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9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination

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UPSC

3rd Week
November. 2025

Features :

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

INDEX

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Delhi's air, a 'wicked problem' in need of bold solutions

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Environment (pollution).

Introduction

Each winter, Delhi wakes to grey skies, closed schools, and AQI levels in the "severe" range, but this is **not a seasonal inconvenience.** It is a long-running public health, economic, and environmental crisis **created by geography, weather patterns, urban choices, and everyday behaviour**. Delhi's air pollution is a "**wicked problem**" that needs coordinated, science-based and bold action across Delhi and the wider National Capital Region.

Cause of Delhi's Air Problem

1. **Geographical factor:**

- Delhi lies in a **basin-like formation** flanked by the Aravalli hills, which restrict air flow and prevent pollutants from dispersing easily.

- Between October and January, high-pressure systems and **temperature inversion** trap cooler air and pollutants near the surface.

- **Low wind speeds** worsen this, turning Delhi into a **closed bowl of stagnant, polluted air**.

2. **Vehicular emissions:** Delhi NCR has over **3.3 crore registered vehicles**. Diesel trucks, two-wheelers, and ageing buses emit nitrogen oxides and **PM2.5**. Even with **BS-VI norms**, enforcement is weak.

3. C**onstruction-related emissions:** Rapid urbanisation, unregulated construction, and poor dust control mean construction dust and debris contribute nearly **27% of PM2.5**. Covering construction sites and following dust norms are often ignored.

4. **Industrial Emissions :** Factories and power plants in neighbouring States emit sulphur dioxide and other toxins, often using outdated technologies and minimal filtration.

5. **Crop Residue Burning: Stubble burning** in Punjab and Haryana each autumn sends large plumes of smoke into Delhi's skies, despite court orders and subsidies for alternatives.

6. F**irecrackers: Deepavali firecrackers**, and even large-scale use of "green crackers" cause intense short-term spikes on top of already high baseline pollution.

7. **Urban development strategy in India:** The current strategy focuses on real estate development, a widening of roads and allowing large fuel guzzling vehicles which are major reasons for increased pollution.

8. **Expansion of 'Grey' infrastructure:** Water bodies, urban forests, green cover, and urban agriculture have all reported shrinkage, and "grey" infrastructure has seen rapid expansion.

9. **Land use change:** The handing over of open spaces to real estate developers and lack of any meaningful afforestation affects the city's ecology.

Impact of Delhi's Air Problem

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1. Impact on **Public health**

- Long-term exposure to Delhi's toxic air can **reduce life expectancy by up to 10 years**, especially in areas with consistently high particulate levels.

- Air pollution leads to multiple health conditions including respiratory infections, heart disease, Neurological disorders, Lung cancer, and Premature mortality

- As per the Global Burden of Disease comparative risk assessment for 2015, air pollution exposure contributes to approximately 1.8 million premature deaths and loss of 49 million disability adjusted life-years (DALYs) in India.

2. **Economic loss and reputational damage**

- Air pollution costs India about **1.36% of GDP annually**, around **$36.8 billion**, due to **health-care costs, lost productivity, and premature deaths.**

- Delhi's image as one of the **world's most polluted cities** discourages **international tourists and investors.**

- Funds are increasingly diverted to **emergency responses** such as cloud seeding and domestic air purifiers, including for government offices, instead of addressing structural causes.
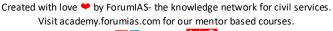
3. **Environment impacts:**

Acid Rain: Damages crops, natural vegetation, soil chemistry and leads to damage to ancient monuments (Taj Mahal Yellowing).

Eutrophication of water bodies: Increases nitrogen intake of freshwater bodies leading to Eutrophication.

Government Initiative

1. **Cloud Seeding (Artificial Rain):** Piloted with IIT Kanpur, three rounds were conducted in 2025 to temporarily reduce airborne particulate matter, although results were mixed due to weather constraints. The key reason for limited results was **insufficient cloud moisture (only 15–20%)**, while successful cloud seeding typically requires 50% or more. High cloud bases (near 10,000 feet) also reduced effectiveness.

2. **Crop Residue Management Scheme:** Crop Residue Management (CRM) scheme which provides subsidy to farmers for buying 'Turbo Happy Seeder', 'Super SMS attachment', 'rotavators' and 'superseeder'.

3. **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):** CAQM is a statutory body formed under the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas, Act 2021. CAQM has provided a framework to tackle the problem of air pollution due to stubble burning.

4. **Initiatives to reduce Vehicular Pollution:** The shift from BS-IV to BS-VI, push for Electric Vehicles (EVs), Odd-even Policy have all been implemented to reduce Vehicular pollution.
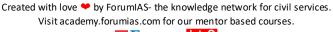
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5. **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** GRAP measures like shutting down thermal power plants and a ban on construction activities are implemented to curb air pollution.

6. **Dust and construction controls:** Mandatory deployment of anti-smog guns and water sprinklers at large buildings, construction sites, and hotspots; mist sprayers installed on electric poles at 13 major air pollution hotspots.a

Way forward

1. **Unified Airshed Management Plan:** Delhi and neighbouring NCR States need to plan for air as one shared system. A Unified Airshed Management Plan should treat Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan as a single pollution zone. **Common standards, joint enforcement drives, and shared data** can reduce blame-shifting and close gaps at borders.

2. **Increase the AQI monitoring stations:** The adequate numbers of AQI monitoring stations as mandated by the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) must be installed. Also, sensor based AQI monitoring units that give hyperlocal data must be set up.

3. **Enhanced powers to the authorities to take action according to the hyperlocal data:** It will help the authorities take pre-emptive actions and allow denser monitoring. For example, if it is found that construction is taking place in a certain pocket without following norms, the authorities can identify the location and immediately penalise the violators.

4. **National Nodal Authority for Air pollution:** India needs a nodal authority with constitutional powers to ensure collaborative pre-emptive action on air pollution with timelines for all stakeholders.

5. **Stricter guidelines for industrial emissions: SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) framework** can lay down tighter guidelines to ensure uniformity in the unit of reporting pollutant emissions, declaration of air pollution mitigation targets (like companies do for carbon emissions), and reporting of disaggregated emissions data. We must reduce exposure across the value chain from production to consumption to recycling of goods and delivery of services.

6. **Making 'Clean air' an investment sector:** The push for substitution of fossil fuels will increase investment opportunities in clean energy transition sector like green mobility, clean cooking. This will open up a new sector for investment and will help in reducing the air pollution simultaneously.

7. **Increased use of Public transport and reduced dependence on private vehicles:** The Delhi Master Plan target of 80 per cent of motorised trips by public transport by 2020 has not been met yet. The deadline has been shifted to 2041. This deadline needs to be met by augmenting the public transport system. The private vehicles use must be disincentivized by introducing ward-wise parking management area plans and parking tax.

8. **Adapting tested global measures**
 • Delhi can adapt measures used in **London, Los Angeles, and Beijing**. These include strict vehicle emission rules, cleaner fuels, relocation or upgradation of highly polluting industries, and limits on coal use in and around urban areas.

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• **Beijing's multi-year plan**, which cut PM2.5 by about **35% in five years**, shows that focused, consistent efforts work.

9. S**cience-led action:** Delhi needs a **sustained, science-led strategy** rather than scattered, emergency actions.

10 T**ransparency:** Real-time air monitoring with **public dashboards** can build trust by showing what people are breathing and what is being done.

11. C**itizen role: Citizen engagement** through campaigns, school programmes, and community initiatives must reinforce that clean air is also a **behavioural responsibility**, not just a governance issue.

Conclusion

Delhi's polluted air reflects structural choices, weak enforcement, and low priority for clean air, not an unavoidable winter pattern. Continuing with short-term, crisis-driven responses will deepen health, economic, and ecological damage. A coordinated, science-based, and citizen-backed approach can still transform Delhi's air and prevent future generations from inheriting a permanent public health emergency.

Question for practice:

Examine the major causes of Delhi's air pollution, the key government initiatives taken so far, and what more needs to be done to address the crisis.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

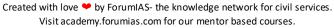## Deeper trade ties will help internationalise the rupee

Source: The post **"Deeper trade ties will help internationalise the rupee"** has been created, based on **"Deeper trade ties will help internationalise the rupee"** published in "Indian Express" on 17th November 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Indian Economy

Context: The internationalisation of the Indian Rupee (INR) has gained significant momentum as part of India's broader strategy to enhance its global economic footprint. The emphasis on deeper trade ties with other countries, especially through local currency usage, is key to this shift. By increasing the role of INR in international transactions, India aims to reduce its dependence on the US Dollar and strengthen its trade position globally.

Current Efforts towards Internationalisation of INR:

1. **Increasing Trade with Key Partners:** India is focusing on expanding trade relationships, particularly with countries in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. As trade volume grows, the usage of INR for invoicing and settlement can reduce the reliance on foreign currencies.
2. **Initiatives by International Institutions:** The **International Finance Corporation (IFC)** has committed to investing $30 billion in 67 local currencies, fostering trade in the Indian currency. Additionally, the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** has forecasted a rise in local currency loans, which will bolster India's trade with regional partners.

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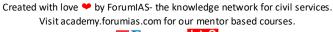**ForumIAS**

3. **RBI's New Policies:** The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has taken steps to make it easier for businesses to settle transactions in INR. This includes allowing banks to lend INR to people in neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. The RBI has also expanded its **Local Currency Settlement System (LCSS)** with countries such as the UAE, Mauritius, and the Maldives.
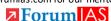
Challenges in the Internationalization of the Indian Rupee (INR):

1. **Dependency on Foreign Currencies**: Despite efforts to reduce dependence on the US Dollar, India continues to rely heavily on foreign currencies for trade settlements. Over **80%** of India's exports are still invoiced in **dollars**, which limits the growth of INR in international trade.
2. **Imbalance in Trade Basket**: The export basket remains heavily skewed towards **primary goods** and **semi-processed items** (over **80%** of trade). This limits the scope for greater use of INR, as the demand for final goods (which are more likely to be traded in local currencies) is lower.
3. **Lack of Awareness and Integration among Exporters**: There is a need for greater awareness among **Indian exporters** about using INR in transactions. Many businesses still rely on **dollars** due to established international practices and lack of understanding of local currency settlement systems.
4. **Challenges in Infrastructure and Payment Systems**: India is still developing the **payment infrastructure** necessary to support widespread adoption of INR. While **UPI** has made strides domestically, **cross-border payment systems** that can seamlessly facilitate INR-based transactions remain underdeveloped in many countries.
5. **Geopolitical and Market Barriers**: The global economic system, dominated by **dollar-based transactions**, poses significant geopolitical challenges. Many countries prefer to settle trade in dollars for stability and ease of conversion, which may slow the adoption of INR.

Way Forward for the Internationalization of INR:

1. **Expanding Local Currency Settlement Systems (LCSS)**: India must continue to **expand LCSS** agreements with key trading partners like the **UAE**, **Mauritius**, and **Maldives**. This would allow for more **cross-border transactions** in INR and reduce reliance on the US Dollar. A focus on **regional partnerships** through agreements like those with ASEAN countries and the **Russian Federation** could further establish INR as a regional trade currency.
2. **Encouraging More Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)**: Signing **FTAs** with more countries would provide a platform for promoting **local currency trade**, including INR. A focus on industries that export **final goods** (such as high-tech, processed products) can make INR more attractive for trade invoicing.
3. **Technological Innovations in Payment Systems**: To streamline cross-border trade, India needs to **enhance digital payment systems**. The **expansion of UPI** to international markets, as well as the development of alternatives to **SWIFT**, such as **Russia's STFM** (System for Transfer of Financial Messages), will be critical in facilitating **INR-based transactions**.
4. **Boosting Awareness and Incentives for Exporters**: The government should work with **export organizations** like the **Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO)** to raise awareness among exporters about the benefits of settling transactions in INR. Financial incentives or subsidies for exporters who use INR in cross-border transactions could encourage adoption.
5. **Promoting Diversified Exports**: India should focus on increasing the share of **processed and finished goods** in its trade basket. A more diversified export profile, especially in sectors like technology, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing, will provide stronger justification for the use of INR in global trade.

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6. **Long-Term Policy Commitment**: A **consistent policy commitment** towards internationalizing the INR is necessary, with special focus on **trade and payments systems**. Policies encouraging international companies to hold and use INR will also help improve its acceptability.

Conclusion: To achieve the goal of **INR internationalization**, India must focus on addressing existing challenges such as dependency on foreign currencies, trade imbalances, and the need for better payment infrastructure. By strategically expanding local currency settlement systems, entering more FTAs, and promoting technological advancements in payments, India can position the INR as a viable alternative to the US Dollar in international trade. If these steps are taken, INR's global usage could significantly rise, contributing to India's long-term economic growth and self-reliance.

Question: How will deeper trade ties help internationalize the Indian Rupee? Discuss the current steps and future prospects.

What are Digital Personal Data Protection Rules?

Source: The post **"What are Digital Personal Data Protection Rules?"** has been created, based on **"What are Digital Personal Data Protection Rules?"** published in "The Hindu" on 17th November 2025.
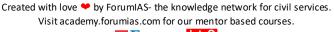
UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Governance

Context: The **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** establishes a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of personal data in India, aligning with global standards such as the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**. This Act regulates how businesses and government bodies handle citizens' digital data, ensuring privacy, security, and accountability. Additionally, it introduces amendments to the **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005**, addressing the balance between personal privacy and public transparency.

