

Expansion through the Sathyan Naravoor Judgement (2025)

1. The Supreme Court **extended Muruganantham directives to all States and Union Territories**.
2. It directed the establishment of an **effective grievance redressal mechanism** for disabled prisoners.
3. The Court mandated **inclusive education and rehabilitation measures** within prisons.
4. It provided for **enhanced visitation rights** to enable families to assist disabled inmates.
5. Crucially, the Court held that **Section 89 of the RPwD Act applies to prison authorities**, making violations punishable and ensuring accountability.

Constitutional and Jurisprudential Significance

1. The judgements reaffirm that **fundamental rights do not end at prison gates**, as held in *Sunil Batra*.
2. They uphold **Articles 14, 19, and 21**, ensuring equality, dignity, and humane treatment.

3. The rulings demonstrate **constitutional morality**, judicial sensitivity, and correction of legislative silence.
4. They strengthen the tradition of **social action litigation** as an instrument of social justice.

Challenges

1. Poor implementation of prison reforms due to **administrative apathy and lack of accountability**.
2. **Inadequate infrastructure and financial constraints** in most prisons.
3. **Low awareness and sensitisation** of prison officials regarding disability rights.
4. Absence of **uniform standards** across States and Union Territories.

Way Forward

1. Ensure **time-bound implementation** of Supreme Court directives through clear SOPs.
2. Conduct **mandatory disability audits** in all prisons.
3. **Revise Prison Manuals** in line with the RPwD Act, 2016.
4. Provide **adequate budgetary allocations** for accessibility and healthcare.
5. Institutionalise **training and sensitisation** of prison staff.
6. Establish **independent monitoring and grievance redress mechanisms**.
7. Prefer **alternatives to incarceration** for severely disabled undertrials.

Conclusion: The Muruganantham and Sathyan Naravoor judgements mark a transformative step in recognising the rights of disabled prisoners. By aligning prison administration with disability law and constitutional values, the Supreme Court has advanced substantive justice. The real test now lies in faithful enforcement to ensure that incarceration does not result in double punishment for disability.

Question: Discuss the significance of recent Supreme Court judgements extending disability rights to prisoners in India. How do these judgements reflect constitutional morality and address systemic deficiencies in prison administration?

Lok Adalats emerge as key pillar of accessible justice

Source: The post ‘Lok Adalats emerge as key pillar of accessible justice’ has been created, based on “Lok Adalats emerge as key pillar of accessible justice, resolve millions of cases annually” published in “DD NEWS” on 20th December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

Context: Lok Adalats are an important component of India’s alternative dispute resolution mechanism aimed at delivering accessible and people-centric justice. They function under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, and promote amicable settlement of disputes through consensus. By reducing litigation costs and delays, Lok Adalats strengthen access to justice for marginalised and vulnerable sections.

Legal and Institutional Framework

1. Lok Adalats operate under a **four-tier structure** comprising the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), State Legal Services Authorities, District Legal Services Authorities, and Taluk Legal Services Committees.

2. This decentralised structure ensures justice delivery from the national level to grassroots institutions.
3. Awards passed by Lok Adalats have the **status of civil court decrees** and are **final and binding**, with no provision for appeal.

Key Features of Lok Adalats

1. Lok Adalats follow an **informal, conciliatory, and non-adversarial procedure**.
2. They do not charge court fees, and any fee already paid is refunded upon settlement.
3. They deal with both **pre-litigation disputes** and **pending court cases**.
4. National Lok Adalats are organised on pre-notified dates across the country, enabling mass disposal of cases in a single day.
5. The introduction of **E-Lok Adalats during the COVID-19 pandemic** expanded access through virtual participation.

Role of Permanent Lok Adalats

1. Permanent Lok Adalats handle disputes related to **public utility services** such as transport, electricity, water, postal services, and telecommunications.
2. They have jurisdiction over cases involving claims up to **₹1 crore**.
3. If conciliation fails, Permanent Lok Adalats can **adjudicate disputes**, ensuring timely and enforceable outcomes.

Significance and Impact

1. Lok Adalats have significantly **reduced pendency** in regular courts.
2. They provide **swift relief** to accident victims, farmers, small traders, and consumers.
3. By combining speed, empathy, and legal certainty, Lok Adalats enhance **public trust in the justice system**.

