

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



सत्यमेव जयते

UPSC

3rd Week

January. 2026

Features :

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

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Most road accidents occur in known zones, solutions lie in focused effort

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

Introduction- Findings from a **joint road safety assessment by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and the SaveLIFE Foundation** reveal that road accident deaths in India follow clear patterns. A majority of fatalities occur **without traffic violations**, at **identified locations**, and during **specific time hours**. These patterns show that road deaths are predictable and preventable through focused action on known problem areas.

Current Status of India's Road Safety

1. India's global position in road fatalities: India ranks **first globally in annual road accident fatalities**. Its road deaths are far higher than China, which records only **36% of India's total**, and the United States, which records **25%**.

2. Deaths concentrated in limited districts: In **2023 and 2024**, about **3.5 lakh people died in 9.68 lakh road accidents** across India. Of these, **89,085 deaths occurred in just 100 districts**, accounting for **over one-fourth of total fatalities**.

3. Time of accidents and emergency response gap: About **53% of all deaths occur between 6 pm and 12 am**. After accidents, **eight out of ten victims are hospitalised without using the 108 ambulance service**, showing weak emergency coverage.

4. Road network and fatality distribution: India has the **second-largest road network in the world**, covering about **63.45 lakh km**. However, **63% of road crash fatalities occur outside National Highways**, showing that local roads drive most deaths.

5. Limited enforcement impact: Among violations, **speeding accounts for 19% of deaths**, followed by **rash driving (7%)** and **dangerous overtaking (3%)**. Enforcement remains weak at the local level.

What Are India's Road Safety Challenges

1. Engineering defects

- **Road engineering as the main contributor:** Around **59% of fatalities do not involve any traffic violation**, clearly pointing to **poor road design and engineering failures** as major causes of deaths.
- **Frequent engineering defects on roads:** Common issues include **damaged crash barriers, faded or missing pavement markings, unprotected hard structures, wrong or damaged signage, and inadequate illumination**. These defects appear repeatedly across districts.

2. Accidents occur in known locations: Most crashes are concentrated in **specific road stretches, crash-prone spots, and police station areas**. These locations repeatedly report fatalities every year.

3. Crash patterns causing maximum deaths: **Rear-end, head-on, and pedestrian crashes account for 72% of all fatalities**. These crashes are closely linked to design flaws, visibility issues, and poor separation of traffic.

4. **Weak Vehicle Safety Standards in India-** Crash tests carried out by the Global New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP) in 2014 revealed that some of India's top-selling car models failed the UN (United Nations)'s frontal impact crash test.

5. **Lack of Golden Hour Treatment-** Lack of rapid trauma care on highways leads to high fatalities.

Evidence from High-Risk Districts

1. **State-wise spread of severe districts: Uttar Pradesh accounts for most of the top 20 districts** with high fatalities. Tamil Nadu has 19 severe districts, followed by Maharashtra (11), Karnataka (9), and Rajasthan (8).

2. **Critical corridors and hotspots:** About 54% of all fatalities occur on 18 identified corridors managed by the National Highways Authority of India and state PWDs. These corridors include 379 critical locations.

3. **Intensity of deaths in severe districts:** Each of the 100 severe districts records an average of 455 deaths every year. 58% of deaths occur at crash-prone locations, while 42% occur on critical corridors.

Initiatives Taken

1. **Formulation of National Road Safety Policy (NRSP), 2010-** The policy was formulated based on the recommendations of S Sundar Committee. Some important highlights are-

- (a) Establishment of a Road Safety Information Database.
- (b) Periodical review of road design standards and Vehicle safety standards.
- (c) Creation of a National Road Safety Council to supervise matters related to road safety.

2. **Establishment of District Road Safety Committees (DRSC)-** Established under the Section 215 of the Motor Vehicle Act of 1988. These have been entrusted with creation of a district road safety plan and an emergency medical plan.

3. **Passage of Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019-** GOI has tried to enhance the road safety measures through this act.

(a) Creating a National Road Safety Board to advise the government on traffic management.

(b) Higher fines for traffic rule violations.

(c) Recalling defective vehicles which are dangerous for the environment and people.

(d) Creation of a 'Solatium Fund' for victims of hit-and-run accidents.

(e) Punishment to the owner for violations committed by Juvenile.

(f) Automated testing for driver's licence and fitness certificate (FC).

(g) Protection of Good Samaritans from civil and criminal liability.

4. **Focused national assessment:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and SaveLIFE Foundation jointly identified and ranked the 100 most severe districts, highlighting where deaths occur and why.

5. **Global commitment to reduction:** India is a signatory to the Stockholm Declaration on Road Safety, which sets a target to reduce road deaths and injuries by 50% by 2030.

7. Some global initiatives for Road Safety

Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety (2015)- India is a signatory to the Declaration.

The countries plan to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3.6 i.e., to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030.

Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030- The UN General Assembly adopted resolution “Improving global road safety” with the ambitious target of preventing at least 50% of road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030.

Way Forward

1. Corridor-wise road safety surveys: NHAI and state PWDs should conduct **comprehensive road safety surveys** on each critical corridor to identify repeated engineering defects.

2. Site-specific engineering correction: Crash-prone locations need **location-specific fixes** based on existing IRC and MoRTH guidelines rather than broad solutions.

3. Strengthening enforcement capacity: Critical police stations must be upgraded with **adequate manpower** to improve enforcement at high-fatality locations.

4. Improving ambulance coverage: All **108 ambulances should be audited** for compliance, with a clear target to handle **75% of hospitalisations** after crashes.

5. Better coordination using existing schemes: No new schemes are required. **Current budgets must align engineering repair, enforcement, and hospital readiness** through better coordination.

6. Implementation of the important recommendations of the KS Radhakrishnan panel on Road Safety- The important ones are

- (a) Compulsory Audit on road safety by the state governments
- (b) Creating awareness among people on road safety rules, insurance policies
- (c) Providing enough compensation to victims on time.

Conclusion

Road deaths in India follow clear patterns. **Over one-fourth of fatalities occur in just 100 districts**, many at fixed locations and times. **Engineering failures, weak emergency response, and local enforcement gaps** drive outcomes more than violations. Using existing schemes, fixing known road defects, strengthening police stations, and improving ambulance reach can sharply reduce deaths without new policies or budgets.

Question for Practice:

Despite multiple policy interventions, road accidents in India continue to rise. Examine the major causes behind increasing road accidents and suggest effective measures to improve road safety.

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

India needs a new foreign policy plan

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. .

Introduction

India's foreign policy is facing a serious test as the long upward trend in India-U.S. relations has stalled. Changes in U.S. priorities, declining respect for partnerships, and weakening multilateralism show that earlier assumptions no longer work. The shifting balance of power, especially the U.S.-China equation, makes it necessary for India to rethink its foreign policy approach. A new plan must be based on realism, national strength, and diversified partnerships rather than expectations of special treatment.

Changing U.S. Strategic Priorities under Trump

1. Transactional mindset: The U.S. President treats foreign relations as deals driven by immediate gains. Strategic trust and long-term partnership have been replaced by bargaining and pressure.

2. Power hierarchy: Countries are judged by how much leverage they possess. Those seen as weak or eager face public disregard rather than diplomatic respect.

3. China leverage:

- China holds a strong hand because of its control over rare earths and magnets. This economic dominance shapes U.S. caution and restraint toward Beijing.
- The U.S. seeks a "grand bargain" with China instead of sustained confrontation. This shows a willingness to compromise even on sensitive strategic issues.

4. Ally restraint:

- When Japan faced Chinese pressure over Taiwan-related remarks, the U.S. warned Japan not to provoke China. This signals reduced commitment to protecting allies' concerns.
- Statements suggesting China may decide Taiwan's future weaken deterrence. Such ambiguity signals a retreat from earlier security assurances in the region.

5. Trade pressure: Trade negotiations are used as tools of coercion rather than cooperation. India faces threats of extreme tariffs despite being ready to conclude a trade agreement.

Erosion of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad Framework

1. Strategic dilution: Unclear U.S. signals on China and Taiwan weaken the Indo-Pacific concept. The strategy lacks a firm security and political foundation.

2. India marginalisation: India's role as a central Indo-Pacific partner has weakened. The U.S. no longer treats India as a key pillar of its regional strategy.

3. Quad downgrade: Delayed engagement and reduced urgency show the Quad is no longer a U.S. priority. Even the timing of high-level visits reflects this decline.

4. Rhetoric gap: Positive statements from U.S. officials are not supported by policy action. Diplomatic reassurance has replaced strategic commitment.

5. Partner uncertainty: Unpredictable U.S. behaviour creates doubts among Quad members. Trust in long-term coordination has weakened.

6. Multilateral retreat: U.S. withdrawal from international organisations reduces platforms for joint action. This limits India–U.S. cooperation in global governance.

India–U.S. Relations: From Confidence to Disillusionment

1. Initial confidence: India believed ideological affinity and personal rapport with the U.S. leadership would strengthen bilateral ties. Early high-level meetings reinforced the belief that relations would continue on an upward path.

2. Trade optimism: India expected to be among the first countries to conclude a bilateral trade agreement with the United States. This expectation was based on early diplomatic signals and positive engagement.

3. Strategic continuity: Early meetings of Quad foreign ministers suggested continuity in the Indo-Pacific strategy. These signals created confidence that U.S.–China competition would remain central.

4. Policy reversal: Later actions showed that earlier assumptions were incorrect. The U.S. shifted toward accommodation with China alongside selective confrontation.

5. Personal friction: Ties were strained by Trump's claim of brokering a ceasefire during Operation Sindoor without Indian acknowledgment. The issue worsened sentiment but did not determine policy direction.

6. Structural drivers: The deeper cause lies in changing geopolitics and the decline of U.S. power relative to China. This shift explains America's reassessment of alliances and global commitments.

7. Status downgrade: India has been treated as a second-tier partner despite personal praise. Evidence includes stalled trade talks, tariff threats, and U.S. withdrawal from forums like the International Solar Alliance.

India's Strategic Recalibration and Diversification

1. Appeasement limits: India's repeated phone calls, lobbying efforts, and attempts to secure early engagement produced no outcomes. Instead, they enabled public claims by the U.S. President without yielding trade or strategic gains.

2. Strategic restraint: India has stopped chasing reconciliation at any cost. This is visible in ignoring advice to place a call to seal the trade deal and skipping chances for face-to-face meetings.

3. Diplomatic silence: India has avoided reacting to threats of a 500 percent tariff and incorrect claims on Apache helicopter deliveries. Silence is used to deny political leverage and public misrepresentation.