Key Features of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act:

1. **Definition of Data Fiduciaries and Data Principals: Data fiduciaries** (individuals or entities handling data) must manage and protect the personal data of **data principals** (individuals whose data is collected), ensuring its safe processing, encryption, and security.
2. **Informed Consent Requirement:** Data fiduciaries are required to obtain **informed consent** from **data principals** before collecting, processing, or sharing data. The consent must specify the purpose, nature, and duration of data collection.
3. **Rights of Data Principals: Data principals** have the right to access, correct, or delete their data. If they become inactive or request deletion, data fiduciaries are obligated to comply.
4. **Data Breaches and Penalties:** If a **data breach** occurs, data fiduciaries must report it within a specified time frame. Fines for non-compliance range from **₹10,000** to **₹250 crore** depending on the severity of the breach.
5. **Appointment of a Data Protection Officer (DPO):** A **DPO** must be appointed by data fiduciaries to ensure compliance with the DPDP Act and manage data security and breaches.

6. **Restrictions on Data Transfers:** The Act imposes **restrictions on cross-border data transfers**, mandating that sensitive personal data is stored and processed within India, unless authorized otherwise.

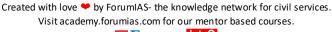**Relation to the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:**

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1. **Amendment to the RTI Act:** The **RTI Act, 2005** has been amended to protect **personal information** from disclosure, allowing government bodies to refuse requests for personal data, even if public interest is involved.
2. The amended **Section 8(1)** of the RTI Act aligns with the DPDP Act by introducing restrictions on revealing private information unless there is a significant public interest.
3. **Controversy and Opposition:** The amendment has sparked controversy, with critics arguing that it could be used to **limit transparency** and **obstruct accountability**, particularly in cases where government officials' actions need to be scrutinized.
4. Transparency and civil rights groups, including those associated with the **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)**, have expressed concerns that the amendment could shield government activities from public scrutiny under the guise of privacy.

Challenges in the Implementation of the DPDP Act:

1. **Enforcement and Compliance Issues:** The DPDP Act's effective enforcement depends on the formation of the **Data Protection Board of India (DPBI)**. However, key aspects of the Act, such as the creation of the DPBI, have yet to be fully implemented. This delay hinders the enforcement of data protection regulations.
2. **Balancing Privacy and Transparency:** The amendment to the **RTI Act** has created a conflict between **privacy rights** and **public transparency**. Striking a balance between the right to privacy and the public's right to access information remains a challenge, as it could limit citizens' access to crucial information about government operations.
3. **Data Fiduciary Accountability:** While the Act mandates data fiduciaries to implement robust data security measures, ensuring compliance across various industries and sectors can be a logistical and financial challenge. Small businesses, in particular, may struggle to meet the regulatory requirements, including appointing a **Data Protection Officer (DPO)** and reporting data breaches promptly.
4. **Public Awareness and Education:** A lack of widespread awareness among **data principals** (citizens) about their rights under the DPDP Act could hinder its effectiveness. Ensuring that people are informed about their **right to access, modify, or delete** their data is crucial for the success of the Act.
5. **Resistance from Government Bodies:** Despite the DPDP Act's protections, **government bodies** may resist certain provisions, such as the restriction on disclosing personal information, leading to potential conflicts with citizens' rights to **public information** under the **RTI Act**.
6. **Cross-Border Data Transfers:** The Act's restrictions on **cross-border data transfers** may face opposition from multinational corporations and foreign governments, as it could disrupt global data flows. This could also affect India's participation in global digital trade and limit access to international data processing resources.

Way Forward:

1. **Effective Implementation and Infrastructure Development:** India must expedite the formation of the **Data Protection Board of India (DPBI)** and ensure that the **Data Protection Officer (DPO)** role is well-defined and resourced across businesses. This would ensure consistent enforcement and monitoring of the DPDP Act.
2. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Widespread awareness initiatives must be launched to inform citizens about their rights under the DPDP Act, the process for consent management, and their ability to seek redress if their data is mishandled.

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3. **Regulation of Government Transparency:** A balanced approach is needed to ensure that government data is made available for public scrutiny while respecting individuals' right to privacy. Clear guidelines should be set to ensure transparency without compromising personal data.
4. **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Continued dialogue with industry stakeholders, including **businesses** and **technology firms**, will be essential to address challenges related to cross-border data flow and data security compliance.

Conclusion: The **DPDP Act, 2023** is a crucial step toward protecting personal data in India. However, the effective implementation of the Act faces several challenges, including balancing privacy with transparency, ensuring compliance across sectors, and fostering public awareness. India must address these challenges to ensure that the DPDP Act achieves its goal of safeguarding digital privacy while promoting transparency and accountability in governance.

Question: What are the key features of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023? How does it aim to protect personal data and how does it relate to the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005? Discuss the challenges associated with its implementation.

The lower judiciary — litigation, pendency, stagnation

Introduction

India's subordinate judiciary, which handles the bulk of civil and criminal cases, now faces a crisis of **litigation, pendency and stagnation**. Despite constitutional safeguards and High Court supervision, huge backlogs, vacancies, weak infrastructure, procedural hurdles and uneven training have slowed justice delivery, making timely, accessible and effective adjudication a major challenge at the trial level.
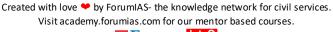
What is Subordinate Judiciary?

Subordinate courts work at the district and lower levels under the supervision of the High Court. **Articles 233 to 237 of Part VI of the the Constitution** regulate their organisation and ensure independence from the executive.

District Judges are appointed, posted and promoted by the Governor in consultation with the High Court, while judges below that level are appointed after consulting the State Public Service Commission and the High Court.

A three-tier structure operates: District and Sessions Courts at the top, various subordinate civil and criminal courts and special courts below, with appeals ultimately lying to the High Court.

Significance of Subordinate Judiciary

1. **Accessibility to justice**: It is the first point of contact for most people, making justice accessible in their local communities. This is vital for rural populations and ensures that judicial reach extends to all strata of society.

2. **Handling the majority of cases**: These courts handle the largest volume of cases, managing over 85% of all civil and criminal matters in the country.

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3. **Enforcing the rule of law**: By addressing a wide range of disputes, from petty offenses to major crimes, the subordinate judiciary plays a critical role in maintaining law and order and upholding the rule of law at the local level.

4. **Reducing the burden on higher courts**: By effectively managing and resolving cases at the district and lower levels, these courts prevent the Supreme Court and High Courts from being overwhelmed.

5. **Facilitating local dispute resolution**: They handle a variety of civil matters like disputes over property, contracts, and family law, resolving issues between individuals and organizations at the local level.

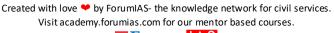**Major Concerns related to Subordinate Judicial Service**

1.**Huge case backlog:** As per NJDG data about **4.7 crore cases** are pending in district and subordinate courts, out of **5.34 crore** cases across all courts.

2.**Delay justice:** India Justice Report (IJR) 2025 notes that of **5.1 crore cases** pending in high courts and district courts (Jan 2025), **12%** are over **10 years** old, **22%** are **5–10 years**, and around **61%** (HC) and **46%** (district) have been pending for more than **three years**, showing systemic delay at the trial level.

3.**Overburdening**: At the district court level, the average workload rose to **2,200 cases per judge.** Prime hours are spent on clerical tasks instead of recording evidence, hearing arguments, and writing judgments, so judges function more like **ministerial officers** than adjudicators.

4. **High Vacancies in Subordinate Judiciary:**

- According to IJR 2025, sanctioned subordinate-court strength is **25,771 judges**, but only **20,478** are in place (about **15 judges per 10 lakh people**), and **vacancies in subordinate courts have stayed between 21–22%** from 2018-19 to 2025.
- The 2023 "State of the Judiciary" report also recorded **5,300 vacancies** in the district judiciary.

5. **Infrastructure Gap**: Over 40% of district and subordinate courts lack basic facilities such as modern computers, reliable internet, and video-conferencing equipment.

6. Access to Justice & Physical Accessibility: only **30.4%** of district-court complexes have separate **PwD washrooms**, more than **half** lack ramps, only about **25%** provide wheelchairs, and roughly **5%** have tactile paving, making subordinate courts difficult to use for persons with disabilities.

7. **Administrative and procedural challenges**

- Judges spend a large part of the day on calling cases, issuing summons, and checking files instead of deciding disputes.
- Archaic procedures and multiple technical steps create frequent delay points, which are often used by parties to postpone hearings and execution.

Major Reasons for Delay

1. **Judges doing clerical work:** Subordinate judges spend prime hours calling cases, issuing summons, and receiving vakalatnamas instead of recording evidence and writing judgments.

2. **Inexperienced and underprepared judges:** Many new judges lack prior practice at the Bar, struggle with workload and procedure, and sometimes fail to pass clear, timely orders.

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3. **Mandatory pre-suit mediation in commercial cases:** Section 12(a) of the Commercial Courts Act requires mediation before filing, even when parties have already exchanged notices and failed to settle, so it simply adds a new layer of delay.

4. **Cooling-off and separation rules in mutual consent divorce:** The six-month cooling-off period and one-year separation requirement in mutual consent divorce slow down disposal and often lead to further proceedings on whether these conditions can be relaxed.

5. **Confusion and forum issues under the new Rent Act:** The insistence on a written registered lease and conflicting views on rent court jurisdiction allow the same dispute to go to civil or commercial courts, creating forum confusion and extra litigation.

6. **Two-stage decrees in partition suits:** Separate preliminary and final decrees, plus a fresh application for final decree, turn partition cases into long, staggered processes.

7. **Hyper-technical rules for execution of decrees:** Order XXI of the Code of Civil Procedure has 106 detailed rules that judgment debtors can use to obstruct execution, forcing decree-holders to visit court for years to realise their claims.
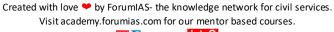
Way Forward

1. M**inisterial court:** Create a **separate "ministerial" court** in each district to handle calling cases, issuing summons, receiving vakalatnamas, written statements and recording ex parte evidence.

2. **Raise judge strength:** States must **fill all sanctioned posts quickly** and **increase sanctioned strength** in low-ratio states, in line with the **Law Commission 120th Report** and **Supreme Court directions** to move towards **50 judges per million population**.

3. **Ensure experience-based entry:** New civil judges should have **minimum practice experience** at the Bar; the Supreme Court has now restored the **3-year practice requirement** for Civil Judge (Junior Division).

4. **Career progression:** Ensure **merit-based promotion** and proper use of **LDCE quota** for faster promotion of efficient officers.

5. **Strong training**: Each new civil/senior civil judge should undergo **structured training at High 6. Court Benches**, observing hearings, use of precedents and order-writing.

7. Raise **state judicial spending above the current ~0.59% of state budgets** and improve **per capita spend**, as flagged by India Justice Report 2025.

Conclusion

A stronger subordinate judiciary is essential for real access to justice, not just a formal right on paper. If clerical work is removed from judges, vacancies are filled, procedures are simplified, and training, infrastructure and funding are improved, district courts can move from pendency and stagnation towards **faster, reliable and citizen-centred justice**.

Question for practice

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Examine the major concerns and causes of delay in India's subordinate judiciary and suggest a suitable way forward to strengthen its functioning.

Source: The Hindu, India Justice Report (IJR) 2025

India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa

Source: The post "**India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa"** has been created, based on **"India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa"** published in "The Hindu" on 18th November 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- International relations

Context: India's relationship with Africa has grown significantly over the past decade, evolving from traditional ties to a more dynamic and multi-faceted partnership. The **India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)** held in 2015 marked a milestone in this relationship. Since then, India has increased its diplomatic presence, trade relations, and investment in Africa, positioning itself as a critical player in Africa's growth and development.

Growth in India-Africa Relations

1. **Diplomatic Expansion**: Since 2015, India has opened **17 new missions** across Africa, reinforcing its diplomatic engagement.
2. **Trade and Investment**: Trade between India and Africa has surpassed **$100 billion**, and India is now one of the **top five investors** in Africa with cumulative investments of **$75 billion**. Investment flows are steadily rising, focusing on key sectors such as **energy**, **infrastructure**, and **technology**.
3. **Global Representation**: India has played an instrumental role in ensuring Africa's full membership in the **G-20**, strengthening the continent's global voice.

Opportunities for Deeper Engagement

1. **Demographic Dividend**: By 2050, one in four people on Earth will be in Africa, creating a unique opportunity for India to tap into a young, growing market. India's **economic strength** and **demographic alignment** with Africa provide a solid foundation for mutual growth.
2. **Strategic and Economic Partnerships**: India has increasingly focused on **co-investing in future-facing sectors** such as **green hydrogen**, **electric mobility**, and **digital infrastructure** in Africa. India can help Africa leapfrog in these areas, thus fostering sustainable growth.
3. **Educational and Technical Cooperation**: India's educational initiatives, such as the **IIT Madras campus in Zanzibar**, provide African students with opportunities to develop skills that are essential for Africa's future development. Over **40,000 Africans** have studied in India in the last decade, with many returning to contribute to their nations' development.
4. **Security and Peacekeeping:** India's **naval and security** partnerships in Africa are expanding. Countries like **Comoros**, **Djibouti**, and **Kenya** have joined India in strengthening shared maritime security.
5. India's support for **peacekeeping missions** in Africa, as part of its broader UN peacekeeping efforts, further demonstrates its commitment to the continent's stability.