Challenges

1. Many settlements in Lok Adalats are criticised for **mechanical disposal and forced compromises**, especially involving vulnerable parties.
2. Lok Adalats have **limited jurisdiction**, excluding serious criminal matters and complex disputes.
3. Lack of **legal awareness** among citizens reduces effective utilisation of Lok Adalats.
4. **Inconsistent quality of conciliation** due to varying expertise of conciliators.
5. Overemphasis on numerical disposal sometimes undermines **substantive justice**.

Way Forward

1. Ensure **voluntary and informed consent** of parties to prevent coerced settlements.
2. Improve **training and capacity-building** of conciliators and judicial officers.
3. Strengthen **legal awareness programmes** through NALSA and para-legal volunteers.
4. Expand the scope of **E-Lok Adalats** using secure and user-friendly digital platforms.
5. Introduce **monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** focusing on quality, not just quantity, of settlements.

Conclusion: Lok Adalats have emerged as a cornerstone of accessible justice in India. Their continued expansion reflects the State's commitment to an efficient, inclusive, and humane justice delivery system. Strengthening Lok Adalats will further advance the constitutional goal of justice for all.

Question: Lok Adalats have emerged as a key pillar of India's alternative dispute resolution framework. Discuss their role in ensuring accessible, speedy, and cost-effective justice in India.

The bulldozed demolition of MGNREGA

Source: The post **"The bulldozed demolition of MGNREGA"** has been created, based on **"The bulldozed demolition of MGNREGA"** published in **"The Hindu"** on **22nd December 2025**.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

Context: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is a landmark rights-based legislation derived from Article 41 of the Constitution of India. It guarantees wage employment to rural households and has functioned as a critical pillar of social security, poverty alleviation, and decentralised governance in rural India.

Importance of MGNREGA

1. MGNREGA has played a transformative role in rural India. It has provided income security to crores of households, increased rural wage levels, reduced seasonal migration, and strengthened the bargaining power of landless labourers.
2. The scheme has empowered Gram Panchayats and institutionalised transparency through social audits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA acted as a lifeline for the rural poor.

Key Changes and Their Implications

1. **Dilution of the Right to Work:** The new law removes the legal guarantee of employment and converts MGNREGA into a discretionary scheme. Employment is no longer demand-driven, which undermines the very foundation of the right to work.
2. **Budgetary Capping of Employment:** The earlier uncapped funding system has been replaced with pre-determined budgetary allocations. This limits the number of workdays provided and makes employment dependent on Union government priorities rather than rural distress.
3. **Restriction on Year-Round Employment:** The imposition of mandatory non-working days during peak agricultural seasons reduces employment availability. This weakens the wage bargaining power of workers and may suppress rural wage growth.
4. **Increased Financial Burden on States:** The cost-sharing ratio has been altered from 90:10 to 60:40, with States bearing all additional expenditure beyond central allocations. This discourages States from generating employment and strains their finances.
5. **Centralisation and Weakening of Local Governance:** The replacement of Gram Sabha-led planning with centrally designed frameworks undermines the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. It erodes local self-governance and ignores region-specific needs.
6. **Misleading Claims of Increased Employment Days:** Although an increase from 100 to 125 days is claimed, structural constraints make this unachievable in practice. Past trends of delayed payments and stagnant budgets further weaken credibility.

7. **Constitutional and Democratic Concerns:** The weakening of MGNREGA reflects a broader erosion of rights-based legislation in India. Similar dilution has occurred in the Right to Information, Right to Education, Forest Rights Act, and land acquisition laws. This trend raises serious concerns about constitutional morality and the rights-based vision of governance.

Way Forward

1. The legal guarantee of employment must be restored to reaffirm the constitutional right to work.
2. Central funding should remain demand-driven and uncapped to ensure timely and adequate employment.
3. The cost-sharing ratio should be revised in favour of States to encourage active implementation.
4. Year-round employment should be ensured, especially during periods of agrarian distress.
5. Gram Sabhas must be reinstated as the primary planning and implementation authorities in line with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
6. Wage payments should be made timely, and technological systems should be simplified to prevent worker exclusion.
7. Regular social audits and parliamentary oversight must be strengthened to ensure transparency and accountability.