4. Selective alignment: India endorsed U.S. positions on Gaza and Ukraine and issued vague calls for dialogue after U.S. actions in Venezuela. These choices broke ranks with BRICS partners during India's chairmanship.

5. Trade diversification: India redirected diplomatic energy toward trade agreements with the UK, New Zealand, and the EFTA bloc. This aimed to reduce dependence on an uncertain U.S. market.

6. Diplomatic outreach: Since June 2025, India's leadership has visited 21 countries to strengthen ties across regions. This outreach supports a broader multi-alignment strategy.

7. Leverage retention: India continues defence, counter-terrorism, and technology cooperation with the U.S. At the same time, its large market and supply of high-end manpower remain its strongest bargaining assets.

Conclusion

The trajectory of India-U.S. relations reflects deeper shifts in global power and U.S. strategic priorities. As frameworks weaken and assumptions collapse, India has begun recalibrating through restraint, diversification, and multi-alignment. Going ahead, sustaining economic strength and strategic autonomy will be crucial for India to manage great-power rivalry without overdependence on any single partner.

Question for practice:

Examine how changing U.S. strategic priorities under Donald Trump have altered the trajectory of India-U.S. relations and compelled India to recalibrate its foreign policy approach.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

India's Small Towns and the Shifting Urbanisation Landscape

Source: The post "India's Small Towns and the Shifting Urbanisation Landscape" has been created, based on "Are India's small towns being increasingly urbanised? | Explained" published in "The Hindu" on 16th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- G

Context: India's urbanisation is no longer driven only by metropolitan cities. A significant but less visible transformation is occurring through the rapid proliferation and urbanisation of small towns (population below 1 lakh), which now constitute the bulk of India's nearly 9,000 towns.

Reasons for the proliferation and urbanisation of small towns

1. **Crisis of metropolitan accumulation:** Indian metros face over-accumulation marked by inflated land prices, stressed infrastructure, and high living costs.
2. **Capital relocation:** Capital is shifting to small towns due to cheaper land, lower wages, weaker regulation, and minimal political scrutiny.
3. **Economic functions of small towns:** They are emerging as logistics hubs, agro-processing centres, warehouse towns, construction economies, service and consumption markets.
4. **Labour absorption:** Small towns absorb migrants pushed out of metros and rural youth facing agrarian distress.
5. **Structural outcome of capitalism:** Small towns are fully embedded in the urban process, not peripheral to it.

Are small towns a better alternative to metros?

1. **No inherent inclusivity:** Growth is characterised by the urbanisation of rural poverty rather than equitable development.

2. **Dominance of informality:** Informal labour, home-based women workers, and insecure platform-based employment prevail.
3. **New power hierarchies:** Local elites such as real estate brokers, contractors, micro-financiers, and political intermediaries control land and labour.
4. **Ecological stress:** Unregulated groundwater extraction, tanker economies, and weak environmental oversight are common.

Policy and governance failures

1. **Metro-centric urban missions:** Schemes like AMRUT largely exclude small towns from substantial infrastructure investment.
2. **Weak municipal capacity:** Small-town local bodies are underfunded, understaffed, and lack planning autonomy.
3. **Inappropriate planning models:** Metropolitan templates are replicated without accounting for local socio-economic realities.
4. **Token participation:** Citizen engagement is limited to procedural formalities.

Way Forward

1. **Political recognition** of small towns as the main frontier of India's urban future.
2. **Context-specific planning** integrating housing, livelihoods, transport, and ecology.
3. **Empowered municipalities** with transparent finances and administrative capacity.
4. **Democratic institutional space** for workers' collectives, cooperatives, and environmental groups.
5. **Regulation of capital and platforms** to ensure labour rights, local value retention, and data accountability.

Conclusion: India's small towns are central to its urban trajectory. Without policy correction and political will, they risk becoming sites of deepened inequality. With democratic planning and regulation, they can evolve into engines of balanced and sustainable urbanisation.

Question for Practice: "Small towns, rather than metropolitan cities, are emerging as the primary sites of India's urban transformation." Critically examine the causes, nature, and implications of this shift.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India-EU FTA: Need for Faster Progress

Source: The post "India-EU FTA: Need for Faster Progress" has been created, based on "In a year of unpredictability, India needs to accelerate EU FTA" published in "Indian Express" on 16th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: The global economy in 2026 is characterised by uncertainty arising from slowing growth in China and policy-induced disruptions in the United States. Rising protectionism, geopolitical tensions, and fragile global supply chains have reduced the reliability of traditional trade partners. In this context, accelerating the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement has become strategically essential for India to ensure export stability, attract long-term investment, and sustain economic growth.

Global economic context: Rising uncertainty

United States

1. The US economy recorded strong growth of 4.3 per cent in late 2025, largely driven by consumer spending.
2. However, this growth is structurally weak as investment is heavily concentrated in artificial intelligence infrastructure, with uncertain future consumption demand and high energy requirements.
3. Corporate hiring has slowed, and AI-related equity markets show signs of overvaluation.
4. The Trump administration's tariff-led revenue strategy is likely to increase domestic inflation, weaken consumption demand, raise public debt, and eventually slow overall economic growth.

China

1. China's economic growth has been on a long-term secular decline, falling from 8–10 per cent in earlier decades to below 4 per cent.
2. The continuing real estate crisis has reduced household wealth and domestic demand.
3. Ageing demographics further constrain consumption and labour supply.
4. Recent export growth is largely driven by trade diversion and tariff arbitrage, which is unlikely to be sustainable as partner countries raise tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Implications for India's trade prospects

1. Slowing growth in the world's two largest economies has reduced the scope for broad-based global trade expansion in 2026.
2. The commodity trade surge witnessed in late 2025 was largely temporary and driven by pre-emptive imports ahead of the US tariff regime.
3. India's services exports remain relatively resilient, but their performance continues to depend heavily on economic conditions in the United States.
4. As a result, trade diversion away from the US market presents the most realistic opportunity for India to expand exports in the near term.

Strategic importance of the India–EU Free Trade Agreement

1. The European Union is India's fourth-largest trading partner and a major destination for both goods and services exports.
2. Despite its importance, EU markets have received comparatively less attention than the US in India's trade strategy.
3. Growing trade and political frictions between the EU and the US, as well as concerns over Chinese trade practices, are pushing the EU to seek alternative partnerships.
4. The successful conclusion of the India–UK FTA strengthens India's negotiating credibility and sets a precedent for deeper engagement with the EU.
5. An India–EU FTA would help India diversify export destinations, reduce excessive dependence on the US market, and improve trade resilience.

Germany's pivotal role in advancing the FTA

1. Germany is the largest economy in the European Union and plays a dominant role in shaping EU trade and industrial policy.

2. Recent India–Germany cooperation agreements signal renewed momentum toward a broader India–EU trade framework.
3. Germany’s Skilled Immigration Act creates an opportunity for India to negotiate Mode 4 provisions related to the movement of skilled professionals.
4. Inclusion of labour mobility would be a major gain for India, particularly in IT, engineering, healthcare, and research services.
5. Germany can act as an anchor for cooperation in advanced manufacturing, green technologies, industrial infrastructure, and defence production.

Investment and technology dimension

1. By 2024, cumulative foreign direct investment from the European Union into India had reached approximately 120 billion dollars, indicating strong existing economic ties.
2. Significant untapped potential remains, particularly in high-technology and infrastructure sectors.
3. Empirical studies show that trade and FDI are complementary, with FDI being the most reliable channel for long-term technology transfer.
4. Priority sectors such as electronics, infrastructure, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing align closely with India’s development objectives.
5. A combined framework comprising an FTA, a services agreement, and an investment pact would maximise economic gains for India.

Way Forward

1. India should fast-track negotiations for a comprehensive and balanced India–EU Free Trade Agreement.
2. Greater emphasis must be placed on services trade, especially mobility of skilled professionals under Mode 4.
3. The agreement should include strong provisions for technology transfer, investment protection, and industrial collaboration.
4. Strategic engagement with Germany should be leveraged as a gateway to broader and deeper EU economic integration.

Conclusion: In an environment of slowing global demand, rising protectionism, and geopolitical uncertainty, accelerating the India–EU Free Trade Agreement is both an economic and strategic necessity. A well-structured agreement can strengthen India’s trade resilience, boost services exports, attract technology-intensive foreign investment, and provide a stable foundation for long-term growth.

Question for Practice: In the backdrop of slowing global demand and rising protectionism, regional trade agreements are becoming central to India’s economic strategy.”

Discuss this statement with special reference to the proposed India–EU Free Trade Agreement.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

India must widen, and deepen, its export pool to offset US tariffs

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests. .

Introduction

India's trade data for December 2025 shows that export growth has slowed at a time when imports remain high. This change has gained importance after the United States imposed a 50% tariff on Indian goods from August 2025. While headline export numbers appear stable, deeper trends reveal weakening momentum, rising trade imbalance, and limited market diversification, raising concerns for India's external trade stability.

India's Recent Trade Performance

- 1. Slow growth in exports:** India exported goods worth \$38.5 billion in December 2025, compared to \$37.8 billion in December 2024. This reflects a modest 1.8% annual growth, showing limited expansion in external demand.
- 2. Sharp rise in imports:** Goods imports stood at \$63.55 billion in December 2025. This was nearly 9% higher than imports in December 2024, indicating strong import dependence.
- 3. Widening trade deficit:** The large gap between exports and imports resulted in a trade deficit of \$25 billion. This level of deficit increases vulnerability to external shocks.

Emerging Export Trends in the Post-Tariff Period

1. Sequential momentum has weakened

Slow growth: Month-on-month export growth slowed sharply after the tariff hike. Sequential momentum declined from an average of **0.7% during January–July 2025** to just **0.1% during August–December 2025**, after adjusting for seasonal variation.

Sector-wide export slowdown: The weakening trend was visible across major sectors. Growth slowed in electronics, engineering goods, petroleum, and textiles, while exports of pharma, chemicals, and gems and jewellery declined on a sequential basis.

2. India's exports to the US fell: Exports to the US declined both annually and sequentially after the tariffs. Average sequential growth dropped from 1.9% before August to -1.4% between August and December 2025, reflecting reduced competitiveness due to higher prices.

3. Marginal rise in exports to China: Exports to China recorded a small increase of about \$2 billion per month. However, this gain was insufficient to compensate for the around \$7 billion monthly decline in exports to the US.