Challenges to Overcome

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1. **Competition from China**: Despite India's growing presence, it still lags behind **China**, which has heavily invested in Africa. China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** has allowed it to dominate African infrastructure projects.
2. **Bureaucratic Hurdles**: Indian firms often face challenges such as **small balance sheets** and **bureaucratic delays** that hinder their ability to scale up investments in Africa.
3. **Need for Technology Transfer**: While India has contributed significantly in terms of funding and projects, there is a need for **more technology transfer**, particularly in cutting-edge sectors like **renewable energy** and **digital infrastructure**.
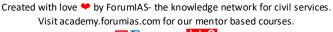
The Human Link and Soft Power

1. India's most significant contribution to Africa is its **human capital**. Over **40,000 African students** have studied in India in the past decade, creating a network of skilled professionals.
2. **People-to-people connections**, such as the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**, help build long-lasting relationships between India and Africa. Many of these students have returned to Africa, working in **policy, governance**, and **innovation** sectors, acting as bridges between the two regions.

Way Forward

1. **Technology and Innovation**: India should focus on advancing its partnerships with Africa in **high-tech sectors**, particularly **green hydrogen**, **electric mobility**, and **digital infrastructure**, which are key to Africa's sustainable growth.
2. **Increasing Investments**: India must work to overcome bureaucratic barriers and increase **public-private partnerships** (PPP) to scale investments in Africa's development.
3. **Trade Partnerships**: Strengthening India's trade relations through agreements like the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** will open up new opportunities for deeper economic integration.
4. **Capacity Building**: India should continue to expand its **educational and skill development programs** in Africa, focusing on technical training, entrepreneurship, and digital skills, in order to contribute to Africa's human capital development.
5. **Enhanced Security Cooperation**: Building more robust security and defense ties through joint military exercises, peacekeeping operations, and infrastructure security projects will reinforce India-Africa partnerships.

Conclusion: India's partnership with Africa is entering a new phase, one that goes beyond trade and investment to include **strategic cooperation, educational partnerships**, and **sustainable development initiatives**. The challenges posed by competition and bureaucratic obstacles are real, but India's strengths in **technology, human capital**, and **diplomacy** offer significant opportunities for strengthening ties. In the coming years, India must **move up the value chain** by focusing on **co-investment in future-facing sectors** and enhancing its technological and educational outreach to Africa. The continent's demographic and economic transformation offers India a unique opportunity to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the African continent.

Question. Discuss the evolving relationship between India and Africa, highlighting the opportunities and challenges in enhancing their strategic, economic, and cultural ties. How can India strengthen its position in Africa in the coming years?

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Need of a cluster-based cooperative model

Source: The post "***Need of a cluster-based cooperative model***" has been created, based on "**Need of a cluster-based cooperative model**" published in "The Hindu Business line" on 18th November 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Indian Economy

Context: India's agricultural sector, which supports a large portion of the population, faces significant challenges such as low efficiency, fragmented production, and inadequate infrastructure. To address these challenges and boost India's agricultural exports, there is a growing need to adopt a **cluster-based cooperative model**. This model has the potential to streamline supply chains, connect producers with processors and global markets, and enhance product efficiency, profitability, and inclusivity.

The Concept of Cooperative Clusters

1. **Cooperative Clusters**: This model involves farmers coming together in **clusters** based on their geographic advantages, producing specific crops, and linking up with processors and global markets.
2. **Strengths of the Model**: It promotes **collective participation**, enhances **productivity**, and enables **better market access**. It creates a **synergistic environment** where farmers can collectively procure inputs, streamline production, and share resources to achieve economies of scale.
3. **Global Competitiveness**: The model fosters efficiency in production and enhances profitability by connecting producers to international markets, facilitating improved branding, certification, and export.

Advantages of a Cluster-Based Cooperative Model

1. **Increased Efficiency and Profitability**: By joining forces, small farmers can overcome individual barriers such as lack of resources, infrastructure, and technical expertise. The collective approach allows for **bulk procurement** and better **negotiation power**.
2. **Improved Marketing and Branding**: With the collective effort of farmers, they can create stronger market identities and **better brand recognition** in global markets, increasing demand and profitability.
3. **Linking Agriculture with Industry**: The model fosters a better connection between **agriculture and agri-processing industries**, promoting the development of **value-added products**, thus opening up new market opportunities.

Key Success Factors for Cluster Development

1. **Infrastructure Development**: Proper **storage facilities**, **processing units**, and **cold chains** are crucial to ensure that products can be processed, packaged, and transported efficiently.
2. **Access to Finance and Technology**: Farmers need access to **credit facilities**, technical knowledge, and government support for adopting modern agricultural practices and infrastructure.
3. **Export-Orientation**: A key component of the cluster model is aligning production with **global demand**, tailoring products for export markets. For example, regions like **Jammu and Kashmir** can focus on high-value crops like **saffron** and **walnuts**, while **Tamil Nadu** can specialize in **turmeric** and **spices**.

Examples of Potential Clusters

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1. **Jammu and Kashmir**: Known for its unique climate and geography, the region can be developed as a cluster for producing high-value crops such as **saffron**, **apples**, and **walnuts**, which are in global demand.
2. **Tamil Nadu**: Leveraging its agricultural diversity, Tamil Nadu can focus on **turmeric**, **banana**, **spices**, and other high-demand crops, combining traditional practices with modern methods.
3. **Maharashtra and Gujarat**: These states could focus on **horticultural crops**, connecting farmers directly with processors and exporters to enhance agricultural value chains.

Current Challenges in Indian Agriculture

1. **Fragmented Production**: India's agricultural sector is characterized by small and marginal farmers, often scattered across different regions, which hinders the scaling of production.
2. **Post-Harvest Losses**: India faces **5-15% post-harvest losses** due to inadequate cold storage, scientific warehousing, and processing facilities, especially in fruits and vegetables.
3. **Limited Market Access**: Many farmers lack direct access to global markets, resulting in limited profitability and inefficient supply chains.
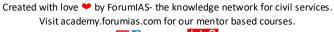
Way Forward

1. **Promote Policy Support**: The government should provide **policy backing**, including **financial support**, incentives for **infrastructure development**, and **subsidies** for cooperatives to form and grow.
2. **Infrastructure Development**: Investment in **storage facilities**, **cold chains**, and **agri-processing units** must be prioritized to reduce post-harvest losses and increase value addition.
3. **Skill Development**: Extension services and **agricultural training** must be strengthened to enhance the **capacity of farmers** to adopt new technologies and best practices, improving production efficiency.
4. **Strengthen Export Linkages**: Building **global market access** through international partnerships, trade agreements, and export infrastructure is essential for ensuring that the cooperative clusters can compete on the global stage.
5. **Focus on Sustainability**: As the cluster model grows, it is important to emphasize **sustainable farming practices**, ensuring that the agricultural sector remains environmentally and economically viable in the long term.

Conclusion: A **cluster-based cooperative model** holds significant potential in transforming India's agricultural sector. It can help address the pressing challenges of fragmented farming, post-harvest losses, and limited market access. By promoting **collective participation**, enhancing **global linkages**, and improving **productivity**, this model offers a pragmatic solution to the challenges faced by Indian agriculture, ensuring long-term growth, profitability, and sustainability.

Question. Critically analyze the need for a cluster-based cooperative model in India's agriculture. Discuss its potential advantages and challenges, and suggest a way forward for its successful implementation.

What can local bodies expect from the 16th FC?

Source: The post **"What can local bodies expect from the 16th FC?"** has been created, based on "**What can local bodies expect from the 16th FC?**" published in **"The Hindu"** on **19th November 2025.**

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UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Governance

Context: The 16th Finance Commission (FC) submitted its report on November 17. Under Article 280 of the Constitution, the FC is mandated to recommend vertical sharing of Central revenues with States and measures to augment the finances of panchayats and municipalities. Given the limited progress in fiscal decentralisation, local bodies expect the 16th FC to bring stability, clarity, and greater financial empowerment.

What Local Bodies Expect from the 16th FC

1. Greater vertical devolution: Local bodies expect the FC to allocate a higher percentage share of the Union divisible pool, ensuring predictable and adequate resources. They also anticipate a formula-based approach rather than the earlier ad hoc lump-sum grants.

2. Strengthening of own-source revenues: Local governments expect clearer guidelines on expanding property tax, advertisement tax, and user charges. They expect the FC to push States to devolve revenue powers aligned with functional responsibilities.

3. Clearer functional devolution: Panchayats and municipalities expect the FC to encourage States to map functions in line with the 11th and 12th Schedules. They expect stronger alignment between assigned functions and corresponding funds.

4. Revival of performance-based grants: Local bodies expect the FC to introduce realistic and implementable performance criteria. They expect incentives for improving auditing, transparency, service delivery, and administrative reforms.

5. Better integration of State Finance Commissions: Local governments expect the FC to ensure that recommendations of SFCs are considered and implemented consistently. They anticipate a framework that encourages States to devolve funds and functions as per constitutional intent.

6. Reduction of ad hocism: Local bodies expect the FC to move away from abrupt shifts in grant design seen in previous FCs. They expect consistent principles to guide tied, untied, and conditional grants.

Challenges Faced So Far

1. Inadequate functional devolution: States often retain control over key subjects listed in the 11th and 12th Schedules. Local bodies thus lack clarity over their actual service delivery responsibilities.

2. Weak local revenue capacity: Many local governments lack the authority or capacity to effectively administer property tax or user charges. Local revenues remain insufficient to meet operational costs.

3. Poor implementation of State Finance Commissions: Though over 100 SFC reports have been submitted, very few have been accepted or implemented by States. The absence of SFC-based devolution weakens the overall fiscal framework.

4. Discontinuity in Union FC recommendations: Successive FCs have changed formulas, grant types, and conditions frequently. Local bodies struggle to plan long-term due to such inconsistencies.

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5. Unrealistic performance conditions: Several FCs recommended conditions that were difficult for most local governments to meet.As a result, performance-linked grants were often discontinued.

6. Inability to estimate actual resource needs: Earlier FCs could not accurately assess expenditure needs of 2.7 lakh panchayats and 5,000 municipalities. This has resulted in inadequate and uneven grant allocations.

Way Forward

1. Adopt a stable, transparent formula for grants: The 16th FC should standardise tied, untied, and performance grants to reduce policy uncertainty. A predictable multi-year framework will improve planning at the grassroots.

2. Strengthen SFCs and enforce their implementation: The FC should mandate timelines and minimum standards for SFC constitution and functioning. A monitoring mechanism can ensure States implement their SFC recommendations.

3. Promote realistic and outcome-based performance grants: Conditions should focus on achievable reforms such as timely audits, data reporting, and improved service indicators. Incentives should reward efficiency rather than penalise weak capacity.

4. Link funds to actual functions devolved: Grants must be aligned with functions that States assign to local governments. This alignment will strengthen accountability and improve service delivery.

5. Enhance local revenue mobilization: Capacity building, digitisation of property tax records, and rational user charges should be promoted. States should be nudged to devolve appropriate taxation powers.

6. Create a comprehensive database of local finances: A national-level dataset on local government finances can help assess expenditure needs accurately. This will support evidence-based grant allocation by the FC.

Conclusion: Local bodies expect the 16th Finance Commission to provide a coherent, sustained, and equitable framework for fiscal decentralisation. Strengthening functional clarity, ensuring predictable grants, improving revenue capacity, and reinforcing SFCs can finally realise the vision of the 73rd and 74th Amendments by empowering grassroots governance in India.

Question: Discuss key expectations of local bodies from the 16th Finance Commission and the challenges in strengthening local government finances.

Threats to Indian Sea Cows

Source: The post **"Threats to Indian Sea Cows"** has been created, based on **"Threats to Indian Sea Cows"** published in **"Indian Express" on 19th November 2025.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 3- Environment

Context: Dugongs (Dugong dugon), also known as sea cows, are listed as *Vulnerable* on the IUCN Red List and protected under **Schedule I** of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. A recent IUCN report has highlighted that

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India's dugong populations, found primarily in the Gulf of Mannar–Palk Bay, the Gulf of Kutch, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, face severe risks due to human-induced pressures.
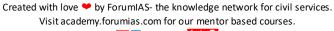
Significance of Dugongs

1. Dugongs play a vital role in maintaining the health of **seagrass ecosystems**, which are crucial habitats for fish, invertebrates, and carbon storage.
2. Their grazing activity helps keep seagrass meadows healthy by preventing overgrowth and promoting nutrient recycling.
3. Seagrass ecosystems where dugongs graze can contribute significantly to **carbon sequestration**, acting as major "blue carbon" sinks.
4. Healthy seagrass habitats support **commercially important fisheries**, contributing up to **₹2 crore per year** in additional fish production.
5. Dugongs serve as an indicator species for assessing the ecological health of shallow coastal waters.

Why Are Dugongs in India at Risk?

1. Rapid decline in population: Once abundant, the population has drastically reduced; estimates vary between **250–450 individuals**, with some experts suggesting even lower numbers. Their elusive nature and cloudy, shallow waters make accurate surveys difficult, complicating conservation.

2. Degradation of coastal habitats: Seagrass meadows are shrinking due to coastal development, sedimentation, and pollution. Habitat loss directly reduces their food availability and safe nursing grounds.

3. Accidental entanglement in fishing nets: Breakdown of traditional, regulated fishing methods increases bycatch incidences. High mortality is linked to gillnets and other fishing gear, especially in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

4. Pollution and toxic contamination: Research from *Marine Pollution Bulletin* found high concentrations of **arsenic, cadmium, chromium, mercury, and lead** in dugong tissues. These pollutants enter the sea through industrial effluents, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage, eventually settling in seagrass beds. Toxic accumulation weakens vital organs like the liver and kidneys, increasing mortality and reducing reproductive success.