Conclusion: MGNREGA represents the constitutional commitment to social justice, dignity of labour, and inclusive growth. Its dilution threatens rural livelihoods and democratic decentralisation. Strengthening and protecting MGNREGA is essential for safeguarding India's constitutional values and ensuring equitable development.

Question: MGNREGA has been one of the most important rights-based social security legislations in India. Critically examine the recent changes to the scheme and suggest a way forward.

Aviation Sector Restructuring

Source: The post "Aviation Sector Restructuring" has been created, based on "We saw Indigo meltdown. Now lets see Aviation Sector Restructuring" published in "Indian Express" on 22nd December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: The recent operational meltdown of IndiGo Airlines highlights deep-rooted structural and regulatory weaknesses in India's rapidly expanding aviation sector, similar to earlier crises such as the 2022 Southwest Airlines disruption in the United States.

Background and Context

1. India is the third-largest domestic aviation market and is projected to become the largest by 2027.
2. IndiGo controls nearly 60% of the domestic market, indicating high market concentration.
3. On October 5, 2023, IndiGo cancelled over 1,000 flights due to crew shortages, exposing systemic failures.
4. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) was aware of pilot shortages but delayed intervention.

Key Issues Highlighted by the IndiGo Meltdown

1. **Operational and Corporate Governance Issues:** IndiGo pursued aggressive cost-cutting and scheduling efficiency at the cost of operational resilience. The airline lacked adequate buffer capacity in pilots and aircraft to manage disruptions. Internal warnings about system stress were reportedly ignored, similar to the Southwest Airlines case.
2. **Regulatory and Institutional Failures:** The DGCA relied on paperwork compliance rather than proactive safety oversight. Regulatory responses were reactive rather than preventive. Parliamentary oversight remained weak, with limited accountability mechanisms.
3. **Market Structure Concerns:** Excessive market dominance reduced competitive pressure on service quality. Passengers lacked effective alternatives due to limited competition.
4. **Passenger Welfare Issues:** Flight cancellations and delays caused financial and psychological distress to passengers. Compensation mechanisms remained weak and inconsistently enforced.

Lessons from the 2022 Southwest Airlines Crisis

1. The crisis demonstrated how fragile operational systems can amplify minor disruptions into nationwide breakdowns.
2. Strong post-crisis regulatory intervention in the US led to financial penalties and mandated system upgrades.
3. The US Department of Transportation enforced passenger compensation and accountability.

Suggested Reforms for India's Aviation Sector

1. **Regulatory Reforms:** The DGCA should conduct a formal inquiry into IndiGo's operational failure and publish findings. Financial penalties should be imposed proportional to airline turnover to ensure deterrence. Safety audits must focus on operational resilience, not just documentation.
2. **Competition and Market Reforms:** The Competition Commission of India should examine monopoly-like conditions in aviation. Policies should encourage sustainable competition rather than excessive consolidation.
3. **Consumer Protection Measures:** The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 should be effectively enforced for aviation services. Passenger compensation norms must be automatic and time-bound.
4. **Institutional Oversight:** A Joint Parliamentary Committee may be constituted to examine systemic aviation failures. Political funding links through electoral bonds should be reviewed to avoid regulatory capture.

Conclusion: The IndiGo meltdown serves as a warning that rapid aviation growth without strong regulation, competition, and passenger-centric governance can undermine safety and public trust. Comprehensive restructuring of regulatory oversight and market practices is essential to ensure a resilient and equitable aviation ecosystem in India.

Question: The IndiGo Airlines disruption has exposed structural and regulatory weaknesses in India's civil aviation sector. Discuss the causes of such aviation meltdowns and suggest reforms to improve safety, resilience, and competition.

For a choking capital, going electric is the way out

Source: The post "For a choking capital, going electric is the way out" has been created, based on "For a choking capital, going electric is the way out" published in "Indian Express" on 23rd December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: Delhi experiences a severe air pollution crisis every winter, turning the city into a public health emergency zone. The government response largely relies on short-term measures such as GRAP, traffic restrictions and school closures, which only manage symptoms. Transport has emerged as the single largest controllable source of air pollution in Delhi, making electrification of mobility a long-term structural necessity.