4. Exports to the rest of the world remained flat: Exports to countries other than the US and China showed no meaningful growth. This indicates limited diversification and weak alternative demand during the tariff period.

Major Concerns

1. Pressure on the rupee: Lower export earnings reduce demand for the rupee. This places downward pressure on the exchange rate and adds to external sector stress.

2. Loss of competitiveness for exporters: Indian exporters are unable to absorb the full cost of US tariffs. Higher prices reduce competitiveness and lower bilateral trade volumes.

3. Breakdown of trade predictability: Unpredictable tariffs weaken confidence among businesses and policymakers. Such uncertainty moves trade away from rules-based systems toward fragmented trading blocs.

4. Sectoral exposure to tariffs: The tariffs affect electronics, machinery, textiles, gems and jewellery, and auto components. Only pharmaceuticals and energy products remain exempt at present.

5. Impact on MSMEs and investment sentiment: Export-linked MSMEs face immediate pressure. Some multinational firms may reassess short-term plans, though long-term investment decisions remain largely unchanged.

6. Tariffs driven by US domestic economic pressures: The US faces a worsening fiscal position, a persistent trade deficit, and a rising debt-to-GDP ratio. It is using bilateral tariffs to seek favourable trade terms, but this approach raises input costs, pushes consumer prices higher, and has begun feeding into inflation, as acknowledged by the US Federal Reserve.

India's Way Forward

1. Reducing dependence on a single market: India cannot remain exposed to policy shifts in one country. Export concentration in the US increases vulnerability during trade disruptions.

2. Expanding markets in the Global South: Broadening exports across the Global South is essential. Engagement with 32 countries under Operation Sindoor must be followed by deeper trade integration.

3. Strengthening domestic demand as support: Rising rural incomes are creating new demand for goods. Redirecting export capacity toward domestic markets can help absorb external shocks.

4. Balanced trade strategy: India must defend employment and growth without moving toward protectionism. Diversification, market expansion, and risk reduction offer more stable long-term solutions.

Conclusion

The US tariff hike has weakened India's export momentum and exposed the risks of limited market diversification. While the immediate impact is visible through slower growth and a widening trade deficit, the long-term damage can be contained. By widening export destinations, deepening trade partnerships beyond the US, and strengthening domestic demand, India can protect its growth path and build a more resilient export ecosystem.

Source - [Indian Express](#)

A Decade of Startup India

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Economy-Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

National Startup Day on 16 January 2026 marks ten years of the Startup India Initiative. What began in 2016 as a policy push has grown into one of the world's largest startup ecosystems. The initiative has reshaped entrepreneurship, strengthened innovation capacity, and supported inclusive development. It aligns closely with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 by combining economic modernisation with regional and social uplift.

Evolution of India's Startup Ecosystem (2016–2025)

- 1. Rapid Expansion of Startups:** India has more than 2 lakh startups as of December 2025, placing it among the largest startup ecosystems in the world. This growth has spread across technology, services, and manufacturing sectors, making startups a key driver of economic transformation.
- 2. Rise of Startup Hubs:** Cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR have emerged as major innovation centres. These hubs attract investment, skilled talent, incubators, and global partnerships, strengthening India's startup competitiveness.
- 3. Growth Beyond Metro Cities:** Nearly 50% of startups now originate from Tier II and Tier III cities, reflecting the widening reach of entrepreneurship. This shift highlights the role of Startup India in decentralising innovation and promoting balanced regional development.
- 4. Bridging the Rural–Urban Divide:** Startups are addressing development gaps through solutions in agri-tech, telemedicine, microfinance, tourism, and ed-tech. These innovations support rural livelihoods, improve service delivery, and connect local economies with national markets.
- 5. Women-Led Entrepreneurship:** More than 45% of recognised startups have at least one woman Director or Partner as of December 2025. This trend reflects growing gender inclusion and the emergence of entrepreneurship as a tool for social equity.
- 6. Economic and Developmental Significance:** Startups play a critical role in driving innovation, improving productivity, and accelerating technology adoption across sectors. They generate large-scale employment, strengthen digital and financial inclusion, and promote grassroots entrepreneurship, making Startup India a central pillar of India's long-term growth strategy.

Key Flagship Schemes Under Startup India

- 1. Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS):** The Fund of Funds for Startups is managed by SIDBI with a total corpus of ₹10,000 crore. It provides capital support to SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds. More than 140 AIFs have together invested over ₹25,500 crore in 1,370+ startups.

2. Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS): This scheme facilitates collateral-free loans for startups through eligible financial institutions. Under CGSS, more than 330 loans amounting to over ₹800 crore have been guaranteed.

3. Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS): With a corpus of ₹945 crore, SISFS supports early-stage startups. It provides financial assistance for proof of concept, product development, prototyping, trials, market entry, and commercialisation through 215+ approved incubators.

4. Startup India Hub: The Startup India Hub functions as a national digital platform for the startup ecosystem. It enables interaction among startups, investors, mentors, incubators, corporates, academic institutions, and government bodies.

5. States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF): The SRF evaluates states and Union Territories based on startup-friendly policies and their implementation. The framework promotes competitive federalism and encourages continuous improvement in startup governance.

6. National Mentorship Portal (MAARG): MAARG provides startups with access to experienced mentors across sectors. It supports strategic guidance, resilience building, and long-term growth.

7. Startup India Investor Connect Portal: Developed in collaboration with SIDBI, this digital portal links startups with venture capital funds and investors. It allows entrepreneurs to reach multiple investors through a single application and pitch process.

Complementary Schemes Strengthening the Ecosystem

1. Atal Innovation Mission (AIM): Launched in 2016 with an outlay of ₹2,750 crore till March 2028, AIM promotes innovation across schools, universities, startups, and industry. AIM 2.0 focuses on scaling proven models and strengthening Atal Tinkering Labs.

2. GENESIS (Gen-Next Support for Innovative Startups) Scheme: Launched in 2022 by MeitY, GENESIS supports 1,600 technology startups in Tier II and Tier III cities with an outlay of ₹490 crore.

3. MeitY Startup Hub (MSH): Established in 2016, the MeitY Startup Hub acts as a central platform for technology-led entrepreneurship. As of December 2025, it supports over 6,148 startups, 517 incubators, and 329 laboratories across the country.

4. Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE) 2.0 Scheme: Introduced in 2019, it supports Information and Communication Technology (ICT) startups in areas such as AI, IoT, blockchain, robotics, healthcare, agriculture, and clean tech through 51 incubators.

5. National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI) Programme: Launched by DST in 2016, NIDHI has supported 12,000+ startups, created 1,30,000+ jobs, backed 175+ incubators, and generated 1,100+ intellectual property assets.

6. Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP): It is implemented under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY–NRLM). It promotes rural entrepreneurship by enabling households to establish and expand local enterprises.

7. ASPIRE Scheme: ASPIRE stands for A Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industries and Entrepreneurship. Launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), it supports innovation and enterprise creation in rural and underserved areas through Livelihood Business Incubators.

8. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP): The Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is implemented by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). It promotes self-employment and grassroots enterprise creation by ensuring financial support and effective last-mile delivery.

Challenges Faced by Startup India

1. Limited Access to Funding: Early-stage funding remains uneven and metro-centric. There is a significant reliance on foreign venture capital, and deep tech startups, which require long-term investment, struggle with the typical short fund lifecycles of venture capital (VCs).

2. Regulatory & Compliance Burdens: Complex tax structures (like frequent changes in GST regulations), bureaucratic delays, and an overall high compliance burden raise the cost and difficulty of doing business. Inconsistent policy enforcement also creates friction.

3. High Failure and Closure Rates: By October 2025, 6,385 DPIIT-recognised startups had closed due to funding gaps, cash flow issues, and scaling problems.

4. Market Saturation and Intense Competition: Overcrowding in sectors like fintech, e-commerce, and food delivery leads to high cash burn and low margins.

5. Talent Shortage and Retention Issues: Startups face difficulty attracting skilled workers in AI, data science, cybersecurity, and semiconductor design.

6. Weak Deep-Tech Ecosystem: The ecosystem remains dominated by service-based models, with limited progress in advanced manufacturing and core technology.

7. Infrastructure and Geographic Disparity: Startups in Tier II and III cities often face greater challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable internet and power, and a lack of local support systems like incubators and mentors.

8. Corporate Governance Issues: Incidents of corporate mismanagement in high-profile startups have raised concerns among investors, leading to increased scrutiny and potentially tighter regulations, which can deter investment and innovation.

9. Cultural and Societal Barriers: A traditional cultural preference for job security can make entrepreneurship less appealing due to the inherent risk aversion and potential social stigma associated with business failure.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Early-Stage Domestic Funding:** India needs deeper domestic capital pools to reduce dependence on foreign venture capital and ensure stable long-term funding for startups.
2. **Promote Long-Gestation Deep-Tech Startups:** Dedicated patient capital, research infrastructure, and policy support are required for sectors such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and advanced manufacturing.
3. **Simplify Regulatory and Compliance Frameworks:** Reducing licences, harmonising state-level rules, and easing tax compliance can lower operational burden for early-stage startups.
4. **Expand Startup Infrastructure Beyond Metros:** Improved internet connectivity, incubation centres, testing labs, and logistics facilities are essential in Tier II and Tier III cities.
5. **Strengthen Mentor and Industry Linkages:** Deeper engagement between startups, corporates, academia, and global firms can support technology transfer and market access.
6. **Improve Governance and Transparency Standards:** Strong corporate governance norms are needed to build investor confidence and ensure sustainable ecosystem growth.
7. **Encourage Risk-Taking Culture and Entrepreneurial Mindset:** Awareness programmes and academic integration can reduce fear of failure and promote entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

Conclusion

After a decade, Startup India represents a structural shift in India's economic model. With strong institutional support, expanding regional participation, and growing innovation capacity, startups have become central to employment generation and inclusive growth. Addressing funding, infrastructure, and governance gaps will be essential to sustain momentum and realise the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Question for practice

Discuss the impact of the Startup India Initiative on India's startup ecosystem over the past decade.

Source: [PIB](#)

Uttarakhand to Himachal to J&K, why this winter feels snowless

Source: The post "Uttarakhand to Himachal to J&K, why this winter feels snowless" has been created, based on "Uttarakhand to Himachal to J&K, why this winter feels snowless" published in "Indian Express" on 17th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: The winter of 2024–25 has been characterised by an acute deficiency of rainfall and snowfall in the western Himalayan states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. The northwest region received only **8 per cent of the normal rainfall**, resulting in bare mountain peaks and raising serious concerns about climate variability and environmental security.