5. Slow reproductive rate: A female dugong gives birth only once in several years. Slow breeding makes population recovery extremely difficult once numbers decline.

Government Measures Taken

1. In 2010, the **MoEFCC** constituted a *Task Force for Conservation of Dugongs* to assess threats.
2. India launched the **National Dugong Recovery Programme**, in partnership with Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
3. The **Dugong Conservation Reserve** was established in **Palk Bay, Tamil Nadu (2022)** to protect seagrass meadows and create secure habitats.
4. Awareness campaigns and research collaborations have been initiated to monitor dugong distribution and mortality.

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Challenges in Conservation

1. Dugongs inhabit **remote, cloudy, and shallow** waters where surveys are unreliable, making population management difficult.
2. Coastal populations depend heavily on fishing for livelihood, creating conflict between conservation goals and economic needs.
3. Enforcement of no-fishing zones or restrictions is weak in ecologically sensitive maritime areas.
4. Marine pollution continues unabated due to limited monitoring and inadequate treatment of industrial and municipal waste.
5. Long-term seagrass restoration requires sustained funding and coordination between multiple agencies.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening seagrass conservation** through large-scale mapping, restoration, and strict regulation of coastal development.
2. **Reducing bycatch** by promoting dugong-safe fishing gear, seasonal closures, and community-based marine conservation models.
3. **Controlling marine pollution** via stricter enforcement of effluent discharge norms, expansion of sewage treatment, and monitoring toxic metal levels.
4. **Enhancing scientific monitoring** using satellite tracking, drones, and acoustic methods for better population estimation.
5. **Community participation** by incentivising fisherfolk to adopt sustainable practices and developing alternative livelihoods.
6. **Regional cooperation** with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries, given the migratory nature of coastal marine fauna.
7. **Strengthening protected areas** through expansion of Dugong Conservation Reserves in other habitats like the Gulf of Kutch and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Conclusion: Dugongs are essential to the ecological health of India's coastal ecosystems, but they face severe threats from habitat degradation, overfishing, pollution, and slow reproductive rates. Strengthening seagrass conservation, reducing anthropogenic pressures, and improving scientific monitoring can ensure the survival of these gentle "gardeners of the sea."

Question: Why are dugongs declining in India, and what measures are needed to ensure their long-term conservation?

How China Dealt With Air Pollution - Lessons for India

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Pollution

Introduction

China moved from choking, coal-driven smog to visible gains in air quality within a decade, while India still struggles with hazardous winter air in many cities. In China, air pollution became a core development priority, backed by strict targets, heavy investment, cleaner energy, electric transport and better monitoring. India can study these choices, their limits and their relevance to its own federal structure and growth needs.

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China's air pollution crisis

1. Rapid growth and rising pollution: After economic opening, China's coal-based industrial growth made emissions soar. By the 2000s, **thick urban haze** showed the cost of power plants and heavy industry, while **PM2.5 from coal, industry, vehicles and burning of crop residues** became the key health threat.

2. Beijing as the symbol: Beijing's air became a global symbol of this crisis. In 2015, its **average AQI was about 144**, similar to present Delhi levels. Attention during the 2008 Olympics and rising public anger turned air quality into a **core political issue**.

Initiatives Taken by China to Control the Air Pollution Crisis

1. Policy priority: Air pollution became a **clear policy priority** in China's **11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10)**. It was recognised as a serious concern linked to rapid coal-based growth and urban smog, so central leaders decided that cutting key pollutants would be a core development goal, not a side issue.

2. Implementation performance: China used a **top-down implementation system**. The Communist Party's organisation departments monitored how well regions met environmental goals and compared the performance of different provinces and cities.

3. Target for officials: Under the **cadre evaluation system**, specific **targets were fixed for governors, mayors, county magistrates and other officials**. Their success or failure on these air-quality and energy goals directly influenced promotions and assessments.

4. Increasing investment:

> • China backed these targets with **higher investment in pollution-control equipment**. Industries were required to fit better filters and treatment systems, and many **outdated, highly polluting plants were shut down**.

> • This combination of money for technology and compulsory closure of dirty capacity became a major tool to reduce emissions from coal-based power and heavy industry.

5. Adoption of electric vehicles: China also focused on the **adoption of Electric Vehicles (EVs)** to cut transport emissions. For example, **Shenzhen** fully electrified more than **16,000 buses** by 2017, and other big cities expanded electric buses and cleaner public transport.

6. **Shifting from coal:** China has prioritized replacing coal with cleaner energy sources, such as natural gas and renewables, through policies like the "**coal-to-gas**" initiative.

7. **Modernizing industries:** Stricter emission standards have been enforced for new and existing industrial plants, including upgrading technology to remove pollutants like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides.

8. **Implementing traffic controls: Low Emission Zones (LEZs)** have been introduced in cities to restrict entry for high-emission vehicles, and restrictions have been placed on the number of private vehicles through measures like license plate lotteries.

9. **Large-scale afforestation:** China has undertaken extensive tree-planting programs, such as the **Great Green Wall,** to combat pollution and improve air quality.

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10. **Enhanced monitoring:** The country has invested in state-of-the-art air quality monitoring systems and makes hourly and daily Air Quality Index (AQI) data publicly available to inform the public about health risks.
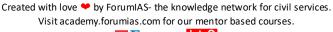
Limitations to China Initiative

1. Top-down implementation: Strong top-down pressure leads some local officials to fake data and quietly restart factories that were officially closed.

2. Coal expansion risk: Plans to increase coal production capacity after the 2021 power shortage risk pushing PM2.5 levels and ground-level ozone back up again.

3. Weak air-quality benchmarks: China's basic air-quality standards are set much lower than in Western countries, so even reported improvements still allow relatively dirty and unhealthy air in many big cities.

Comparing China and India: structural differences

1. Different policy approach over time: Both countries introduced environmental laws in the 1980s and air-quality programmes in the 2010s, but China's strategy has been more steady overall.

2. Continuous plans vs emergency measures: China relies on continuous national plans, while India uses GRAP-type measures that activate after pollution breaches limits and focus on Delhi-NCR.

3. Role of political will and money: A study highlights two determinants: political will and financial resources, and clear accountability linking national standards with plant-level emission control.

4. Household pollution and biomass use: India faces household emissions from rural biomass use; LPG support helps, but clean fuel is still not affordable for many.

5. Basic services and growth: When China moved to clean up, most citizens already had reliable power; India still lacks equitable electricity access and worries that green goals may slow growth.

6. Centralised China vs federal India: China's unitary state allows tighter top-down control, whereas India's tiered governance has overlapping jurisdictions and weakly fixed institutional responsibility.

7. Courts and PILs as accountability tools: India's judiciary and PILs create decentralised legal accountability, which China partly lacks.

Way Forward for India

1. **Plan for long-term, nationwide action:** India should move from short, seasonal responses like GRAP to steady clean-air plans covering major cities.

2. **Tie targets to accountability:** Like China's cadre system, India must link air-quality goals with clear responsibility and strict plant-level monitoring.

3. **Clean up power and industry:** India can curb pollution by closing or upgrading dirty plants and limiting new coal power, as China did after 2013.

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4. **Invest in cleaner transport:** Promoting public transport and large electric bus fleets, as in Shenzhen, can sharply cut city emissions.

5. **Support clean fuels for households:** Expanding affordable LPG and other clean options is essential to reduce biomass burning and household smoke.

6. **Use science and data to guide action:**

> • India should expand air-quality monitoring, study which sectors (power plants, industry, vehicles, households, farms) cause how much pollution, and use this evidence to decide **where to act first and how strict the rules should be**.
> • Clear, public data can also help check whether policies are really reducing PM2.5 and other pollutants over time.

Conclusion

China moved from severe smog to **significant, though incomplete, air quality gains** within a decade by combining political will, strict targets and heavy investment. India cannot copy this path in full because of its **different governance structure, energy needs and social realities**, but it can adapt the lessons to build its own route towards cleaner air.

Question for practice:

Examine how China's approach to tackling air pollution can inform India's clean-air strategy, considering both successes and limitations.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Time to Sort Out India's Cereal Mess

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS paper 3- Indian economy- issues of buffer stocks and food security

Introduction

India's foodgrain policy is facing growing contradictions. While the country has **excessive stocks of rice and wheat**, it is **dependent on imports for pulses and edible oils**, spending huge amounts on food subsidies and foreign purchases. The recent controversy over **paddy procurement in Tamil Nadu's kuruvai season** shows how India's procurement and cropping system has become distorted. It underlines the urgent need to reform the **procurement, crop diversification, and food security policy**.

Key Facts Behind India's Cereal Mess

1. Across India, paddy procurement (as rice) was **119.86 lakh tonnes** by October 31, 2025, against **82.08 lakh tonnes** a year earlier.

2. Rice stocks now stand at **356.1 lakh tonnes** against a norm of **102.5 lakh tonnes.**

3. **Subsidy burden:** The Union government spends about ₹**2 lakh crore** each year on food subsidy.

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4. India is the **largest producer of pulses** at **252.4 lakh tonnes** in 2024-25, yet it imports pulses worth ₹**30,000 crore** and edible oil worth ₹**1.2 lakh crore**, with about **55%** of edible oil demand met through imports.
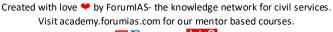
Cause of India's Cereal Mess

1. **Assured support for paddy:** Paddy offers **minimum assured returns** and easy procurement. Farmers shift more land to paddy when other crops look risky, which keeps adding to **large rice stocks**.

2. **Limited comfort in pulses and oilseeds:** Pulses and oilseeds do not enjoy the same backing. Procurement of notified pulses at MSP has fallen, so farmers feel **less secure** growing them.

3. C**heap edible oil imports:** Cheaper edible oil imports weakened domestic oilseed prices. Output has lagged behind demand because policy support here stays weaker than for rice and wheat.

4. **Procurement–PDS imbalance:** Rice procurement is **525–547 lakh tonnes**, while PDS distribution is **392–427 lakh tonnes**. Buying more than needed creates **surplus stocks** and higher costs, even while India imports pulses and edible oil.

5. **System inefficient:** ICRIER study estimating about **28% loss** of rice and wheat in distribution, showing that the system is still not efficient.

Consequences

1. **Nutritional Deficiencies:** A cereal-heavy diet with inadequate protein and micronutrients is linked to rising lifestyle diseases like diabetes and obesity.

2. **Price Volatility:** Despite the overall surplus, India has experienced high cereal inflation, raising questions about the accuracy of production data and market dynamics.

3. **Resource Misallocation:** Continued overinvestment in certain cereal production, particularly water-intensive crops like rice in water-stressed regions, raises sustainability concerns.

Way forward

1. **Crop diversification:** India should consider diversifying agriculture away from just rice and wheat.

2. **Financial support:** Farmers need financial support and guidance to reduce their fear of switching crops and to manage the risk of trying new crops.

3. **Export relaxation:** Since rice production already exceeds national needs, export restrictions should be relaxed so that farmers can benefit from global markets instead of facing sudden curbs.

4.,**Investigate and potentially expand cereals' industrial applications,** considering the speculated rise in use for products like beer and biscuits.

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5. **Direct link between farmers and buyers:** Primary producers should be helped to tie up directly with buyers, such as papad manufacturers with blackgram farmers, so that both sides gain better prices and stable supply.

6. **Strengthening Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs):**

    • Farmers should be encouraged to form and join FPOs so that they can bargain better, organise supplies, and build long-term market linkages.

    • FPOs, self-help groups and cooperative societies can share paddy procurement work, as seen in West Bengal, and reduce the load on existing procurement agencies.

    • FPOs can be used to educate farmers on soil health, guide them towards crop diversification, prepare market studies, and help set up supply chains in different regions.

7. **Plugging leakages and reforming the system:** The government should examine leakages and weaknesses in the PDS and procurement system and work with farmers, experts and policy makers to plug loopholes and move towards wider reform.

Conclusion

India's current foodgrain system is **imbalanced and unsustainable**. It rewards overproduction of rice and wheat while neglecting vital crops like pulses and oilseeds. To fix this, India must **redesign its procurement system**, **incentivise diversification**, and **empower FPOs and cooperatives**. Such reforms require **joint efforts by farmers, policymakers, and experts**. Though gradual, these steps are essential to build a **balanced, self-reliant, and sustainable agricultural future**.

Question for practice

Examine the causes of India's cereal mess and what should be done to address it.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's Plant Variety Act and Issues Around It

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 Plant Variety Act is being reviewed after two decades to match new technologies, trade changes, and farmers' needs. Planned amendments must balance **high-yielding varieties** with the protection of **traditional and community-developed seeds** and farmers' rights.

India's Plant Variety Act

The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 is a **sui generis system** for plant variety protection. It was enacted to meet **India's WTO–TRIPS obligation** to create an "effective system" for protecting plant varieties, while avoiding patents on plants.

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It **recognises both breeders and farmers** for conserving, improving, and making available plant genetic resources, and aims to promote new varieties without harming food and livelihood security.

Implementation Authority

Implementation is done by the **Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA)** under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. The Authority maintains the **National Register of Plant Varieties and grants plant variety certificates (PVCs)**.

Rights under the Act:

Breeders get exclusive rights to produce, sell, market, distribute, import or export protected varieties and to act against infringement.

Researchers can use registered varieties for experiments or breeding, with permission for repeated use.

Farmers who develop new varieties can register them and get the same protection as breeders. All farmers can save, use, sow, re-sow, exchange, share or sell farm produce, including seed of protected varieties, as long as it is not sold as branded seed.
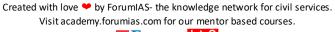
R.S. Paroda committee on India's Plant Variety Act

A **twelve-member committee chaired by R.S. Paroda** has been set up by the PPV&FRA to examine the Act and Rules and suggest amendments.