Challenges

1. Transport-related emissions contribute nearly 25–40 per cent of Delhi's PM_{2.5} due to tailpipe emissions, congestion, idling and ageing vehicles.
2. Policy uncertainty caused by delays in notifying a new EV policy has led to withdrawal of incentives and decline in consumer and investor confidence.
3. Delhi has witnessed a slowdown in EV adoption, including zero electric-auto registrations in 2025 and a decline in electric two-wheeler sales.
4. The Fleet Aggregator Scheme has not been effectively operationalised, limiting electrification of commercial and shared mobility fleets.
5. The city operates only 7,000–8,000 buses for nearly 30 million residents, which is far below global urban transport standards.
6. Reduction in bus routes and unreliable service frequency have resulted in falling public transport ridership.
7. Charging and swapping infrastructure remains inadequate, unreliable and poorly monitored, discouraging potential EV users.
8. Weak enforcement of scrappage policies allows old and highly polluting vehicles to continue operating on city roads.

Four Pillars of a Credible Clean Transport Strategy

1. Accelerated Electrification of Vehicles

- Delhi must promote EV adoption across all segments through stable incentives, clear policy signals and predictable funding.
- The city should phase out new sales of non-electric two- and three-wheelers from 2026 to provide certainty to manufacturers, financiers and consumers.

2. World-Class Electric Bus System

- A strong and reliable public transport system is essential, as no global city has cleaned its air without one.
- Delhi must commit to deploying at least 20,000 electric buses over the next five years to reduce emissions at scale.
- High-frequency services, route expansion and seamless last-mile connectivity are necessary to restore public confidence in buses.

3. Phasing Out Old and Polluting Vehicles

- Delhi must enforce year-round restrictions on non-BS IV and non-BS VI vehicles to reduce emissions from ageing fleets.

- An aggressive scrappage and replacement programme should be implemented with firm deadlines, incentives and strict enforcement.

4. Charging and Swapping Infrastructure as a Public Utility

- Electric mobility cannot scale without widespread and reliable charging and swapping infrastructure.
- Delhi must deploy thousands of charging points across residential areas, markets, office districts and transport corridors.
- Charging infrastructure should be treated as a public utility with transparent pricing, real-time uptime monitoring and operator accountability.

Way Forward

1. Delhi should establish a permanent clean-transport war room to ensure coordinated, data-driven and accountable decision-making.
2. A unified five-year clean transport mission should be launched with measurable targets and enforceable timelines.
3. Clean mobility should be recognised as essential public health infrastructure rather than a discretionary environmental initiative.
4. Financial support mechanisms such as concessional loans, leasing models and battery swapping should be promoted for small operators and low-income users.
5. Public-private partnerships should be leveraged to rapidly scale electric fleets and charging infrastructure.

Conclusion: Delhi's air pollution crisis cannot be resolved through episodic emergency responses and seasonal restrictions. Electrification of transport, supported by strong public transport systems and robust infrastructure, offers the most credible pathway to clean air. With sustained political will, policy certainty and mission-mode execution, Delhi can restore its leadership in electric mobility and ensure the fundamental right to clean air for its citizens.

Question: Delhi's air pollution crisis requires a shift from seasonal emergency measures to a structural clean transport strategy. Discuss

Aravalli Benchmark could have effects beyond mining

Source: The post "Aravalli Benchmark could have effects beyond mining" has been created, based on "Aravalli Benchmark could have effects beyond mining" published in "Indian Express" on 23rd December 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: The Aravalli Hills are ecologically critical for biodiversity conservation, groundwater recharge and pollution control in north-west India. The newly approved 100-metre local relief benchmark for defining the Aravalli Hills has generated concern as it may substantially reduce the officially recognised extent of the range. Although the government has assured limited impact on mining, the new definition poses wider environmental and governance challenges.

Challenges

1. Large-scale exclusion of Aravalli landscapes

- The 100-metre local relief criterion excludes vast areas earlier identified as Aravalli under the Forest Survey of India's 3-degree slope methodology.
- In Rajasthan, which hosts nearly two-thirds of the Aravalli range, more than 99 per cent of previously mapped Aravalli hills could be excluded.
- Several ecologically and historically significant districts have been dropped from the official Aravalli list.

2. Risk of increased mining and construction

- Areas excluded from the Aravalli definition may legally become available for mining and quarrying in the future.
- Even if legal mining remains limited, the scope for illegal mining may increase due to weaker regulatory oversight.
- The new definition may also enable large-scale real estate and infrastructure development, particularly in Delhi-NCR.