Causes of the Snowless and Dry Winter

1. **Weak Western Disturbances:** Western disturbances that crossed northern India during December and January were moisture-deficient and shallow in nature, which reduced their capacity to generate precipitation.
2. **Altered Trajectory of Weather Systems:** The western disturbances propagated at higher latitudes, causing limited precipitation over Kashmir and parts of Himachal Pradesh while largely bypassing Uttarakhand.
3. **Reduced Wind Confluence:** The usual interaction between western disturbances and moisture-laden easterly or westerly winds from the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea was weak, preventing cloud formation and rainfall.
4. **Short Residence Time of Systems:** Weak atmospheric circulation reduced the duration for which western disturbances remained over the region, limiting rainfall intensity and coverage.
5. **Long-term Climatic Trends:** IMD data shows that dry winters have become increasingly frequent over the last decade, indicating a broader trend of climatic unpredictability in the Himalayan region.

Implications of Reduced Winter Precipitation

1. **Water Security Stress:** Reduced snowfall has limited groundwater recharge and spring rejuvenation, thereby affecting drinking water availability and river flows during summer months.
2. **Agricultural Impact:** Rabi crops have been adversely affected due to insufficient soil moisture, as early winter precipitation is crucial for sustained crop growth.
3. **Glacial and Hydrological Risks:** Lower snow persistence accelerates glacier melt, shifts the Equilibrium Line Altitude upward, reduces long-term river discharge and increases the risk of glacial lake outburst floods.
4. **Forest Fires and Ecological Degradation:** Dry forest floors have triggered widespread forest fires, with thousands of fire alerts reported, even in ecologically sensitive protected areas.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening Climate Monitoring and Forecasting:** There is a need to improve high-resolution forecasting of western disturbances and enhance regional climate models for better early warning and planning.
2. **Sustainable Water Resource Management:** Artificial recharge of aquifers, revival of springs and promotion of rainwater harvesting must be prioritised in the Himalayan states.
3. **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Farmers should be encouraged to adopt drought-resistant crop varieties, improved irrigation efficiency and revised cropping calendars.
4. **Glacier and Disaster Risk Management:** Regular monitoring of glaciers and glacial lakes using satellite data should be strengthened to reduce the risks of glacial lake outburst floods.
5. **Forest Fire Preparedness:** Improved forest moisture conservation, early fire detection systems and community-based fire management are essential to mitigate fire risks.

Conclusion: The snowless winter of the western Himalayas is a clear indicator of evolving climate patterns. Addressing its impacts requires integrated climate adaptation strategies, scientific monitoring and sustainable resource governance to protect both mountain ecosystems and downstream populations.

Question: The winter of 2024–25 witnessed unusually low snowfall and rainfall in the western Himalayan states. Discuss the causes behind the snowless winter in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, and analyse its implications for ecology, agriculture and water security.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Circularity has a hidden price: Who pays for fair and compliant recycling?

Source: The post “Circularity has a hidden price: Who pays for fair and compliant recycling?” has been created, based on "Circularity has a hidden price: Who pays for fair and compliant recycling?" published in “Down to Earth” on 17th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Indian Economy

Context: The circular economy is promoted as a sustainable solution to plastic waste, but in practice, fair and compliant recycling in India often operates at a financial loss. Project Protoprint in Pune exposes the hidden social, environmental, and economic costs of recycling that are not reflected in market prices.

About Project Protoprint

1. Project Protoprint was established by SWaCH, India’s first waste picker-owned cooperative, to enable waste pickers to move up the plastic recycling value chain.
2. The project aimed to create a fully compliant, waste picker-owned recycling unit that processed mixed post-consumer rigid plastics such as HDPE and polypropylene.
3. The unit prioritised fair wages, formal employment benefits, pollution control compliance, and integrated collection, aggregation, and recycling.

Key Economic Findings

1. The recycling unit incurred a loss of approximately ₹14.5 per kilogram of plastic processed, making financial self-sufficiency impossible.
2. In contrast, conventional recycling units that procured ready-made flakes and avoided full compliance showed marginal profits of around ₹0.7 per kilogram.
3. This difference demonstrates that profitability in the recycling sector is achieved primarily by externalising costs rather than through operational efficiency.

Hidden Costs of Recycling and Who Bears the True Cost

1. Many recycling units reduce costs by underpaying labour and failing to provide safe working conditions.
2. Environmental costs are externalised through untreated effluents, improper waste disposal, and residual waste burning.
3. Financial compliance is avoided by evading the 18 percent GST on plastic scrap, which keeps the sector largely informal.
4. Waste pickers and informal workers bear the cost through low incomes, job insecurity, and hazardous working conditions.
5. The environment bears the cost through pollution and ecological degradation caused by non-compliant recycling practices.
6. Responsible recycling units bear financial losses due to compliance becoming a first-mover disadvantage.

Structural Problems in the Recycling Economy

1. Recycling margins remain tied to the fluctuating prices of virgin plastics rather than the actual cost of fair and safe recycling.
2. Extended Producer Responsibility has functioned largely as a symbolic compliance tool instead of a financing mechanism.
3. Poor material design, including multilayered plastics and harmful additives, significantly reduces recyclability and increases processing costs.

Policy Reforms Required

1. **Financing the True Cost of Recycling:** Extended Producer Responsibility must be strengthened to finance the real costs of compliant recycling, including fair wages and environmental safeguards. Producer contributions should cover difficult-to-recycle plastics and be linked to demand creation for recycled content.
2. **Rationalising Taxation and Formalisation:** The 18 percent GST on plastic scrap discourages formalisation and forces transactions into informal channels. Rationalising GST rates would lower entry barriers, improve compliance, and integrate informal actors into the formal economy.
3. **Improving Material Design:** Material design must prioritise mono-material and recyclable packaging to improve recycling efficiency. Producers must be held responsible for the full life-cycle impacts of plastic products.
4. **Simplifying Compliance:** The regulatory approval process for recycling units must be simplified and expedited. Recycling should be recognised as a priority environmental service rather than being treated as a regulatory burden.

Conclusion: Project Protoprint demonstrates that circularity has a real cost that is currently borne by waste pickers, responsible recyclers, and the environment. A just and viable circular economy requires that these costs be internalised through producer responsibility, fiscal reform, and regulatory support.

Question: “The circular economy often masks the true social and environmental costs of recycling.” Discuss this statement in the context of India’s plastic recycling sector. Examine the challenges faced in ensuring fair, compliant, and economically viable recycling, and suggest policy measures to address them.

Source: [Down to Earth](#)

How should India tackle child trafficking

Source: The post “How should India tackle child trafficking” has been created, based on “How should India tackle child trafficking” published in “The Hindu” on 19th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Governance

Context: Child trafficking is a serious **violation of human rights and infringes upon a child’s right to life, dignity and development under Article 21 of the Constitution**. Despite multiple laws and judicial interventions, child trafficking continues due to socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak enforcement.

Meaning of Child Trafficking

1. The **Palermo Protocol, 2000** defines child trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.
2. **Section 143 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023** defines trafficking broadly and includes physical and sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, forced labour and organ removal.
3. Consent of the victim is irrelevant in determining the offence of trafficking.

Constitutional and Legal Protection of Children

1. Article 23 of the Constitution prohibits human trafficking, forced labour and begar.
2. Article 24 prohibits employment of children in hazardous industries.
3. Article 39(e) and 39(f) direct the State to protect children from abuse, exploitation and moral and material abandonment.
4. Sections 98 and 99 of the BNS criminalise the selling and buying of minors.
5. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 addresses trafficking for sexual exploitation.
6. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 provides for care, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked children.
7. The POCSO Act, 2012 provides gender-neutral definitions of sexual offences against children and prescribes stringent punishments. Fast Track POCSO Courts have been established to ensure speedy justice.

Judicial Response

1. In Vishal Jeet v. Union of India (1990), the Supreme Court held that child trafficking requires a preventive and humanistic approach.
2. In M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu (1996), the Court prohibited child labour in hazardous industries.
3. In Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2011), the Court issued directions to address child trafficking and exploitation.
4. In K.P. Kiran Kumar v. State (2025), the Supreme Court held that trafficking violates children's fundamental rights and issued strict preventive guidelines.

Challenges

1. Poverty, unemployment and migration increase children's vulnerability to trafficking.
2. Family breakdown, disasters and lack of awareness make children easy targets.
3. Social media and online platforms are increasingly misused for recruitment.
4. Weak investigation, low conviction rates and trial delays reduce deterrence.
5. Poor Centre-State coordination and inadequate rehabilitation increase the risk of re-trafficking.

Way Forward

1. The government must strengthen Centre-State coordination as police and law and order are State subjects.
2. Investigation and prosecution mechanisms must be improved to increase conviction rates.
3. Social and economic rights of children must be ensured through education, nutrition and social security schemes.
4. Online platforms must be regulated to prevent digital recruitment of children.
5. A victim-centric approach focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration must be prioritised.

Conclusion: Child trafficking is a serious human rights violation that undermines children's dignity and constitutional protections. Despite strong laws, gaps in enforcement, coordination and rehabilitation persist. A holistic approach involving strict enforcement, Centre-State cooperation and social welfare measures is essential to combat child trafficking effectively.

Question: How should India tackle the problem of child trafficking? Discuss the constitutional, legal and judicial measures along with the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Patent rights and public health: What are Bharat's options?

Source: The post “Patent rights and public health: What are Bharat's options?” has been created, based on “J Sai Deepak writes | Patent rights and public health: What are Bharat's options?” published in “Indian Express” on 19th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Governance

Context: India is obligated under the TRIPS Agreement to protect patent rights, while simultaneously retaining the sovereign right to safeguard public health. The key challenge lies in preventing abuse of patent monopolies, particularly through evergreening, without discouraging genuine innovation.

Patent Rights and Prevention of Evergreening

1. India's patent regime prevents the grant of patents for minor modifications that do not enhance therapeutic efficacy.
2. This ensures that pharmaceutical companies do not obtain repeated monopolies over substantially the same invention.
3. Such measures are TRIPS-compliant and do not amount to protectionism.

Legal Options Available to India

1. **Section 47(4)** of the Patents Act allows governments to import patented medicines without the patentee's consent for public use.
2. **Section 66** empowers the Central Government to revoke patents in public interest if they are prejudicial to the public.
3. **Section 92A** enables compulsory licensing for manufacture and export of medicines to countries lacking manufacturing capacity.
4. **Section 102** permits acquisition of patents by the government for public purposes under eminent domain.
5. Abusive patentees can also be proceeded against under the **Competition Act, 2002** for abuse of dominant position.