The committee will examine deficiencies in implementation, present-day challenges, and farmers' requirements, then submit its report to the Authority, which will in turn present its views to the Union Agriculture Ministry.

Argument for the amendment I India's Plant Variety Act

1. **Updating outdated definitions:** Current definitions of "variety" and "seed" do not fully cover combinations of genotypes or vegetatively propagated material like tubers, bulbs or tissue-culture plants, so the law does not match today's seed technologies.

2. **Clarifying breeder and institutional roles:** The Act needs clearer recognition of public institutions and private firms as breeders to avoid disputes over who can register and commercialise new varieties.

3. **Improving DUS testing framework:** Present Distinctness–Uniformity–Stability (DUS) rules are narrow and allow confusion and disputes, so clearer trait-based descriptors and procedures are required.

4. **Curbing abusive market practices:** Amendments seek to define "abusive acts" such as selling seeds with misleading or identical denominations and make such conduct punishable.

5. **Protecting community and traditional seeds:** Stronger safeguards are required so community-developed and traditional varieties cannot be privatised or registered without farmer consent and benefit-sharing.

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6. **Strengthening farmer compensation and sovereignty:** Clearer rules on compensation for non-performing registered seeds and alignment with global plant-treaty negotiations are needed to protect farmer rights and India's seed sovereignty.

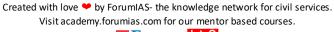**Concern related to the amendments of India's Plant Variety Act**

1. **Dilution of farmer-centric balance:** There is concern that amendments may tilt the Act towards breeder and industry interests, weakening its original pro-farmer design.

2. **Vague and punitive "abusive acts" clause:** Critics say criminalising "abusive acts" without precise, objective criteria could give excessive discretion to authorities and be misused against small seed dealers.

3. **Risk of privatising community and traditional seeds:** Farmer groups fear DUS-tested community varieties could be registered by companies, enabling monopolisation of shared seed commons and biocultural heritage.

4. **Marginalisation of small farmers in a techno-legal regime:** Complex IPR procedures, expanded breeder rights and weak legal support can worsen power asymmetry between resource-poor farmers and large seed firms.

5. **Weak, unclear compensation and liability framework:** Rules on holding breeders liable for seed failure and compensating farmers remain under-specified even as stronger breeder rights are considered.

6. **Possible drift towards UPOV-1991-style standards:** Some experts fear that, in the name of "harmonising" with international standards, future amendments could slowly make India's law resemble the UPOV-1991 model, which is widely viewed as giving stronger rights to commercial breeders and relatively weaker protection to farmers' traditional practices of saving, reusing and exchanging seeds.

Way forward

1. **Strengthen community seed control:** Amendments must keep **community-developed seeds** out of private monopoly. DUS-tested farmers' varieties should be registered in community names. This will help prevent future misuse and keep control with local seed keepers.

2. **Clarify key legal terms:,**The law and Rules should clearly define **variety, seed, breeder institution and abusive act**. Clear wording will make procedures easier to understand and apply for all stakeholders.

3. **Detail farmer compensation rules:** Rules must spell out when and how farmers will be compensated if protected propagating material fails to perform. Simple criteria and process will help farmers claim timely relief.

4. **Link reforms with global talks:** Reforms should watch plant-treaty negotiations on the multilateral system. They should also support **in situ conservation** and fair **benefit sharing** with local farming communities.

Conclusion

Revising India's Plant Variety Act is a chance to align the law with new technologies while **strengthening farmers' rights** by supporting innovation, ensuring accountability and protecting community seed systems so that traditional and improved varieties together secure farmers' livelihoods and community control over seeds.

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Question for practice:

Discuss the key concerns related to the proposed amendments to India's Plant Variety Act and suggest a suitable way forward to protect farmers' rights.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Threat of Digital Tradecraft in Terrorism

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Security

Introduction

Terrorism has entered the digital age, where extremist groups are no longer limited to physical networks or propaganda. They now exploit the **digital ecosystem — encrypted apps, private servers, and spy-style communication — to plan, coordinate, and execute attacks** while avoiding detection. The recent Red Fort blast in Delhi revealed how advanced digital tradecraft has become a key weapon in modern terrorism.

Use of Digital Tradecraft in Terrorism

1. Encrypted Messaging and Private Servers

• Encrypted apps and private servers: Terror groups increasingly use **encrypted platforms like Threema app** that require no phone numbers or emails. Such apps hide user identities, erase metadata, and allow message deletion from both ends.

• Some modules even run **private servers** to exchange layouts, maps, and instructions, making it nearly impossible for law enforcement to trace communication.

2. **Spy-style email 'dead drops':** A common digital tactic is using **shared email accounts** where messages are never sent but saved as drafts. Another member logs in, reads, and deletes them — a **dead-drop system** that leaves no visible trail in mail logs and bypasses traditional surveillance.

3. Integration with physical operation: Digital coordination supports **on-ground reconnaissance and logistics**. Terror cells conduct site visits, collect materials such as explosives, and use ordinary vehicles to remain unnoticed. This integration of digital stealth with physical planning increases operational precision and reduces exposure.

4. Multi-layered security and global linkages: Modules follow **strict operational discipline** — switching off phones, using VPNs, and maintaining minimal online activity. Many show **ideological or logistical links with international groups** like Jaish-e-Mohammed, reflecting a global exchange of both ideology and technical know-how. Such tactics together form a **multi-layered operational security system** designed to minimise traceability.

Impacts of Digital Tradecraft

1. Weakening Traditional Surveillance

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• Encrypted and decentralised technologies have **reduced the effectiveness of conventional tools** like phone tapping, metadata analysis, or email interception.

• Deleted messages, private servers, and VPN masking prevent reconstruction of digital trails. Even banned apps continue to operate through proxies, exposing the limits of mere regulatory restrictions.

2. Rising Transnational Complexity: Digital connectivity allows terror networks to **operate across borders**, sharing ideology, finances, and instructions through encrypted channels. This blurs jurisdictional boundaries and demands international coordination for effective countermeasures.

3. Institutional and Social Risks: The involvement of professionals such as **doctors or academics** in terror cells shows how radicalisation has penetrated educated circles. It highlights the challenge of detecting extremism in institutions where digital tools provide cover for covert recruitment and coordination.

Way Forward

1. Strengthening Digital Forensics

• D**igital forensic units:** There is a need to **build specialised digital forensic units** with expertise in encrypted-platform analysis, server tracking, and memory forensics.

• These **teams need skills in encrypted-platform analysis**, server forensics, and memory dumping to recover short-lived or deleted data.

• The **state must invest in units** that monitor misuse of end-to-end encrypted platforms, anonymising services, and VPN exit nodes as possible indicators of terror tradecraft and adapt investigative practices accordingly.

2. Regulation of self-hosted communication infrastructure

• Frame clear rules for **self-hosted or private communication servers**.

• Require such servers to follow lawful access obligations under rules that still safeguard genuine privacy.

3. Cooperation with technology providers

• **Strengthen cooperation with technology companies** providing encrypted or communication services.

• Ensure lawful interception is possible under **strict, judicially supervised processes**.

4. Updating counter-terrorism laws and procedures

• Update counter-terrorism laws to **explicitly cover encrypted and decentralised communication**.

• Include mechanisms for detecting **digital dead drops, shared accounts, and draft-only mailboxes** in investigations.

5. **Training for investigators**

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• Train law-enforcement officers to **identify patterns of digital dead drops, shared accounts, and draft-only communication**.

• Build skills to recognise and respond to emerging digital tradecraft techniques.

6. Counter-radicalisation in universities and institutions

• Support universities and similar institutions to **spot early signs of radicalisation**, especially among highly educated professionals.

• Design **counter-radicalisation programmes** suited to professional and academic spaces where modules can remain less visible.

7. Strengthening international cooperation

• Deepen **intelligence and law-enforcement partnerships** with other countries.

• Focus on cases involving **encrypted apps, private servers, and possible foreign funding** of terror modules.

8. **Tech diplomacy with host countries of encrypted services**

• Use **tech diplomacy** with countries where major encrypted services are based.

• Seek **lawful but privacy-respecting access** to self-hosted infrastructure linked to terror cases.

9. Public awareness on digital tradecraft: Educating the public about **how digital tools are misused by terror groups** can enhance vigilance without creating fear. Community reporting, guided by awareness, can act as a frontline defence against extremist digital activity.

Conclusion

The **digital transformation of terrorism** marks a new frontier in security challenges. Extremist groups now combine technological sophistication with traditional radicalisation to operate in invisible digital spaces. For India and other democracies, the task is not only to strengthen physical security but also to build **intelligence, legal, and cyber-forensic capacities** capable of navigating encrypted, decentralised, and private networks. Protecting societies in the digital era means securing both the **streets and the servers**.
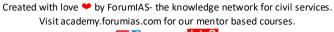
Question for practice:

Examine how modern terrorist groups are using digital tradecraft to evade surveillance and why this poses new challenges for counter-terrorism agencies.

Source: **The Hindu**

Hidden Cost of Polluted Groundwater

Source: The post **"Hidden Cost of Polluted Groundwater"** has been created, based on "**Hidden Cost of Polluted Groundwater**" published in **"The Hindu"** on **20th November 2025.**

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UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 3- Environment

Context: Groundwater contamination has become a major environmental and developmental challenge affecting health, agriculture, and economic stability in India. The Annual Groundwater Quality Report 2024 shows that nearly one-fifth of samples from 440+ districts exceed safe contamination limits. Punjab faces a particularly severe crisis, with almost one-third of samples showing uranium above permissible levels along with widespread fluoride, nitrate, and arsenic. With 600 million people depending on groundwater for drinking and irrigation, the crisis has national-level implications.

Key Challenges and Impacts

1. **Public Health Crisis:** High levels of uranium, fluoride, arsenic, and nitrates have led to severe health issues such as skeletal deformities, fluorosis, chronic illnesses, and cognitive impairment in children.
    a. In Mehsana (Gujarat), fluorosis has reduced workers' earning capacity and pushed households into cycles of wage loss and medical expenditure.
    b. Diarrhoeal diseases due to unsafe water still kill large numbers of children under five each year, contributing to significant human capital erosion.

2. **Heavy Economic Burden:** The World Bank estimates that environmental degradation—mainly polluted water and soil—costs India USD 80 billion annually, nearly 6% of GDP.Illnesses caused by contaminated water reduce productivity and cause millions of lost working days. High out-of-pocket health expenditure further weakens economically vulnerable households.

3. **Agricultural Decline:** Soil degradation now affects nearly one-third of India's land area, with polluted irrigation water accelerating the damage. Heavy metal residues reduce crop yields and contaminate food chains.
    a. Farms located near polluted water bodies show declining productivity and falling incomes.
    b. Export markets increasingly demand strict quality standards, and contamination-related rejections pose a risk to India's USD 50-billion agricultural export sector.

4. **Rising Inequality**: Wealthier households can afford bottled water or filtration systems, but poorer families remain dependent on contaminated aquifers. Illness, reduced productivity, and debt reinforce poverty cycles in rural areas. Children exposed to fluoride or arsenic face long-term cognitive and physical impairments, limiting future opportunities.

5. **Over-Extraction and the Vicious Cycle:** Punjab extracts groundwater at 1.5 times the sustainable limit, forcing farmers to drill deeper and encounter poorer-quality water. Increased fertiliser use further contaminates aquifers, creating a feedback loop that undermines long-term agricultural viability.

Way Forward

1. **Real-Time Monitoring:** Establish a nationwide, real-time groundwater quality monitoring network with open-access data to ensure transparency and community awareness.
2. **Stronger Regulation:** Strengthen enforcement against untreated industrial effluents and sewage discharge. Reform pollution control agencies to ensure accountability and compliance.

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3. **Agricultural Reform:** Shift from chemical-intensive farming to crop diversification, organic practices, and micro-irrigation.Pilot programmes in Punjab and Haryana show that shifting from paddy to pulses and maize reduces pressure on aquifers and maintains farmer incomes.
4. **Decentralised Water Treatment:** Promote village-level purification systems and low-cost community filters. The success of community water purification units in Nalgonda (Telangana), which reduced fluorosis among children, can be replicated.
5. **Protecting Agricultural Exports**: Strengthen export quality checks to prevent contamination-related rejections.Provide farmer training on safe water usage, residue management, and quality standards.
6. **Community Awareness:** Conduct awareness campaigns on contamination risks, safe water practices, and sustainable farming methods. Encourage community participation in local water management.

Conclusion: Groundwater contamination is a severe but often invisible threat that affects health, livelihoods, agriculture, and economic growth. Unlike water scarcity, contamination is often irreversible and permanently damages aquifers. India must adopt bold, coordinated, and sustained measures to prevent this silent crisis from becoming a national catastrophe and to safeguard long-term development.

Question: Groundwater contamination in India poses a serious public health, agricultural, and economic challenge. Discuss the key impacts of this crisis and suggest measures to address it.

Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker

Source: The post "**Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker"** has been created, based on "**Recognise the critical role of the childcare worker**" published in "The Hindu" on 20th November 2025.
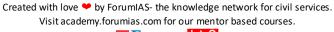
UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Governance

Context: On July 24, 2023, the UN General Assembly declared October 29 as the International Day of Care and Support, recognising the need to reduce, redistribute and value unpaid care and domestic work. Care work remains overwhelmingly performed by women and adolescent girls, yet it is largely invisible, undervalued, and unaccounted for in policy and national statistics. India has a long history of childcare efforts, from early pioneers like Tarabai Modak and Gijubai Badheka, to modern childcare systems such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

Evolution of Childcare in India
1. Early childcare institutions emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through progressive educationists.
2. Post-Independence, childcare shifted to private and voluntary sectors, excluding low-income families.
3. The 1972 Study Group report, convened by Mina Swaminathan, set a social justice agenda for holistic development of poor and marginalised children.
4. This led to the launch of the ICDS in 1975, which today runs 1.4 million Anganwadi Centres, serving 23 million children with 2.4 million workers and helpers.
5. By 2030, India will need 2.6 million centres and over five million workers to reach nearly 60 million children.

Key Challenges in India's Childcare System

1. **Underpaid and Undervalued Care Workers:**

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a. National and global studies highlight that despite their critical role, care workers remain underpaid, undervalued, and lack recognition as professionals.

b. Rapid ICDS expansion has diluted pre-service and in-service training, weakening practice-based learning crucial for quality childcare.

c. Their role is often reduced to providing food, hygiene, and immunisation, rather than being acknowledged as early childhood professionals.

d. Workers face poor working conditions, limited paid leave, inadequate social security, and very low wages (₹8,000–₹15,000), often below minimum wages for skilled work.

2. **Impact of Climate Change**

a. Poor women and children are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters such as floods and droughts.

b. Climate-induced male migration increases women's care burden, eliminating the possibility of shared responsibilities.

c. Migrant families in urban areas face high living costs, compelling women to work as domestic workers while having little or no childcare support.

d. Only 10% of Anganwadi centres function in urban areas, leaving a vast urban care deficit.

3. **Feminisation of Unpaid Care**

a. The Time Use in India 2024 survey shows women spend 426 minutes/day on unpaid care work compared to 163 minutes/day by men.

b. This unpaid work constitutes 15%–17% of GDP, yet remains unrecognised in economic policymaking.

c. Lack of maternal time for care and feeding is linked to high child undernutrition, with 35% child stunting and only 11% of children receiving a minimum acceptable diet.

4. **Inadequate Early Childhood Provision**

a. There is extremely limited care for children under three years, with only 2,500 functional crèches under the Palna Scheme out of 10,000 sanctioned.

b. Public investment in childcare stands at only 0.4% of GDP, far below Scandinavian levels of 1%–1.5%, which provide universal childcare.

Positive Developments

1. India Childcare Champion Awards 2025 was organised by Mobile Creches and FORCES, these awards honour creche workers, supervisors, NGOs, local leaders, employers, and CSR funders.

2. The awards highlight care workers as skilled professionals and social change-makers, challenging caste, class, and gender norms.

3. Workers build trust with parents, offer emotional support to children, and advocate for health insurance and better care infrastructure.

4. They play multiple roles: nurturing caregivers, educators, monitors of child development, and community leaders.

Way Forward

1. **Recognition and Professionalisation**

a. Childcare workers must be recognised as professional workers with respectable wages, job security, and clear career pathways.

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b. Comprehensive investments in training, skill-building, and practice-based learning are essential.

2. **Strengthening Childcare Infrastructure**: India must expand childcare facilities, especially for children under three and in urban poor settlements. Public investment must increase to 1–1.5% of GDP, aligning with global standards of universal childcare coverage.

3. **Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid** Care: Policies must encourage men's participation in domestic and care work through awareness campaigns, paternity benefits, and gender-sensitive programmes.

4. **Climate-Responsive Care Policies:** Childcare services must be strengthened in climate-vulnerable areas to support migrating households and reduce gendered care burdens.

5. **Decentralisation and Convergence**: Local governments, communities, and civil society must be involved in planning and monitoring childcare services. Integration of health, nutrition, education, and social protection services can enhance holistic child development.

Conclusion: Care work lies at the heart of human development and gender equality, yet remains invisible and undervalued in India. Recognising, professionalising and adequately funding care services is essential for building a strong, inclusive, and equitable nation. With expanded investment, improved working conditions, decentralised systems, and recognition of care workers' contributions, India can move closer to universal, high-quality childcare aligned with global best practices.

Question: "Care work in India remains undervalued and underfunded." Discuss the major challenges in India's childcare system and suggest measures to strengthen care infrastructure and workers' rights.

Supreme Court on Governor Powers

Source: The post **"Supreme Court on Governor Powers"** has been created, based on **"Supreme Court on Governor Powers"** published in "Indian Express" on 21st November 2025.
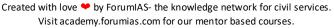
UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Polity

Context: In a landmark Constitution Bench judgment, **the Supreme Court clarified the scope and limits of the Governor's powers under Articles 200 and 163, along with related constitutional provisions such as Articles 201, 142, 145(3), and 361.** The reference arose due to increasing concerns over delays by Governors in granting assent to Bills passed by state legislatures. The Court addressed fourteen constitutional questions and provided definitive interpretations that govern legislative–executive relations in the federal structure.

Governor's Options Under Article 200

1. The Supreme Court held that the **Governor has only three constitutionally** permissible options under Article 200.

2. These **include granting assent to the Bill,** withholding assent and returning the Bill to the Legislature with recommendations (if the Bill is not a Money Bill), and reserving the Bill for the consideration of the President.

3. The **Court clarified that there is no fourth option that allows the Governor to "withhold assent simpliciter"** by merely keeping the Bill pending indefinitely.

4. If the Governor decides to withhold assent, **then the Bill must be returned to the House.**

Whether the Governor is Bound by the Aid and Advice of the Council of Ministers

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1. The Court held that, **under Article 163, the Governor is required to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers** except in matters where the Constitution expressly provides for discretion.
2. The Court further held that **granting or withholding assent under Article 200 is an area where the Governor has discretion** and is therefore not bound by the Cabinet's advice.
3. The reasoning of the Court was that **if the Governor were bound by ministerial advice, then the Governor would never be able to return a Bil**l for reconsideration because no government would advise against its own legislation.

Justiciability of the Governor's Constitutional Discretion

1. The Court held that the **substantive decision of the Governor, or the reasons behind choosing a particular course of action under Article 200**, cannot be subjected to judicial review.
2. However, the **Court clarified that prolonged, unexplained, or indefinite inaction** on the part of the Governor is subject to judicial scrutiny.
3. Therefore, **if a Governor keeps a Bill pending without making any decision,** the Court may direct the Governor to act, although it cannot direct what decision must be made.

Article 361 and Judicial Review

1. The Court **explained that Article 361 grants personal immunity to the Governor and the President for acts done** in the exercise of their official duties.
2. However, this **immunity applies only to the individual and not to the "office" of the Governor.**
3. Consequently, the Court held that **the actions or inactions of the Governor's office that cause constitutional delays** can still be examined by the judiciary even though the individual holding the office cannot be personally questioned.
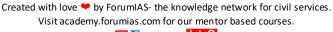
Timelines for Governors

1. The Court **overruled its earlier April 2025 judgment that prescribed strict timelines** of one to three months for the Governors to act on Bills.
2. The Court reasoned that **Article 200 uses the expression "as soon as possible,"** which prevents courts from imposing rigid or fixed timeframes.
3. **The judiciary, therefore, cannot mandate specific deadlines**, although it can intervene to prevent unreasonable delays.

President's Discretion Under Article 201

1. The Court held that **the President's discretion under Article 201** is similar to the **Governor's powers under Article 200.**
2. The **President's decision to either assent to or withhold assent from a reserved Bill is not open to judicial review** on its merits.
3. The Court also clarified that t**he President cannot be compelled through judicial directions to act within fixed timelines** when dealing with state Bills reserved for consideration.

Requirement of Supreme Court's Advice Under Article 143

1. The Court clarified that **Article 143 gives the President the option, but not the obligation,** to seek the Supreme Court's advisory opinion on questions of law.

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2. The **President is not required to seek this advice every time a Governor reserves a Bill.** The President's subjective satisfaction is considered sufficient for the purpose of acting on reserved Bills.

3. The Court held that **judicial review applies only to enacted laws and not to Bills,** which represent proposed legislation.

4. Therefore, **courts cannot adjudicate the validity, content, or constitutionality of a Bill** before it receives assent and becomes a law.

Whether Article 142 Can Substitute the Governor's or President's Role

1. The Court held that A**rticle 142 does not empower the Supreme Court to substitute the constitutional roles of the Governor or the President**.

2. The Court **rejected the concept of "deemed assent,"** which earlier judgments had proposed as a remedy for delays.

3. It clarified that **Article 142 cannot be used to override substantive constitutional provisions,** such as those that require the Governor's or President's assent before a Bill becomes law.

4. The Court held **unequivocally that a Bill cannot become law without the assent of the Governor, or of the President in cases where the Bill is reserved.** Until such assent is granted, the Bill has no legal force and remains only a proposed piece of legislation.

5. **Scope of Supreme Court's Powers Under Article 142:** The Court held that the question regarding the extent of the Supreme Court's powers under Article 142 was too broad to be answered definitively.

6. However, it reiterated its position that Article 142 cannot be used to contradict or override substantive or procedural provisions of the Constitution, such as the mandatory requirement for constitutional assent.
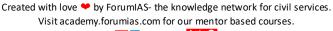
Reference to Five-Judge Bench Under Article 145(3)

1. The Court declined to answer the question regarding whether certain matters must compulsorily be referred to a Constitution Bench of at least five judges under Article 145(3).

2. It held that the question was irrelevant to the specific issues concerning the Governor's powers on legislative assent.

Bar Under Article 131

1. The Court declined to answer the question on whether Article 131 bars any other jurisdiction of the Supreme Court concerning disputes between the Union and the States.

2. It noted that Article 131 confers original jurisdiction on such disputes but held that this issue was irrelevant to the reference concerning the Governor's powers.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court's judgment establishes a clear and balanced constitutional framework governing the roles of Governors, state legislatures, and the Union executive. It preserves necessary constitutional discretion while ensuring accountability by preventing indefinite delays. The verdict strengthens cooperative federalism by clarifying constitutional boundaries and by safeguarding the legislative process from executive inaction.

Question: What were the major issues clarified by the Supreme Court regarding the Governor's powers to grant assent to Bills under Article 200?

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The Need of a National Arbitrator Database

Source: The post **"The Need of a National Arbitrator Database"** has been created, based on **"The Need of a National Arbitrator Database"** published in "The Hindu" on 21st November 2025.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Polity

Context: India has repeatedly expressed its aspiration to become a global hub for international arbitration. However, recent statements, including those made by the Solicitor General, indicate that the current arbitration ecosystem suffers from an "integrity crisis." The predictability of appointments, the dominance of select networks, and the lack of transparency have undermined trust in arbitration as a credible dispute-resolution mechanism. This has occurred despite the existence of a legislative framework intended to address these issues.

Key Challenges in India's Arbitration System

1. The Solicitor General highlighted that **the name of an arbitrator often reveals the likely client and law firm,** indicating entrenched networks and a lack of neutrality.
2. The system **suffers from a deep-seated integrity crisis marked by opacity,** repetitive appointments of a select few arbitrators, and limited diversity.
3. The **absence of institutional arbitration dominates the landscape** and allows ad-hoc practices to flourish without accountability.
4. **Arbitrator performance is not systematically evaluated,** and there is no mechanism to track the quality or judicial outcomes of awards.
5. **Parties often manipulate selection** by using narrow criteria to engineer predetermined appointments.
6. **Judicial interference and delays** undermine the finality and efficiency of arbitration.
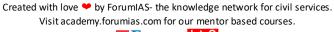7. There is **inadequate training and capacity building for arbitrators,** leading to inconsistent quality of awards.

Failure to Operationalise the Arbitration Council of India (ACI)

1. Although the **Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2019** envisioned the **creation of the Arbitration Council of India** to grade arbitral institutions and accredit arbitrators, the ACI remains non-functional.
2. This represents **a substantive failure of reform rather than a procedural delay.**
3. The **gap between legislation and implementation** has allowed informal networks to continue dominating appointments, thereby weakening the credibility of the arbitration process.

Need for a National Arbitrator Database (NAD)

The proposed National Arbitrator Database is essential for ensuring transparency, objectivity, and merit-based appointments.

a. Comprehensive Profiles: Every active arbitrator would be required to register on the NAD. The database would include **information such as qualifications, domain expertise, years of experience, number of awards delivered, and the judicial track** record of these awards. This information would be publicly accessible to promote transparency.

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b. Algorithmic Allocation: Arbitrator selection in institutional or court-appointed cases would occur **through algorithmic matching.** Parties would **define required competencies, and the system would generate a randomised, skill-based shortlist, preserving party autonomy** while reducing human discretion.

c. Safeguards Against Manipulation: If restrictive criteria produce fewer than a minimum threshold of arbitrators, the system would **automatically broaden parameters.** The NAD would **also flag suspicious patterns,** such as repeated criteria combinations that repeatedly select the same arbitrator.

d. Continuous Monitoring: Every arbitration would **require outcome reporting.** Arbitrators whose awards are frequently set aside would have this reflected in their grading, while **consistently sound arbitrators would benefit** from enhanced professional standing. This process would democratise opportunities and reduce the dominance of a select few.
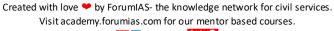
Benefits of the Proposed System

1. The system would greatly improve transparency and ensure merit-based appointments.
2. It would reduce real and perceived bias in arbitrator selection.
3. It would strengthen institutional credibility and promote accountability.
4. It would create more opportunities for qualified and diverse arbitrators.
5. It would provide measurable performance metrics for evaluating arbitrators.
6. It would align India's arbitration practices with global standards and support its goal of becoming an international arbitration hub.