3. Weakening of ecological safeguards beyond mining

- The Aravallis act as a natural barrier against desertification, dust storms and air pollution in the NCR region.
- Derecognition of low-height hill systems may expose fragile landscapes to land-use change, deforestation and groundwater depletion.
- Environmental damage from non-mining activities such as construction and road building may intensify.

4. Methodological and scientific concerns

- Measuring hill height from local relief rather than a standardised baseline can exclude genuine hills if surrounding terrain is elevated.
- The focus on avoiding "inclusion errors" overlooks the far more serious risk of "exclusion errors" in fragile ecosystems.
- Averaging slope data at the district level obscures the presence of hilly terrain within largely plain districts.

5. Uncertainty in long-term protection

- Although protected areas like tiger reserves and sanctuaries remain safeguarded under existing laws, past attempts to alter boundaries raise concerns.
- Protection dependent on administrative classifications rather than ecological continuity is vulnerable to policy changes.

Way Forward

1. Adopt a precautionary and ecosystem-based definition

- The Aravalli definition should integrate elevation, slope, geology and ecological functions rather than rely on a single height benchmark.

- Scientific mapping by independent institutions such as the Forest Survey of India should be given primacy.

2. Ensure protection beyond mining restrictions

- Regulatory safeguards must explicitly cover construction, real estate development and infrastructure projects in Aravalli landscapes.
- Environmental Impact Assessments should be made mandatory for all major activities in Aravalli-adjacent areas.

3. Strengthen monitoring and enforcement

- Illegal mining and encroachments should be addressed through satellite monitoring, real-time reporting and strict penalties.
- State governments must be held accountable for enforcement failures through judicial and institutional oversight.

4. Provide statutory and long-term protection

- The Aravallis should be protected through a comprehensive legal framework or a dedicated conservation notification.
- Eco-sensitive zoning should be expanded to include buffer areas beyond formally notified hills.

5. Balance development with ecological security

- Urban and infrastructure planning in NCR and western India must recognise the Aravallis as critical natural infrastructure.
- Sustainable development models, rather than deregulation, should guide land-use decisions in the region.

Conclusion

The new Aravalli benchmark presents serious environmental challenges that extend well beyond mining. Without corrective safeguards, it risks weakening protection for one of India's most fragile and valuable ecological systems. A science-based, precautionary and legally robust approach is essential to ensure that development does not come at the cost of irreversible ecological damage.

Question: The new 100-metre benchmark for defining the Aravalli Hills may harm the ecosystem. What are the challenges it creates, and how can the Aravallis be protected?

Right to Disconnect: Drawing the line after work

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Indian Economy – Employment and labour productivity.

Introduction

The Right to Disconnect Bill responds to the growing problem of **constant work-related digital connectivity**. It is introduced as a **private member's Bill**, which is **rarely enacted**. The Bill comes at a time when India has consolidated labour law through **four labour codes**. These codes regulate **working hours, overtime, and**

employer control. However, **digital work now extends beyond offices and fixed hours**, raising serious questions about how labour law should respond.

What is Right to Disconnect bill

The Bill gives employees the right to **not respond** to work-related calls, emails, or messages **beyond prescribed working hours**. It seeks to protect **personal time** from constant digital intrusion. This recognises that work now extends beyond **physical workplaces**.

Significance of Right to Disconnect law

1. **Mental & Physical Health:** Prevents digital burnout, stress, and fatigue by ensuring proper rest, reducing risks of work-related health issues.
2. **Improved Work-Life Balance:** Gives employees control over their personal time, allowing more focus on family, hobbies, and personal development, as noted in studies showing long hours strain family life.
3. **Enhanced Productivity:** Refreshed and less stressed employees are more focused and efficient during working hours, as downtime leads to better performance.
4. **Clear Boundaries:** Establishes a legal line between professional and personal life, something older labor laws didn't address in a 24/7 digital world.
5. **Protection from Penalties:** Shields employees from disciplinary action or negative consequences for not responding to work communications outside of agreed hours.
6. **Adaptation to Modern Work:** Addresses the challenges of remote and constant digital work, recognizing the need for legal frameworks in the digital era.
7. **Economic & Societal Benefits:** Healthier, happier workers can reduce healthcare burdens, potentially leading to broader economic benefit

What are the concerns of Right to Disconnect bill?