Challenges in Using These Options

1. Political and diplomatic pressures from developed countries discourage aggressive use of TRIPS flexibilities.
2. Concerns over foreign investment and trade retaliation create policy hesitation.
3. Limited institutional capacity and lack of proactive patent scrutiny reduce effective enforcement.
4. Lengthy administrative and legal processes delay timely intervention.
5. Balancing innovation incentives with affordability remains a persistent policy dilemma.

Way Forward

1. The **Central and State Governments should formulate clear, transparent patent policies** that integrate public health objectives with intellectual property enforcement.
2. **Patent authorities must proactively scrutinise patents in critical sectors** such as pharmaceuticals and agriculture to detect evergreening and abusive practices at an early stage.
3. The government **should use TRIPS-compliant tools** such as compulsory licensing, government use and patent revocation in a timely and calibrated manner to ensure affordable access to essential medicines.
4. **Institutional capacity of patent offices, competition authorities and enforcement agencies** should be strengthened through specialised training and coordination.
5. **India should continue engaging diplomatically** to defend its public health-oriented patent framework while reassuring investors that genuine innovation will be protected.

Conclusion: Patent protection and public health are not competing goals but complementary obligations under India's constitutional framework and international commitments. While India has incorporated several TRIPS-compliant safeguards within its patent regime, their underutilisation has limited the country's ability to ensure timely and affordable access to essential medicines. A calibrated and transparent use of these legal tools, combined with strong institutional capacity and policy clarity, can deter abusive patent practices without undermining genuine innovation. By aligning intellectual property governance with public health priorities, India can uphold its role as the pharmacy of the Global South while remaining a credible destination for innovation and investment.

Question: Patent rights must be balanced with public health imperatives. Discuss India's legal options under the Patents Act, 1970 and the challenges in using them effectively.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Electricity Amendment Bill: Centre signals course correction after stakeholder pushback

Source: The post "Electricity Amendment Bill: Centre signals course correction after stakeholder pushback" has been created, based on "Electricity Amendment Bill: Centre signals course correction after stakeholder pushback" published in "Down To Earth" on 20th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Governance

Context: The Union government is revising the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, aimed at overhauling the Electricity Act, 2003. The Bill seeks to improve efficiency, financial viability, and consumer choice in India's power distribution sector, while addressing long-standing issues like discom losses, subsidy burden, and regulatory inefficiencies.

Key Objectives of the Bill:

1. The Bill seeks to enhance competition in the power distribution sector by introducing **distribution sub-licensing or multiple supply licensees**, which will allow more than one company to operate in the same area using a common distribution network.
2. It aims to strengthen regulation by providing greater autonomy to **State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs)** in tariff-setting, reducing the influence of discoms, and enforcing strict timelines and contractual discipline.

3. The Bill intends to improve financial discipline and reduce subsidies by phasing out **cross-subsidies**, delivering subsidies directly to consumers through **direct benefit transfers**, and implementing tighter payment security mechanisms for discoms.
4. It seeks to align power sector reforms with broader national objectives by promoting **renewable energy targets**, ensuring grid discipline, and rationalising regulations to reduce litigation in the sector.
5. The Bill also plans to address discom debt issues in accordance with **16th Finance Commission** recommendations, including the possibility of states taking over certain liabilities, while maintaining alignment with fiscal devolution frameworks.

Challenges and Stakeholder Concerns:

1. Several states have expressed concerns that the reforms could **erode their powers** under the **Concurrent List** of the Constitution.
2. Consumer groups have cautioned that competition could initially benefit **urban and high-paying consumers**, while rural and low-income users may continue to rely on financially stressed public utilities.
3. Regulatory oversight needs to ensure that **competition does not compromise affordability or service equity** for vulnerable consumers.

Way Forward:

1. The government should adopt a **phased and calibrated implementation** of reforms to ensure a smooth transition for states and discoms.
2. It is essential to conduct **continuous stakeholder consultations** with state governments, consumer groups, and regulators to address concerns and incorporate workable suggestions.
3. Strengthening **financial restructuring mechanisms** for discoms will be critical to maintain fiscal sustainability and prevent recurrence of losses.
4. Promoting **consumer awareness and transparency** in subsidy delivery will help build trust and ensure that benefits reach intended beneficiaries efficiently.
5. Monitoring and enforcing **performance standards for multiple supply licensees** will be necessary to improve service quality and protect consumer interests.
6. The government should ensure that reforms are aligned with **India's renewable energy and climate goals**, while maintaining grid stability and operational efficiency.

Conclusion: The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, represents a significant step towards modernising India's power distribution sector by introducing competition, enhancing regulatory autonomy, and improving financial discipline. Its successful implementation will depend on a **balanced, consultative, and phased approach** that addresses the concerns of states, consumers, and regulators while supporting the country's broader energy transition objectives.

Question: Discuss the key objectives and proposed reforms under the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025. How does the government plan to balance competition, consumer interests, and financial sustainability of discoms?

Textiles sector driving growth, jobs

Source: The post "Textiles sector driving growth, jobs" has been created, based on "Textiles sector driving growth, jobs" published in "Business Line" on 20th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: India's textile sector has evolved from a legacy industry into a powerful engine of growth, employment, and inclusive development. It supports domestic demand, generates export earnings, and provides livelihood opportunities to women, rural youth, and first-generation entrepreneurs, reflecting the spirit of **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Key Highlights of the Sector:

1. The domestic textile market grew from about ₹8.4 lakh crore to ₹13 lakh crore in five years, driven by rising consumption, with per capita textile expenditure increasing from ₹3,000 in 2014-15 to over ₹6,000 in 2024-25, and projected to reach ₹12,000 by 2030.
2. Textile and apparel exports rose from ₹2.49 lakh crore in 2019-20 to nearly ₹3.5 lakh crore in 2024-25, showing a 28 per cent growth in the post-Covid period, underlining India's global competitiveness.
3. The sector is the **second largest employer** in India after agriculture, directly supporting around 5.6 crore people by 2023-24, with export-led growth creating an estimated 1.5 crore new jobs in the organised sector.
4. Employment has been boosted by **capacity expansion**, facilitated by the import of over 1.8 crore sewing machines since Covid, each supporting approximately 1.7 workers, creating over three crore jobs across the textile value chain.
5. The decentralised expansion allows older machines to move into smaller enterprises, tailoring units, and home-based businesses, **creating inclusive employment** for women, rural youth, and first-generation entrepreneurs.
6. Government initiatives such as the **District Led Textiles Transformation (DLTT)** aim to formalise the workforce, improve skill levels, and provide social security for long-term employment stability.
7. New **Free Trade Agreements**, including the upcoming India-EU FTA, are expected to expand markets, enhance competitiveness, and create additional jobs.
8. Industrial initiatives such as **PM MITRA Parks** and the **PLI scheme** are projected to generate over 23 lakh direct and indirect jobs, while the wider textile value chain may provide an additional 50 lakh livelihoods by 2030.
9. The **handloom and handicraft sector** supports over 65 lakh artisans and weavers, with exports currently at ₹50,000 crore and a target to double to ₹1 lakh crore by 2032, promoting sustainable and inclusive employment.

Challenges:

1. A significant portion of the workforce remains in the **unorganised sector**, making formalisation, skill development, and social security provision challenging.
2. **Infrastructure gaps**, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, limit the full potential of decentralised and home-based textile enterprises.
3. Ensuring **equitable employment opportunities** for women, rural youth, and first-generation entrepreneurs across regions remains a concern.
4. Global competition and changing fashion trends require continuous **upgradation of technology, quality standards, and compliance**, which can be challenging for smaller players.
5. Environmental concerns and the need for **sustainable and eco-friendly production** are increasingly important to maintain global market competitiveness.

Way Forward:

1. The government should continue to support **capacity expansion** through modern technology, machinery, and industrial parks to enhance production efficiency and employment generation.
2. Expanding and leveraging **Free Trade Agreements** will open new markets, boost exports, and create additional jobs in both organised and unorganised segments.
3. Initiatives like **DLTT** should be strengthened to formalise employment, provide skill development, and ensure social security benefits for workers.
4. Special focus should be placed on **inclusive growth** by targeting women, rural youth, and first-generation entrepreneurs with training, credit, and market support.
5. Promoting **sustainable textile production** aligned with global demand for eco-friendly products will benefit artisans, small enterprises, and the overall sector.
6. Encouraging **fast fashion and agile manufacturing** through policy support, incentives, and infrastructure will ensure India remains competitive in the global textile market.

Conclusion: India's textile sector is a **major driver of economic growth, exports, and inclusive employment**. By addressing challenges in formalisation, skill development, technology, and sustainability, the sector can generate over **five crore new jobs by 2030**, strengthen India's global competitiveness, and contribute to the vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047**.

Question: Examine how India's textile sector is driving growth and employment. What are the challenges it faces and the way forward to enhance inclusive development?

What is T.N.'s new hybrid pension model?

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Indian Economy.

Introduction

Tamil Nadu has replaced its 23-year-old pension system with a new hybrid pension model called the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS). The scheme was introduced to balance employee demands for assured pension and the State's concern over rising pension liabilities. TAPS combines features of the Old Pension Scheme, the Contributory Pension Scheme, and newer assured pension models introduced by the Centre and other States.

Old Pension Scheme (OPS): Structure

Coverage and eligibility: Employees who joined State government service or government-aided institutions before April 1, 2003 are covered under OPS.

Funding pattern: OPS is fully funded by the State government. Employees do not make any pension contribution.

Nature of the scheme: OPS is a defined benefit system. Pension is guaranteed for life and does not depend on market returns.

Pension revision mechanism: Pension is revised whenever a new Pay Commission is implemented, usually once every ten years.

Dearness Allowance linkage: Dearness Allowance is paid at the same rate as serving government employees.

Old Pension Scheme (OPS): Benefits

High pension growth over time: Long-serving pensioners have seen major increases due to repeated pay revisions and DA hikes.

Inflation protection: Regular DA increases protect pension value from rising prices.

Income certainty: Pension amount is fixed by salary structure, not affected by market fluctuations.

Lifetime security: Employees receive pension automatically after retirement without investment decisions.

Family pension support: Family members continue to receive pension after the pensioner's death.

Old Pension Scheme (OPS): Concerns

1. Rapid rise in pension burden: Pension liabilities grew at an average annual rate of about 30%, which became unsustainable.