Way Forward

1. The government **should immediately operationalise the Arbitration Council of India** to accredit arbitrators and grade institutions.
2. The **creation of the National Arbitrator Database should be prioritised** as a core tool for transparent and technology-driven reform.
3. India must **strengthen institutional arbitration** and reduce its dependence on ad-hoc procedures.
4. **Capacity-building and specialised training programmes** should be expanded to raise the overall quality of arbitrators.
5. Courts should **limit intervention to statutorily permitted grounds** to protect arbitral autonomy.
6. **Technology integration,** including digital case management and algorithmic allocation should be made standard practice.
7. A **performance-based evaluation system** should be developed to ensure consistent quality and accountability.

Conclusion: India already has a strong statutory foundation for arbitration reform through the 2019 amendment, which created the Arbitration Council of India. What is now required is the political and administrative will to operationalise the ACI and implement a robust National Arbitrator Database. These measures will enhance transparency, restore trust, reduce bias, and help India genuinely emerge as a credible global hub for arbitration.

Question: India aspires to become a global hub for arbitration, yet the system faces an "integrity crisis." Discuss the key challenges affecting India's arbitration ecosystem and suggest reforms needed to ensure transparency, credibility, and merit-based appointments.

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Environment Vs Development - SC's Reversing the Vanashakti Judgement

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Environment

Introduction

On 18 November 2025, the Supreme Court recalled its **May 2025 Vanashakti ruling that had outlawed retrospective environmental clearances**. The case now stands at the centre of a wider conflict between strict, preventive environmental regulation based on prior environmental clearance and demands to protect large public and private investments through limited ex post facto approvals. The split verdict highlights deep tensions between constitutional environmental rights and development-led policy choices.

Background: Vanashakti Judgment (May 2025)

Key holdings of the May 2025 judgment

1. In May 2025, a bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan held that **prior environmental clearance (EC) is the only lawful route** to set up or expand industrial and real estate projects.

2. It struck down the Environment Ministry's **2017 Notification** and **2021 Office Memorandum** that permitted ex post facto ECs, terming this framework **illegal and unconstitutional**.

3. The bench also **restrained the Central Government** from issuing any future circulars or orders providing for retrospective EC or regularising violations of the EIA notification,

4. It allowed ECs already granted under these instruments to continue.

5. The Court relied on **Article 21's right to a pollution-free environment and to health**, and on **Article 51A(g)** which places a duty on citizens to protect and improve the environment.
6. It treated environmental protection as a **foundational requirement rather than a fine-based system.**

Review Petitions and the Reversal: Split Verdict of November 18, 2025

Grounds for review

1. Industry bodies, especially **Confederation of Real Estate Developers of India (CREDAI)**, and the Union government sought review, saying Vanashakti had **ignored earlier precedents** such as Common Cause, Alembic Pharmaceuticals, Electrosteel Steels and Pahwa Plastics, where **limited ex post facto ECs** were allowed in exceptional cases under Article 142.
2. They called the review "imperative and expedient" and demanded a **"balanced approach"**, arguing that a total ban on retrospective ECs would make regularisation of ongoing projects impossible.

Majority view (CJI Gavai & Justice Chandran)

1. By **majority of CJI B.R. Gavai and Justice K. Vinod Chandran**, the Court **recalled the May 2025 judgment** and restored the case for a fresh hearing.
2. CJI Gavai warned of a **"devastating effect"**, including possible demolition of projects worth **nearly ₹20,000 crore**—such as SAIL investments, a **962-bed AIIMS hospital in Odisha**, a **greenfield airport in Karnataka**, a **CAPF medical institute in Delhi**, and many other central and state projects funded from the public exchequer.

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3. The majority held that **ex post facto EC should not be refused with pedantic rigidity** and may be permitted in **rare, exceptional situations**, with heavy penalties and strict conditions instead of demolition.

Minority dissent (Justice Bhuyan)

1. Justice Bhuyan dissented, saying the review **overlooked fundamentals of environmental jurisprudence** and meant **"backtracking on sound environmental jurisprudence" for the sake of violators**.
2. He rejected the "dustbin" argument over sunk public costs, opposed **prodding the government towards ex post facto ECs**, and pointed to **Delhi's deadly smog and rising pollution** as proof of the human cost of weak enforcement.
3. He insisted that **retrospective ECs are an "anathema"**, a concept "devoted to evil", that would cause **irreparable environmental degradation**.

Environment vs Development: Core Legal and Policy Tensions
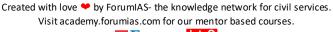
1. Precautionary principle vs regularisation:

• The May Vanashakti ruling treated prior environmental clearance (EC) as non-negotiable, rooted in prevention and advance study.

• The recall opens space for limited ex post facto ECs in "exceptional" cases, shifting focus from strict prevention to controlled regularisation after violations.

2. Sustainable development and article 21:

• One side links sustainable development to the right to life and health under Article 21, insisting that projects must fit environmental limits from the start.

• The opposing view weighs infrastructure needs and sunk public investment, accepting limited retrospective approvals to avoid demolition.

3. Polluter pays vs "pay and legalise": The Court warned against turning the polluter pays principle into a "pay and legalise" route, where fines buy forgiveness. Exceptional ex post facto clearances risk making prior EC look optional rather than mandatory.

4. Narratives on environment and development: The dissent rejects a false narrative that treats environment and development as rivals, stressing that real development includes ecological protection. The majority stresses public cost, jobs and continuity of projects, using penalties to claim a balanced middle path.

Way Forward

1. **Reaffirm prior EC as the norm:** The discussion points towards **prior EC as the default rule**, with any ex post facto relief, if allowed at all, confined to **truly exceptional situations** under strict judicial control.

2. **Stronger enforcement and transparency:** To avoid an **"optional EC" mindset**, authorities need firm monitoring and compliance so that **violators do not expect easy regularisation through fines or fresh notifications**.

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3. Legislative and policy clarity: There is a need for **clear, coherent rules** aligning the EIA framework, notifications and Office Memorandums with constitutional principles, so that **future disputes over ex post facto ECs are reduced**. A detailed implementation roadmap is not explained, which leaves a gap in the policy picture.

Conclusion

The reversal of Vanashakti exposes a sharp clash between **environmental constitutionalism and development-centred pragmatism**. One side insists on strict prior EC, prevention and constitutional duties; the other worries about wasted public investment and favours limited regularisation with penalties. The reheard case will be crucial in deciding whether **India's growth path is guided mainly by precaution, or continues to accommodate post-facto forgiveness**.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the Supreme Court's reversal of the Vanashakti judgment reflects the tension between environmental protection and development needs in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's Fisheries and Aquaculture: Its Promising Course

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 - Agriculture

Introduction

India's fisheries and aquaculture sector is growing rapidly, supporting **livelihoods, nutrition, exports and coastal development**. India has become a **global aquaculture leader**, backed by technological change, institutional support and major schemes such as Blue Revolution, PMMSY and new digital initiatives. At the same time, **environmental stress, climate risks, weak infrastructure and governance gaps** show why a more sustainable and inclusive "Blue Transformation" is urgently needed.

Facts and Data Related to Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

1. India is the world's **second-largest aquaculture producer**, contributing **10.23 million tonnes of aquatic animals**.

2. The country's total aquatic food production rose from **2.44 million tonnes in the 1980s to 17.54 million tonnes in 2022–23**.

3. Marine Products exports increased **by 11.08 % from US$ 0.81 Billion in October 2024 to US$ 0.90 Billion** in October 2025.

4. Coastal states and Union Territories, produce **72 percent** of the country's total fish production and account for **76 percent** of India's total seafood exports.

5. GST on key fish products has been reduced from **12 percent to 5 percent**, making value-added seafood more affordable at home and strengthening India's export competitiveness.

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6. **Livelihoods:** Supports approximately 28 million people through fishing, processing, and related activities.

Challenges to Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

1. Environmental and climate challenges

• **Overfishing and resource depletion:** Many fish stocks are overexploited, threatening their sustainability and disrupting marine ecosystems.

• **Climate change:** Rising sea levels can destroy coastal ecosystems like mangroves, which are vital nurseries for fish, and increasing storm intensity can damage infrastructure. Climate change also affects water temperature and quality.

• **Pollution:** Contamination of water from industrial and other sources threatens aquatic life and the health of the sector.

• **Habitat loss:** Urban and industrial expansion reduces the wetland and other natural areas needed for both wild fish populations and aquaculture.
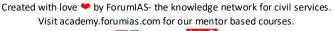
2. Infrastructure and technology challenges

• **Inadequate infrastructure:** Deficiencies in cold storage, processing facilities, and transportation lead to significant post-harvest losses.

• **Slow technology adoption:** The sector struggles to embrace innovative and sustainable techniques and equipment, from modern fishing technology to water-efficient aquaculture systems.

• **Limited extension services:** There is a lack of sufficient support, such as soil and water testing, and real-time market information for fishers and farmers.

3. Governance and management challenges

• **Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing:** IUU fishing is a major problem that can devastate fish stocks, particularly those of high economic value.

• **Weak governance:** Conflicting regulations across different regions make effective enforcement difficult.

• **Slow technology adoption:** The industry needs to embrace modern practices and technologies, but adoption rates are slow, especially at the production level.

• **Limited extension services:** There is a shortage of adequate support, such as soil and water testing facilities and real-time market information, for farmers and fishermen.

4. Health and disease challenges

• **Disease outbreaks:** Disease can spread quickly in aquaculture environments, especially with poor biosecurity measures and limited awareness of emerging diseases.

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• **Unpredictable interactions:** Unanticipated interactions between cultured and wild populations can also pose challenges.

Incentives Taken for the development of India's Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector
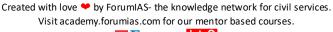
A. India initiative

1. **National Marine Fisheries Census 2025:** This fully **digital, geo-referenced census** covers **1.2 million fisher households** across **13 coastal states**, integrating real-time monitoring and socio-economic data through mobile apps like **VyAS–BHARAT** and **VyAS–SUTRA**. It supports targeted policy planning and transparent welfare delivery.

2. **Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** : The **2025 EEZ Rules** mark a shift to sustainable deep-sea fishing. They prioritize **Fishermen Cooperatives and FFPOs** for deep-sea ventures, regulate access through **digital pass systems**, and ban destructive practices.

3. **Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF):** Established in 2018 with a corpus of ₹7,522 crore, FIDF provides concessional finance and 3% interest subvention for infrastructure projects.

4. **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY): It is flex scheme driving India's blue revolution which is launched in** 2020 with ₹**20,312 crore**, promotes sustainable fisheries through infrastructure, safety, and digital inclusion.

5. **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)**.

   • Approved in **2024** with ₹**6,000 crore**, PM-MKSSY aims to formalize the fisheries sector and extend aquaculture insurance. It offers **40% premium assistance**, capped at ₹25,000 per hectare.
   • Integration with digital platforms like the **ReALCraft portal** and the **National Fisheries Digital Platform** ensures efficiency and traceability.

6. Safety and Monitoring

   • To enhance safety and monitoring, the government is using **digital safety technologies**. Under the **Vessel Communication and Support System (VCSS) Project**.
   • The **NABHMITRA app** and these transponders help improve **maritime safety**, support **real-time communication**, and assist enforcement agencies in monitoring secure and legal fishing activities.

B. Institutional and Global Initiatives

1. Bodies like **ICAR fisheries institutes, MPEDA and the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB)** have promoted innovation, better practices and value chain development across capture fisheries and aquaculture.

2. The **FAO** has supported India through the **Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP)**, the **Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME)** project and a **GEF-funded aquaculture project in Andhra Pradesh**, which focus on climate-resilient, sustainable and ecosystem-based aquaculture and fisheries management.

3. Under a **Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)**, FAO assists India in enhancing fishing port capacities to address environmental and social challenges. Two pilot ports—**Vanakbara (Dadra and Nagar Haveli and**

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Diu) and **Jakhau (Gujarat)**—will receive support to identify strategic investment projects that strengthen sustainability and value chains.

Way forward

1. **Strengthen science-based management** by mapping fish stocks, setting catch limits, curbing IUU fishing, strictly enforcing coastal regulations, and aligning national practices with FAO responsible fisheries guidelines.

2. **Diversify production** by promoting mariculture, deep-sea and offshore fisheries to reduce pressure on crowded coastal and inland waters and to unlock the underused potential of the EEZ.

3. **Upgrade infrastructure** by expanding harbours, landing centres, cold chains, testing laboratories and export hubs, and aligning these investments with PMMSY and broader Blue Economy investment plans.

4. **Support small-scale fishers:** Support small-scale fishers by improving access to formal credit, insurance, cooperatives, safety at sea, housing and social protection, with a special focus on women workers across the value chain.

5. **Invest in climate-resilient aquaculture** by promoting better quality seed and feed, stronger disease control, regular water-quality monitoring, digital tools and low-impact systems such as cage culture and recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS).

6. **Improve data and institutions** by modernising surveys, building robust digital databases and enhancing coordination among the Department of Fisheries, research institutes and coastal States for evidence-based policy and management.

7. **Promote value addition and sustainability** through eco-labelling, improved processing, better use of by-products and community-led co-management of resources and habitats, ensuring long-term resilient incomes and nutritional security.