1. **Undefined "Work":** Indian labour law does not clearly define what counts as work in a digital economy. The Bill limits after-hours communication but does not say whether such engagement is legally treated as **work**.
2. **Labour Code Gap:** The **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020** governs working hours and overtime. The Bill does not clarify how **after-hours digital communication** fits within this framework.
3. **Weak Legal Status:** Because communication is regulated without linking it to working time, the right risks becoming a **behavioural expectation**. It may not function as a **binding labour standard** with enforceable consequences.
4. **Employer Control Issue:** The Bill does not address how **employer control** over an employee's time should be assessed. It leaves unanswered the question of **when an employee's time legally belongs to the employer**.
5. **Mandatory or Contractual:** Indian labour law combines **mandatory rules** with **contractual terms** shaped by employer policies. The Bill does not specify whether the right to disconnect is **mandatory** or can be modified through **contracts**.

6. **Article 21 Ambiguity:** The freedom to disengage is closely linked to **individual autonomy under Article 21**. However, the Bill does not explain whether this right has a **constitutional basis** or remains purely **statutory**.

7. **Enforcement Difficulty:** Workplace pressure to stay connected is often **informal and unwritten**. This makes violations hard to prove and weakens practical enforcement of the right.

8. **Coverage Limits:** Many sectors depend on **cross-time-zone work**, and large parts of India's workforce operate outside standard office hours. The Bill does not address how such realities will be handled.

Way forward

1. **Responsibilities on Employers:** Employers should frame policies that **respect boundaries between work and personal time**, clearly limiting after-hours communication expectations.

2. **Promotion of Vacation:** Encouraging **leave, breaks, and personal time** helps employees recharge, supporting **job satisfaction and productivity**.

3. **Flexible Schedules:** Flexible work hours can help employees manage work-life balance and build a **culture where disconnecting is accepted**.

4. **Supporting Mental Health:** Access to **counselling, wellness programmes, and mental health days** can reduce work-related stress and burnout.

5. **Integrating Digital Work into Labour Law:** The right will be effective only when **digital engagement is clearly recognised as work**, and included under **working time, overtime, and employer control**.

6. **Clarifying Legal and Constitutional Status:** The Bill must clarify whether the right is a **mandatory labour standard** and explain its **relationship with constitutional protections**.

7. Global Learning:

- The **EU** treats **employer control** as the key test for working time, including availability.
- **France** separates working time and rest time, treating availability under employer control as work.
- **Germany** enforces **strict working and rest period rules**.

These examples guide India in answering when an employee's time belongs to the employer.

Conclusion

The Bill accepts that digital work has blurred the line between work and personal life. However, it does not explain how digital labour fits within laws on working time and employer control. Comparative experience shows that protection works when time under employer control is treated as work. The Bill also leaves its constitutional character unclear. It should be seen as the start of a wider legal debate.

For detailed information on **Right to disconnect – Significance and Challenges** [read this article here](#)

Question for practice:

Evaluate the legal and practical challenges of implementing the Right to Disconnect in India in the context of digital work and existing labour laws.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Death knell for the rural job guarantee

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Indian economy.

Introduction

Death knell for the rural job guarantee captures the shift from a **rights-based rural employment system** to a **discretionary framework**. The replacement of **MGNREGA by the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025** changes rural employment from an **enforceable right linked to dignity and survival** into an **administratively sanctioned programme**. This transition **weakens constitutional values, decentralisation, and livelihood security** for the rural poor.

MGNREGA: A Rights-Based Employment Framework

- 1. Constitutional foundation:** The **right to livelihood** is an integral part of the **right to life** under **Article 21**, as affirmed by the Supreme Court in **Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)**. **MGNREGA translated this constitutional principle into practice** by recognising employment as a **necessary condition for a dignified life**.
- 2. Demand-driven guarantee:** **MGNREGA ensured work on demand**. If employment was not provided within **15 days**, workers had the **right to unemployment allowance**, making the **State legally accountable**.
- 3. Justiciable worker rights:** The law guaranteed **timely wage payments, delay compensation, minimum wages, and equal wages for men and women**. These rights were **legally enforceable and not dependent on administrative discretion**.
- 4. Ecological and institutional role:** **MGNREGA focused on creating durable assets to address ecological distress**. It also **strengthened panchayat raj institutions** by placing **planning and execution at the local level**.