2. Increasing share in State revenue: Pension payments rose from 3.8% of revenue receipts in the 1980s to around 16% by 2001–02.

3. Long-term fiscal stress: Rising life expectancy extended pension payments, contributing to pension liabilities growing at about 30% annually.

4. White Paper findings: According to the State's White Paper, pension and retirement benefit expenditure recorded double-digit growth in eight out of fifteen years between 2006–07 and 2020–21.

5. Impossibility of full rollback: Due to rising pension liabilities and repeated high growth rates, a complete return to the Old Pension Scheme became financially unviable for the State government.

What is Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS)?

Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) is a new hybrid pension model introduced by the Tamil Nadu government to replace the 23-year-old Contributory Pension Scheme. The scheme came into effect from **January 1, 2026**.

It was designed to provide **assured monthly pension** to government employees while avoiding the heavy fiscal burden created by the Old Pension Scheme.

TAPS combines features of the **Old Pension Scheme**, the **Andhra Pradesh Guaranteed Pension Scheme**, and the **Unified Pension Scheme** of the Union government.

The decision was taken after a committee headed by **Gagandeep Singh Bedi** submitted its report in **December 2025**.

The scheme aims to provide income security to employees while keeping long-term pension liabilities under control.

Features of Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS)

1. **Hybrid design:** The scheme blends assured pension benefits of OPS with the contributory structure of CPS.
2. **Employee contribution:** Employees contribute **10% of their monthly salary**, similar to the earlier CPS.
3. **Government support:** The State provides at least a matching contribution and bears additional financial requirements.
4. **Assured pension:** Pension is fixed at **50% of the last-drawn basic pay**, not an average of previous months.
5. **Difference from UPS:** Unlike UPS, which uses the average of the last 12 months, TAPS uses **last-month salary**.
6. **Service condition:** Assured pension is provided **irrespective of length of qualifying service**.
7. **Dearness allowance:** Pensioners receive **DA increases on par with serving employees**, ensuring inflation protection.
8. **Family pension:** After the pensioner's death, the family receives **60% of the last pension drawn**.
9. **Gratuity benefit:** Death-cum-retirement gratuity is allowed up to a maximum of **₹25 lakh**.
10. **Compassionate pension:** CPS employees who retired before TAPS implementation are eligible for **special compassionate pension**.

Major Concerns Related to Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS)

1. **Short-term fiscal stress:** For the next seven years, the scheme will strain State finances due to parallel funding of OPS retirees and TAPS beneficiaries.
2. **High budget commitment:** The scheme involves a one-time expenditure of **₹13,000 crore** and an annual contribution of about **₹11,000 crore**.
3. **Absence of pension reset:** Unlike the Old Pension Scheme, TAPS does not allow pension revision after every Pay Commission.
4. **Dual pension burden:** The government must fund existing OPS pensioners while supporting assured pensions under TAPS.
5. **Employee dissatisfaction:** Sections of government employees are unhappy as the scheme does not restore OPS fully.
6. **Uncertain acceptance:** It remains unclear whether TAPS will attract wide support, similar to the limited response received by the Unified Pension Scheme.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme attempts to balance fiscal discipline with employee security. It provides assured pension and inflation protection without returning to the costly OPS model. While TAPS reduces long-term pension risk compared to OPS, its success will depend on implementation clarity, employee confidence, and the State's ability to manage short-term financial stress effectively.

For detailed information on **Indian Pension System- Significance and Challenges** [read this article here](#)

Question for practice:

Discuss the rationale behind the introduction of the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) and examine its key features and associated concerns in comparison with the Old Pension Scheme.

Source: The Hindu

Trump's 'Board of Peace' for Gaza Transition and Role of India

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -International relation

Introduction

The United States has invited India to join the Donald Trump-led Board of Peace, created to guide the peace process in Gaza. The body was originally approved by the United Nations with a limited mandate. However, within four months, its role expanded through a new charter into a wider international organisation. This change has raised several questions for India and other invited countries.

Background: Origin of the Board of Peace

- 1. Trump's 20-point peace plan:** In September last year, Donald Trump proposed a 20-point peace plan for Gaza.
- 2. Temporary transitional governance:** The plan proposed placing Gaza under a temporary transitional governance system.
- 3. Technocratic Palestinian committee:** A technocratic and apolitical Palestinian committee was to manage the day-to-day running of public services.
- 4. Creation of the Board of Peace:** This committee was to be supervised by a new international body called the Board of Peace, to be headed by Trump.
- 5. Early concerns:** Many observers pointed out that the arrangement effectively placed the US President in charge of Gaza.

Shift from UN-Approved Mandate to the New Charter

- 1. Purpose and nature:** Under the UN-approved plan, the Board was created only to supervise Gaza's transitional governance. Under the new charter, it is described as a new international organisation and transitional governing administration.

2. **Geographical scope:** The UN-approved mandate limited the Board's role strictly to Gaza. The new charter expands its role beyond Gaza.
3. **Time duration:** The original mandate was to operate only until the end of 2027. The new charter does not specify any time limit.
4. **Membership system:** The UN-approved version did not include a formal membership structure. The new charter introduces three-year membership terms.
5. **Permanent membership provision:** Permanent membership was not part of the original mandate. The new charter allows permanent membership on payment of \$1 billion in the first year.
6. **Reference to Gaza:** Gaza was central to the UN-approved mandate. The new charter does not mention Gaza at all.
7. **Scope of action:** Earlier, the Board's role was limited to Gaza's transition. The new charter states that it will work to secure peace in areas "affected or threatened by conflict," without defining "threatened."
8. **Approach to institutions:** The UN-approved framework functioned within the UN system. The new charter emphasises departing from institutions that have "too often failed."

Structure, Membership and Governance Framework

1. **Charter design:** The charter contains 13 articles covering membership rules, financial contributions, and dispute redressal.
2. **Three-year membership:** Countries accepting the invitation receive membership for three years.
3. **Permanent membership option:** A country can become a permanent member by paying \$1 billion in the first year.
4. **Countries invited:** Invitations were sent to states across different geopolitical camps, including Hungary, Albania, Greece, Poland, Belarus, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Paraguay, Argentina, Pakistan, and India.
5. **Confirmed acceptances:** Hungary, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan have announced definite acceptance.
6. **Chairmanship:** The charter states that Donald J. Trump shall serve as the inaugural Chairman of the Board of Peace.
7. **Separate US role:** Trump will also serve separately as the inaugural representative of the United States.
8. **Removal conditions:** The chairman can be removed only if he resigns voluntarily or is unanimously declared incapable by the Executive Board.
9. **Binding obligation:** Membership requires a country to consent to be bound by the charter.

Operational Mechanism and Gaza Governance Framework

1. **International Stabilization Force:** The peace plan also envisaged an international force to establish security in Gaza, with appointments announced by the White House.

2. **Executive Board members:** Founding members include Marco Rubio, Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, Tony Blair, Marc Rowan, Ajay Banga, and Robert Gabriel.

3. **National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG):**

Leadership: The NCAG is to be led by Gaza-born technocrat Dr. Ali Sha'ath.

Functions: It will oversee restoration of core public services, rebuilding of civil institutions, and stabilisation of daily life in Gaza.

Governance objective: The committee is intended to lay the foundation for long-term, self-sustaining governance.

4. **High Representative for Gaza:**

Appointment: Bulgarian diplomat Nickolay Mladenov has been appointed High Representative for Gaza.

Role: He will act as the on-the-ground link between the Board of Peace and the NCAG.

5. **Gaza Executive Board:**

Composition: Members include representatives from the US, UK, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE, Cyprus, and the Netherlands.

Absence of Palestinians: No Palestinian representative is included on this board.

Israeli concerns: Israel is reportedly unhappy with the inclusion of figures from Qatar and Turkey.

India's Invitation and Related Questions

1. **Strategic Rationale:** India is viewed as a key partner due to its historic ties and credibility with both Israel and Palestine, as well as its strategic partnership with the U.S..

2. **India's official position:** India has not yet taken a decision and has made no public statement on whether it will accept the invitation.

3. **Consistency with India's policy:** India has repeatedly reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution, calling for a sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel as the basis for lasting peace.

4. **Strategic assessment:** Policy experts note that India must balance humanitarian concerns and global ambitions against reputational, legal, and strategic risks, and may support relief and reconstruction without formally joining the Board.

Conclusion

The Board of Peace has undergone a major transformation from a UN-approved Gaza-specific mechanism into a broader international organisation with global ambitions. Its new charter, governance structure, and membership rules differ sharply from the original mandate. These changes have created uncertainty for countries, including India, that are considering whether to join the body.

Question for practice:

Examine how the transformation of the Trump-led Board of Peace from a UN-approved Gaza-specific mechanism into a broader international organisation has raised institutional and policy challenges for India.

Source: [NDTV](#)

The EV boom is accelerating a copper crunch

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 – Science and Technology

Introduction

The rapid global shift toward electric vehicles is increasing copper demand at an unprecedented scale. Copper is essential for electrification and forms the backbone of EV batteries, motors, wiring systems, charging infrastructure, and power grids. As EV adoption expands rapidly, copper demand is rising much faster than supply. Years of mining underinvestment, declining ore quality, and long project timelines are creating a structural shortage that may affect EV affordability, energy transition targets, and global trade dynamics.

Importance of Copper in the EV Transition

- 1. Central role in EV systems:** Copper is required in EV batteries, electric motors, inverters, wiring harnesses, charging stations, and supporting power grids.
- 2. Higher copper intensity in EVs:** Electric vehicles use four to five times more copper than internal combustion engine vehicles, making electrification highly copper-intensive.
- 3. No effective substitute available:** There is currently no viable large-scale alternative material that can replace copper's conductivity and efficiency.
- 4. Rapid expansion of EV sales:** Global EV sales increased from about 0.55 million units in 2015 to nearly 20 million units by 2025.
- 5. Sharp rise in copper consumption:** Copper demand linked to EVs rose from around 27.5 thousand tonnes in 2015 to over 1.28 million tonnes by 2025.
- 6. Strong demand linkage:** Between 2016 and 2024, copper demand elasticity mostly remained above 1.0, showing demand grew faster than EV sales.
- 7. Peak copper usage phase:** In 2019, elasticity reached 1.76 due to larger battery packs, increased power electronics, and rapid charging infrastructure expansion.
- 8. Efficiency gains insufficient:** Although elasticity may fall to around 0.90 by 2025, total copper demand will continue rising due to large EV volumes.