Conclusion

India's fisheries and aquaculture are on a **promising but fragile** path. Stronger science-based management, climate-resilient practices, better infrastructure and data, and focused support to **small-scale fishers and women workers** are essential. With sustained national reforms and FAO-backed cooperation, India can achieve a resilient Blue Revolution that secures incomes, nutrition and marine ecosystems.
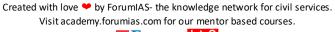
Question for practice:

Examine how India's recent policy initiatives and international collaborations are shaping the **sustainable development** of its fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Source: **The Hindu**

Do we really need large banks now?

Source: The post **"Do we really need large banks now?"** has been created, based on **"Do we really need large banks now?"** published in "The Hindu BusinessLine" on 22nd November 2025.

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UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The Indian banking sector has remained stable even during global financial disturbances due to the Reserve Bank of India's conservative regulatory approach. In this context, the debate on whether India needs global-scale banks has resurfaced as the economy aspires to expand rapidly.

Why the Demand for Large Banks Has Emerged

1. Perception of Funding Constraints: Some stakeholders believe India lacks sufficiently large banks that can finance major private-sector expansion, mergers, acquisitions, and global-scale operations.

2. Poor Global Ranking of Indian Banks: Indian banks rank relatively low on global asset-size rankings, prompting suggestions that India needs much larger banks to support its ambition of becoming a $7.3 trillion economy by 2030.

Global Scenario: How Large Banks Were Formed

1. Government-Created Banking Giants: Many of the world's largest banks were deliberately built through government policies or substantial exposure to market risks to serve strategic national interests.

2. Dominance of Chinese Banks: Chinese banks such as ICBC, Agricultural Bank of China, China Construction Bank, and Bank of China hold a combined asset size of $22 trillion, reflecting their state-supported scale.

Position of Indian Banks Today

1. Global Ranking of Indian Banks: Only SBI (rank 43) and HDFC Bank (rank 73) appear in the list of top global banks.

2. Asset Size Gap: The total assets of all Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks amount to $3.38 trillion, which is nearly half the size of a single Chinese bank like ICBC.

Feasibility of Creating Large Banks in India

1. Limits of PSU Bank Consolidation: Consolidation of public-sector banks from 27 to 12 has strengthened the system, but even merging all PSU banks would create a bank ranked only 18th globally. Such mergers face cultural, structural, and employee-related resistance.

2. Risks of Higher Foreign or Corporate Ownership: Allowing greater corporate or foreign ownership in banks raises governance and systemic-risk concerns.
3. Limited Room for Deposit Growth: With Indian households already depositing most of their savings in banks, expanding the deposit base to create mega-banks is difficult.

Do Large Banks Match Current Economic Needs?

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1. Weak Industrial Credit Demand: Industrial credit growth has slowed, with its share dropping from 39.5% in 2016 to 21.5% in 2025.

2. Shift Toward Retail Lending: Banks rely increasingly on retail credit, which has grown from 22% to 33% of total lending over the same period.

3. Low Private-Sector Capex: Private-sector capital investment remains subdued except in select sectors like renewables and chemicals.

4. Growth of Non-Bank Funding Sources: Companies are increasingly using internal accruals, corporate bond markets, and external commercial borrowings, reducing the dependence on banks.

5. Unsuitability of Banks for Infrastructure Lending: Infrastructure projects create asset–liability mismatches for banks and add long-term risks, making specialised institutions like NaBFID better suited for such financing.

6. M&A Financing Is Manageable: The average annual M&A deal value of ₹3.7 lakh crore during 2019–2024 can be easily financed with the current banking capacity.

Challenges in Creating Large Global Banks in India

1. Governance and Management Complexity: Creating mega-banks increases administrative complexity and may dilute accountability, making governance more difficult.

2. Risk Concentration: Large banks may lead to higher systemic risk, where the failure of one institution could destabilise the entire financial system.

3. Integration Difficulties: Merging banks with different cultures and technological systems creates operational disruption and affects employee morale.

4. Fiscal Constraints: The government lacks sufficient fiscal space to recapitalise very large banks without compromising other developmental priorities.

5. Technological and Cybersecurity Risks: Larger institutions become more attractive targets for cyberattacks and may face greater challenges in integrating digital platforms.

6. Regulatory Challenges: Supervising mega-banks becomes more complex and demands significantly stronger regulatory capacity.

Way Forward

1. Encourage Targeted PSU Bank Consolidation: Consolidation should continue but with a focus on operational efficiency, stronger governance, and improved customer service rather than global rankings.

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2. Strengthen Development Finance Institutions (DFIs): Institutions like NaBFID should be strengthened to handle infrastructure financing, reducing the burden on commercial banks.

3. Deepen Corporate Bond Markets: India should expand bond markets to meet corporate financing needs, reducing reliance on banks and diversifying funding sources.

4. Promote Digital and Technological Capacity: Banks must invest in advanced technology, cybersecurity, and AI-driven decision systems to improve efficiency without necessarily increasing size.

5. Enhance Risk Management Practices: Strengthening risk monitoring, stress-testing, and governance systems can improve safety and performance.

6. Focus on Financial Inclusion and Credit Access: Expanding credit to small businesses, agriculture, and underserved sectors can generate more real economic value than creating globally large banks.

7. Maintain a Stable and Diverse Banking Ecosystem: India should aim for a balanced mix of public-sector banks, private banks, small finance banks, and fintech-driven models rather than only mega-banks.

Conclusion: While India may eventually need larger banks to support global ambitions, the current economic realities do not demand the creation of huge global-scale banks. Strengthening governance, expanding capital markets, improving credit allocation, and empowering DFIs provide a more sustainable path. Stability, efficiency, and resilience must remain the core priorities of India's banking system rather than size alone.

Question: "The Indian economy needs efficient and resilient banks, not necessarily larger banks." Comment in light of the debate on forming global-scale banks in India.
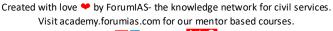
The new direction for India should be toward Asia

Source: The post **"The new direction for India should be toward Asia"** has been created, based on **"The new direction for India should be toward Asia"** published in "The Hindu" on 22nd November 2025.

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

Context: India's foreign policy is undergoing a significant transformation as global power shifts toward Asia and India rises as a major economy. The United States is recalibrating global multilateralism, China is expanding influence, and Russia remains a long-standing partner. In this evolving landscape, India faces strategic choices that require clarity, autonomy, and long-term vision.

Why Asia Should Be the New Strategic Direction for India

1. Asia's Growing Centrality in Global Power: The "G2" optics at the 2025 Busan Summit, with a confident China and an uneasy United States, highlight that geopolitical gravity is shifting toward Asia. Asia now holds **two-thirds of the global population and wealth**, re-establishing itself as the world's strategic and economic centre.
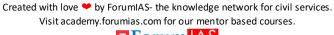
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2. Economic Scale and Market Potential: Asia's market is projected to surpass that of the U.S.A, offering India larger economic opportunities. Unlike Western alliances shaped by colonialism, Asia is integrating through **shared value-chain interests**, allowing India to partner on equal terms.

3. India's Role as a Balancing Power: Asian countries seek partnership with India due to its **technological capacity**, **economic weight**, and ability to balance China.India has the potential to shape Asian regional institutions and emerging economic corridors.

4. Strengthening Relations with Russia and Stable Ties with China: Russia remains a **trusted 75-year-old strategic partner**, and its S-400 system was crucial in "Operation Sindoor." India-China border negotiations in Ladakh are advancing, with potential long-term implications for stability and settlement of related issues such as Kashmir.

5. The Rise of Asian Groupings: Organisations like **BRICS**, **SCO**, and **ASEAN** are becoming intertwined in economic, security, and political domains. The door remains open for India to rejoin **RCEP**, offering a major alternative market to the U.S.

Why India Must Re-evaluate Its U.S.A Engagement

1. U.S.A. Moves Are Reducing India's Strategic Policy Space: U.S.A. is attempting to "pull India away from China" and restrict India's discounted oil purchase from Russia. The U.S.A. Ambassador's public positions reveal attempts to influence India's choices.

2. Concerns Over U.S.A Motives: There is a growing perception that the U.S.A may try to **prevent India's rise** to avoid another China-like competitor.

3. India Has Asserted Strategic Independence: Prime Minister Modi clarified that India's future **cannot be dictated by external powers**, underlining independent decision-making.

Key Challenges for India in Pursuing an Asia-centered Strategy

1. Defining Strategic Autonomy Clearly: India must balance its **developmental priorities** with its rising power status, ensuring that partnerships do not impose external agendas.

2. Navigating New Technological and Geopolitical Rules: Asia's power is now linked to **technology, digital interconnectedness, and innovation**, not traditional diplomacy. India must protect **national data**, promote **endogenous technology**, and strengthen **local defence production**.

3. Adapting to Evolving Security Threats: Cyberwarfare is becoming central, replacing land-centric threats. China's recalibration in Pakistan, U.S.A influence in South Asia, and the U.S.A quest for a base in Afghanistan complicate India's security landscape.

4. Defence Modernisation Challenges: India needs a national debate on reallocating defence resources. Maintaining a large Army and importing big platforms may hinder innovation in **AI, missiles, drones, air defence, and space systems** where India already has competitive capability.

5. AI Sovereignty Risks: India's ₹10,372-crore AI mission has been questioned by global firms for being inadequate. There is a risk of **U.S.A companies dominating India's AI ecosystem**, undermining sovereignty.

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Way Forward

1. Reaffirm Strategic Autonomy Based on India's Dual Agendas: India must align foreign policy with both its **high-growth ambitions** and its **Global South developmental commitments** without dilution.

2. Rebuild Trade and Economic Integration Within Asia: India should explore re-entry into **RCEP** and deepen cooperation across BRICS, SCO, and ASEAN. Trade concessions and mechanisms outside WTO rules may help integrate India into Asian value chains.

3. Prioritise Technology and Innovation as Core National Strategy: India must invest heavily in **indigenous innovation**, digital sovereignty, and localised defence systems. Protecting national data and building homegrown technological capacity should be non-negotiable.

4. Transform National Security for a Digital Era: Cybersecurity, AI-driven warfare, and technological dominance must replace older land-centric doctrines. Defence spending should shift from manpower-heavy structures to **innovation-heavy capabilities**.

5. Achieve AI Sovereignty: Funding for AI must increase at least **20-fold**, with national-level strategic collaboration, advanced compute resources, proprietary AI models, and talent development under PMO leadership. This will be critical for India's goal of becoming a global power by 2047.

Conclusion: As global power shifts toward Asia, India stands at a decisive moment in shaping its future. An Asia-focused strategy—grounded in strategic autonomy, technological strength, regional integration, and innovation—offers India the best path to secure its economic rise, geopolitical influence, and long-term national interests.

Question: India's foreign policy is at an inflection point, with changing global power balances and shifting Asian dynamics. Discuss why the new strategic direction for India should be towards Asia, highlighting key challenges and the way forward.
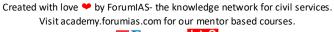
New Framework for Obscenity on Digital Platforms

UPSC Syllabus- Cyber Laws and Regulations: IT Act, 2000, rules regarding online content, and recent amendments.

News- The Union government has proposed new rules to define "obscenity" and other banned content on digital platforms under the IT Rules, 2021. The aim is to make clear what counts as prohibited content and to expand the Code of Ethics so that it applies not just to websites, but also to social media, OTT platforms, and digital news portals.

Background of the Proposed Amendment

The Supreme Court, while hearing a case involving comedian **Samay Raina** and a controversial joke, asked the government to come up with guidelines that strike a delicate balance between **freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a)** and **reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2)**. In response, the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** submitted a detailed proposal outlining new regulatory measures.

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These proposals emerge at a time when concerns over **sexual content, deepfakes, harmful speech, and misinformation** are growing, prompting the government to strengthen oversight of digital platforms.

Key Features of the Proposed Guidelines

- **Definition of Obscene Content:** For the first time, the IT Rules explicitly define "obscenity," drawing from **Section 67 of the IT Act, Cable TV Programme Code, and Indian Penal Code (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita)**.
- **Expansion of Code of Ethics:** A new chapter on **Obscenity** applies to **OTT platforms and digital news portals**, covering 17 restrictions, including vulgarity, glorification of crime, and bias against communities.
- **Alignment with TV Standards:** The Cable TV Programme Code is transposed to digital platforms, raising questions about its relevance online.
- **OTT Compliance:** Platforms may need to ensure content is fit for **public exhibition**, akin to films under the **Cinematograph Act, 1952**.
- **Revival of IT Rules 9(1) and 9(3):** Previously stayed by courts, these rules enforcing the Code of Ethics are proposed to be revived.
- **Community Standards Test:** The Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal test will decide if content is obscene. Content is acceptable if:
    - A reasonable person today would not see it as sexually provocative or voyeuristic.
    - It has literary, artistic, scientific, or political value.

Criticism of the Proposal

Digital rights groups have flagged several issues:

- **Overbroad definitions** could classify too much content as obscene
- **Executive overreach** by expanding IT Rules instead of using parliamentary amendments
- **Risks to free speech**, as ambiguous terms like "good taste" may be misused
- **Overlap with pending court cases**, since some rules are already stayed

Implications for Digital Platforms

If implemented:

- Platforms will need **stricter moderation and compliance processes**
- OTTs may face **film-like certification requirements**
- Social media platforms would have to **proactively filter indecent or vulgar content**
- Digital publishers could experience **heightened regulatory oversight**

Overall, the amendment has the potential to **reshape India's digital content ecosystem**, bringing it closer to a **broadcast-style regulatory framework**.

Question- Examine the key features of the proposed online obscenity guidelines, the concerns of digital rights groups, and their potential impact on India's digital content ecosystem

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