Impact of MGNREGA

- 1. Universal and inclusive design:** **MGNREGA was universal rather than targeted**, avoiding **exclusion errors** and ensuring that **all rural households facing distress** could access employment without **complex eligibility conditions**.
- 2. Improvement in rural incomes:** Within a few years of implementation, studies showed a **rise in workers' incomes** and a **decline in overall poverty**. Increased income stability also led to **higher school enrolment** among rural households.
- 3. Reduced dependence on moneylenders:** According to the **India Human Development Survey**, reliance on moneylenders declined by **21%**, indicating **reduced vulnerability to debt traps and informal exploitation**.

4. Transformative impact on women: Before MGNREGA, about **45% of women workers** were either **not engaged in paid work** or worked only on **family farms**. Over the last five years, **women's participation averaged around 58%**, reflecting the impact of **equal wages, proximity of worksites, and predictable employment**.

5. Reduction in social inequalities: The programme helped **counter caste and gender inequalities** by reducing dependence on **dominant-caste employers**. **Gram Sabha oversight and social audits** enabled **community assertion**.

6. Global recognition and crisis role: International opinion shifted from criticism to praise, with the **World Bank calling MGNREGA a "stellar example" of rural development in 2014**. Its role during the **COVID-19 crisis** showed its value as a **shock absorber**.

New Employment Law: VB-G RAM G Act, 2025

What is VB-G RAM G Act:

The **VB-G RAM G Act, 2025** replaces **MGNREGA** by redefining rural employment as a **mission-based programme rather than a legal guarantee**. It shifts responsibility from **workers' demand to administrative planning and central approval**, turning employment from a **right enforceable against the State** into a **scheme dependent on discretion**.

Features

1. Shift in policy logic: The new law replaces **demand-driven employment** with **administratively planned works**. Employment now depends on **pre-approved missions**, not workers' applications.

2. Centralised control: **Section 5(1)** grants the **Union government wide discretion** over **where, what, and how** public works will be executed. **Local autonomy embedded in MGNREGA stands diluted**.

3. Normative allocations: **Section 4(5)** introduces **State-wise normative fund allocations** based on parameters decided by the **Centre**, converting a **legal guarantee into a centrally sponsored allocation model**.

4. Altered fiscal responsibility: The **Centre-State funding ratio shifts to 60:40** for most States. **Any expenditure beyond the allocated norm must be borne entirely by States**.

Major Concerns of the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025

1. Erosion of enforceable rights: The new law **removes the obligation of the Union government to compensate workers for wage delays**, despite **judicial directions fixing such liability on the Centre**.

2. Threat to federal balance: While **control is centralised**, **financial responsibility is shifted to States**, creating risks of **political favouritism and uneven access**.

3. Work rationing risk: **Fiscal pressure on States** may lead to **suppression of work demand**, increasing **unemployment and distress-driven migration**.

4. Seasonal employment restriction: The provision denying work for **60 days during the agricultural season** harms **landless workers and women**, reinforcing **land, caste, and gender hierarchies**.

5. Illusory employment promise: The claim of **125 days of employment per household** lacks credibility when **average employment remains around 50 days** due to **funding constraints**.

6. Exclusion through administration: **Technocratic controls**, including rigid norms and digital compliance, **widen the gap between workers and officials** and **create new spaces for corruption**.

7. Weak accountability mechanisms: The law introduces **no new safeguards to address corruption**. Existing mechanisms like **social audits remain underfunded and ineffective**.

For detailed information on **VB-G RAM G Bill – Provisions & Significance** [read this article here](#)

Conclusion

MGNREGA blended Gandhian local governance with Ambedkarite rights-based citizenship. The VB-G RAM G Act formalises a long erosion of this framework by replacing **enforceable rights with discretion and central control**. Rural employment policy needs reform, **not dismantling of rights**. Diluting accountability weakens dignity, justice, and the constitutional promise to rural India.

Question for practice:

Examine how the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 replaces the rights-based employment guarantee under MGNREGA with a discretionary framework and its implications for rural livelihoods.

Source: [The Hindu](#)