Emerging Global Copper Supply Constraints

1. **Decades of underinvestment:** Copper mining received limited investment for many years, restricting the industry's ability to expand supply quickly.
2. **Declining ore quality:** Existing mines are producing lower-grade ore, which reduces output efficiency and increases production costs.
3. **Long project development cycle:** New copper mines require 10–15 years from discovery to commercial production, delaying supply response.
4. **Environmental and regulatory barriers:** Mining expansion faces strong environmental opposition and regulatory delays in Chile, Peru, and the United States.
5. **Stagnation of global supply growth:** These factors together have caused global copper supply growth to plateau despite rising demand.
6. **Transition from surplus to deficit:** In 2024, global copper supply exceeded demand by about 0.3 million tonnes, but this balance is reversing.
7. **Large projected supply gap:** By 2026, demand is expected to reach nearly 30 million tonnes, while supply may remain near 28 million tonnes.
8. **Widening long-term shortage:** The deficit could increase to 4.5 million tonnes by 2028 and almost 8 million tonnes by 2030.
9. **Scale of the shortfall:** The projected gap equals the combined output of the world's ten largest copper mines.
10. **Rising cost pressures:** Copper shortages may increase EV production costs and slow adoption.
11. **Infrastructure development risks:** Limited copper availability could delay charging infrastructure and power grid expansion.
12. **Threat to climate transition:** Copper scarcity may become a major bottleneck for global decarbonisation efforts.

Geopolitical and Market Implications

1. China's dominant demand position:

- China's EV-related copper demand rose from about 78,000 tonnes in 2020 to nearly 678,000 tonnes in 2024.
- By 2025, China is expected to account for nearly 60% of global EV-based copper consumption.
- China controls over 70% of global battery cell manufacturing and maintains deeply integrated supply chains.

2. **Regional imbalance in consumption:** By 2025, EV-related copper demand is expected to reach around 210,000 tonnes in the European Union and 114,000 tonnes in the United States.

3. **Limited role of India:** India's EV-based copper demand remains modest at about 7,200 tonnes.

4. **Strategic leverage risks:** High concentration of demand and processing gives China pricing power and leverage over copper-rich regions.

5. **Copper as a strategic resource:** As electrification expands, access to copper is becoming as important as battery technology itself.

Way Forward

1. **Increase mining investment:** Large-scale investment is needed to develop new copper projects and expand existing ones.

2. **Accelerate recycling capacity:** Copper recycling must grow rapidly to reduce pressure on primary mining supply.

3. **Improve material efficiency:** Technological innovation should focus on lowering copper intensity without compromising performance.

4. **Strengthen supply diversification:** Countries must secure long-term contracts and diversify sourcing regions.

5. **Align mineral and climate planning:** Energy transition strategies must integrate resource availability with decarbonisation goals.

Conclusion

The global EV transition is driving copper demand beyond current supply limits. Rapid sales growth, stagnant mining output, and rising geopolitical competition are creating a structural copper crunch. Without urgent expansion of supply, recycling, and strategic planning, electrification goals may slow. The pace of the energy transition will depend not only on technology, but on copper availability.

Question for practice:

Examine how the rapid expansion of electric vehicles is intensifying global copper demand, creating supply constraints and reshaping market and geopolitical dynamics.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The 'Donroe doctrine', a broken international order

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 -International Relation.

Introduction

The year 2026 opened with a strong signal that the **post-1945 international order is weakening**. The U.S. military capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro marked a return to **power-based geopolitics**. This action, termed the '**Donroe Doctrine**', reflects declining respect for sovereignty, international law, and multilateral institutions.

What is Donroe Doctrine?

Origin and meaning: The "Donroe Doctrine" (a blend of "Donald" and "Monroe") is a modern interpretation of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, shaped by President Donald Trump's foreign policy approach. Unlike the original doctrine, which was defensive in nature, the Donroe Doctrine openly supports coercive intervention and regime enforcement.

Core principle: The doctrine asserts that the **United States is the sole security guarantor of the Western Hemisphere**. It rejects interference by non-Hemispheric powers such as China and Russia.

- **Tactics:** It involves a mix of policies, including:
 - **Economic Tools:** Sanctions, tariffs, and economic bailouts.
 - **Military Posturing:** Threats and interventions, notably in Venezuela.
 - **Pressure Campaigns:** Against governments seen as violating U.S. interests or aligning with rivals.

Triggering event: U.S. airborne forces abducted **Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife** in a swift operation. They were incarcerated in the U.S. on charges of threatening American security.

Policy foundation: The **U.S. National Security Strategy (November 2025)** clearly states Washington's intent to **reassert pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere** after years of neglect.

Strategic objective: The strategy seeks to **deny rival powers the ability to deploy forces or control vital assets** in the Hemisphere, treating regional dominance as a core U.S. interest.

Signals of expansion: Implicit threats were issued toward **Cuba, Colombia, and Mexico**, while **Greenland** was described as a security necessity due to its strategic location.

Concern of Donroe Doctrine?

Violation of sovereignty: The forcible detention of a sitting head of state represents a **direct breach of national sovereignty** and diplomatic norms.

Muted global response: Worldwide protests remained limited, indicating **declining faith in collective international resistance**.

Breakdown of rules-based order: The episode reinforces the belief that the **post-Second World War system is no longer effective** in restraining major powers.

Normalisation of force: Military abduction is now projected as a legitimate policy tool, encouraging **coercive regime change**.

Precedent for other powers: Such actions risk encouraging **China and Russia to enforce dominance** within their own zones of influence.

Taiwan implication: China's claim over **Taiwan gains indirect justification** in an environment where force replaces law.

Global Implications of the Donroe Doctrine

United States: The doctrine marks a formal return to **military interventionism and hemispheric dominance**. It places **national power above international law**, reviving coercive “shock and awe” tactics as legitimate policy.

Venezuela: The capture of its President shows the **complete erosion of sovereignty for smaller states**. It establishes regime change through force as an acceptable international practice.

Europe: The doctrine shifts U.S. strategic focus away from Europe and demands that it **assume primary responsibility for its defence**. This weakens security assurances built after 1945.

Ukraine: U.S. pursuit of strategic stability with Russia increases pressure for a negotiated settlement. Any outcome may remain **unsatisfactory to both sides**, risking future escalation.

Russia: The doctrine enables **transactional engagement** between Washington and Moscow. Russia gains leverage as U.S. priorities move from Europe to hemispheric control.

Israel: Strong U.S. interventionism provides political and military backing. It creates conditions to **complete the unfinished conflict of 2025** under favourable circumstances.

Iran: The doctrine emboldens U.S.–Israel action amid Iran's internal unrest. It increases risks of **sanctions, destabilisation, and external intervention**.

Afghanistan: The weakening of global restraint allows extremist groups to **regain operational space**. Regional instability expands under reduced international accountability.

Pakistan: Renewed U.S. strategic interest strengthens the military establishment. **Arms supplies and diplomatic support reinforce military dominance** over democratic institutions.

China: The doctrine legitimises **zone-of-influence politics**, strengthening China's argument for coercive regional control. It reinforces Beijing's strategic confidence.

Taiwan: A permissive global environment increases coercion risks. China may interpret U.S. actions as validation of **force-based territorial claims**.

Indo-Pacific Region: U.S. concentration on the Western Hemisphere reduces exclusive dominance. The **Eastern Pacific and Indian Ocean witness rising multipolar competition**.

India: The doctrine deepens India's strategic squeeze. **U.S. pressure on Russian oil, renewed U.S.–Pakistan alignment, and China's trade leverage** narrow India's diplomatic and economic space.

India at the Crossroads

Strained India–U.S. relations: The U.S. continues to criticise India for importing subsidised Russian oil despite India supporting Washington on most global issues. This has created visible friction in bilateral ties.

Diplomatic isolation in conflict regions: The cooling of India–U.S. relations has affected India's engagement with other countries. This has reduced India's influence in conflict zones such as West Asia.

Pakistan's renewed U.S. backing: The U.S. endorsement of Field Marshal Asim Munir and removal of restrictions on arms supplies have strengthened Pakistan's military position. This directly worsens India's security environment.

China-related economic pressure: China's advantage in trade and tariff disputes leaves India little room to hedge against possible U.S. tariff escalation. This increases India's economic vulnerability.

Conclusion

The Donroe Doctrine reflects a decisive shift from rules-based cooperation to power-driven geopolitics. Sovereignty and international law are steadily weakening. Regional instability is rising across continents. For India, 2026 offers limited strategic comfort, demanding cautious diplomacy, balanced partnerships, and sustained strategic autonomy in an increasingly uncertain global order.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the 'Donroe Doctrine' reflects the breakdown of the post-1945 international order and examine its implications for global geopolitics and India's strategic position.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Judicial removal — tough law with a loophole

Syllabus: GS 2- Polity- Appointment to various Constitutional Posts, Powers, Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Introduction:

The issue of judicial removal came into focus in December 2025 when **107 Lok Sabha Members of Parliament** submitted a motion seeking the removal of a Madras High Court judge. The notice contained **13 charges**, including allegations of acting against **secular constitutional principles**. While the Constitution provides a strict mechanism for removing judges to protect independence, the present case exposes a serious procedural weakness that can block accountability at the very beginning.

Constitutional Framework for Removal of Judges

1.Relevant constitutional provisions: Removal of Supreme Court judges is provided under **Articles 124(4) and 124(5)**, while High Court judges are governed by **Articles 217(1)(b) and 218**.

2. Uniform removal procedure: The procedure prescribed under Article 124 applies equally to both Supreme Court and High Court judges.

3. Use of constitutional terminology: The Constitution does not use the term impeachment for judges. It uses “removal”, while impeachment is used only for the **President of India under Article 61**.

3. Parliament’s authority under Article 124(5): Article 124(5) empowers Parliament to make law for regulating **investigation of charges** and **presentation of an address** for removal.

4. Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968: Based on Article 124(5), Parliament enacted the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**, along with the Judges Inquiry Rules, to regulate the complete procedure.

Grounds for Removal of a Judge

1. Permissible grounds: A judge can be removed only on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

2. Absence of constitutional definition: The Constitution does not define misbehaviour.

3. Judicial interpretation: Courts have explained misbehaviour as conduct that brings dishonour to the judiciary, including wilful misconduct, corruption, lack of integrity, moral turpitude, and abuse of judicial office.

4. Standard of conduct: In *K. Veeraswami v. Union of India (1991)*, the Court stated that judicial honesty and impartiality must be absolute.

5. Requirement of intent: In *M. Krishna Swami v. Union of India (1992)*, the Court clarified that misbehaviour requires wilful conduct and not mere error of judgment or negligence.

Procedure for Removal of a Judge

Step 1: Notice of Motion: A removal motion must be submitted to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. It requires signatures of at least 100 Lok Sabha members or 50 Rajya Sabha members.

Step 2: Admission of Motion: The Speaker or Chairman examines the notice at the initial stage and may admit or disallow the motion. **If the motion is disallowed, the entire process ends and no further action is taken.**

Step 3: Investigation Committee: After admission, a committee is constituted consisting of a Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court, and a distinguished jurist. **The committee conducts a detailed investigation into the charges.**

Step 4: Parliamentary Approval: If the committee finds the charges proved, an address must be passed by each House of Parliament. The address must be supported by a majority of total membership and two-thirds of members present and voting, after which it is sent to the President for removal of the judge.

Major Flaw Related to Removal of a Judge

1. Threshold rejection power: The law allows the Speaker or Chairman to disallow the motion even before investigation begins.

2. No admissibility criteria: The Judges (Inquiry) Act does not specify any criteria for admitting or rejecting a motion.

3. Statutory character of decision: While deciding admission, the Speaker or Chairman acts as a **statutory authority**, not merely as the presiding officer of the House.

4. Risk of arbitrariness: Since reasons for rejection are not mandatory, the process may attract charges of arbitrariness.

5. Comparison with President's removal: Under **Article 61**, a resolution for removal of the President must be moved mandatorily. The Speaker or Chairman has **no power to refuse it**.

6. Conflict with Article 124(5): Article 124(5) allows regulation of investigation and proof of misbehaviour. It does **not permit rejection before investigation**.

7. Unclear purpose of preliminary scrutiny: The law does not explain what examination the Speaker or Chairman must conduct at the first stage.

8. Core constitutional defect: A motion supported by **more than 100 elected MPs** can lapse without inquiry, making the constitutional remedy ineffective.

Consequences of the Existing Flaw

1. Parliamentary process becomes infructuous: If the motion is rejected initially, the entire constitutional mechanism collapses.

2. Investigation never takes place: The expert committee does not get an opportunity to examine the charges.

3. Judicial accountability weakens: A system meant to ensure accountability fails to function effectively when serious allegations cannot even reach the investigation stage.

4. Possibility of political influence: If the government does not support the motion, rejection at the threshold becomes likely.

5. Dilution of constitutional intent: A serious constitutional provision can be defeated by procedural discretion.

6. Impact on public confidence: When accountability mechanisms cannot operate, trust in constitutional institutions declines.

Conclusion:

The law governing removal of judges is intentionally strict to protect judicial independence. However, the power given to the Speaker or Chairman to disallow a motion at the threshold creates a **major loophole**. Article 124(5) does not support such rejection without investigation. When a motion signed by elected representatives can lapse without inquiry, accountability suffers. **This provision requires reconsideration to ensure balance between judicial independence and constitutional responsibility.**

Question for practice:

Discuss how the existing procedure for removal of judges in India, despite being constitutionally strict, contains a loophole that allows a motion to lapse at the threshold stage, thereby weakening judicial accountability.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Lowering the age of juvenility for crimes is a step back

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 - Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections

Introduction

Lowering the age of juvenility weakens the core philosophy of child justice. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 introduced the transfer system, changing India's reform-oriented juvenile framework. In December 2025, a Private Member's Bill proposed reducing the age threshold from **16 to 14 years** for heinous offences, defined as crimes carrying a **minimum punishment of seven years or more**. If enacted, this would expose younger children to adult criminal trials and prisons, eroding principles of care, rehabilitation, and reintegration while prioritising punishment.

Understanding the 'Transfer System' under the JJ Act, 2015

Developmental philosophy of juvenile justice: The juvenile justice system is based on the belief that children are developmentally different from adults and are capable of reform, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Punitive shift under the JJ Act, 2015: After the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, the Act introduced the transfer system, marking a move away from a welfare-based approach toward punishment.

Scope and application of the system: The mechanism allows children aged **16–18 years**, accused of **heinous offences carrying a minimum seven-year punishment**, to be considered for adult criminal trials.

Arguments in Favour of the Transfer System

1. **Criminal accountability:** Supporters argue that children aged **16–18 years** possess sufficient maturity to understand the consequences of heinous crimes like murder or rape. Extending adult trial ensures they are not shielded by the **maximum three-year reformatory limit**.
2. **Deterrent effect:** The provision aims to discourage serious juvenile delinquency by removing the assumption of light punishment. It seeks to prevent intentional misuse of juvenile protection.
3. **Victim justice:** The system attempts to balance the rights of the offender with the rights of the victim. It emphasises proportional punishment in cases involving grave harm.
4. **Capacity assessment:** The Act mandates a **preliminary assessment** by the Juvenile Justice Board. This includes evaluating mental and physical capacity, understanding of consequences, and surrounding circumstances.
5. **Balanced approach:** The transfer system combines retributive and reformatory justice. It retains safeguards by prohibiting the death penalty and mandatory life imprisonment without release.

6. **Place of safety:** Transferred children are sent to a **place of safety** instead of adult prisons. A further evaluation after the age of **21 years** decides continued incarceration or release.

Arguments against the “Transfer System”

1. **Absence of empirical foundation:** The transfer system was introduced **without empirical evidence** showing that adult trials deter juvenile crime.
2. **Lack of scientific assessment tools:** There are **no reliable psychological or medical tools** to measure adult-level mental capacity in children.
3. **Impossibility of retrospective evaluation:** Mental capacity at the time of offence cannot be accurately assessed later, making such judgments unreliable.
4. **Shift from development to blame:** The framework diverts attention from developmental stage and lived circumstances toward abstract criminal culpability.
5. **Weak behavioural indicators:** Decisions rely on factors such as fear, repentance, or awareness of right and wrong, which do not reflect maturity.
6. **High subjectivity:** Juvenile Justice Boards exercise wide discretion without uniform national standards.
7. **Unequal outcomes:** Similarly placed children face different results due to procedure, discretion, and personal background.
8. **Artificial classification of childhood:** The system divides children based on assessment outcomes rather than actual conduct, weakening rehabilitation.
9. **Risk of expansion to younger age:** Lowering the threshold to **14 years** institutionalises arbitrariness at a more vulnerable stage of childhood.

Way Forward

1. **Fix institutional failure instead of lowering age:** Reforms should address gaps in the juvenile justice system rather than withdrawing legal protection from children.
2. **Use evidence-based policymaking:** NCRB 2023 data shows only **31,365 cases** against children in conflict with law, forming just **0.5% of total crimes**, weakening the justification for age reduction.
3. **Strengthen early intervention mechanisms:** Timely support can prevent children from entering the criminal justice system.
4. **Address structural vulnerability:** Many children come into conflict with law due to poverty, neglect, and inequality rather than criminal intent.
5. **Invest in family, education, and mental health support:** Strengthening these systems reduces long-term vulnerability and repeat offending.

6. **Preserve rehabilitation and reintegration:** Reform, not punishment, must remain the central objective of juvenile justice.
7. **Ensure enforcement of safeguards:** Illegal detention in police stations and adult prisons must be prevented through strict accountability.
8. **Uphold child rights principles:** The **best interests of the child** and **equality before law** must guide all legislative reform.

Conclusion

Lowering the age of juvenility expands punishment without supporting evidence. It deepens arbitrariness, weakens rehabilitation, and ignores crime data showing limited juvenile involvement. The real failure lies in institutions, not in childhood protection. Strengthening welfare systems, enforcing safeguards, and investing in early support offer a more just and sustainable response to serious harm.

For detailed information on **JUVENILE JUSTICE LAW** read this article [here](#)

Question for practice:

Examine whether lowering the age of juvenility for heinous crimes under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 strengthens accountability or undermines the principles of child justice.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Why AI infrastructure matters more

Source: The post “**Why AI infrastructure matters more**” has been created, based on “**Why AI infrastructure matters more**” published in “**The Hindu**” on 22nd January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and technology

Context: Artificial Intelligence is no longer only a technological tool but a **strategic economic and governance resource**. India’s white paper “*Democratising Access to AI Infrastructure*” highlights that AI outcomes are determined by access to **compute power, data, and platforms**, making AI infrastructure a key determinant of innovation, inclusion, and sovereignty.

Why AI Infrastructure Matters

1. **Foundation of Innovation and Governance:** AI infrastructure enables the development, training, and deployment of AI systems. Without affordable compute and datasets, innovation remains confined to a few large players, limiting start-ups, academia, and public sector applications.
2. **Structural Data-Compute Imbalance:** Although India generates nearly **20% of global data**, it hosts only **around 3% of global data centre capacity**. This mismatch forces Indian innovators to rely on foreign infrastructure, increasing costs and reducing control.
3. **Global Concentration of AI Power:** A handful of global firms dominate advanced chips, large-scale compute, and frontier AI models. This concentration raises entry barriers, restricts competition, and weakens India’s strategic autonomy.

4. **Role of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Platforms such as **AI Kosh, Bhashini, and TGDex** provide shared, standards-based access to datasets and models, enabling interoperability, accountability, and equitable innovation.
5. **Inclusive Sectoral Transformation:** Democratised AI access can extend benefits beyond IT and finance to **agriculture, healthcare, education, and public services**, particularly through regional and vernacular language solutions.
6. **Sustainability and Resource Efficiency:** AI infrastructure is energy- and water-intensive. Integrating renewable energy, efficient cooling, and green architectures is essential to prevent environmental stress.

Challenges

1. **High Capital and Energy Requirements:** Data centres, GPUs, and HPC systems demand heavy investment, stable electricity, and advanced cooling, posing fiscal and logistical constraints.
2. **Risk of Infrastructure Centralisation:** AI capacity may remain concentrated in metropolitan or corporate hubs, excluding smaller States, institutions, and start-ups.
3. **Dependence on Foreign Technology:** Limited domestic capability in semiconductor manufacturing and cloud platforms increases vulnerability to external supply disruptions.
4. **Governance, Privacy, and Trust Issues:** Weak data protection, unclear accountability, and ethical concerns can erode public confidence in AI systems.
5. **Skills and Access Divide:** Smaller firms, academic institutions, and local governments often lack technical expertise and affordable access to compute.

Way Forward

1. **Recognise AI Infrastructure as a Public Good:** Expand sovereign GPU clouds, national supercomputing capacity, and open model ecosystems under public oversight.
2. **Strengthen Digital Public Infrastructure:** Scale DPI platforms with transparent access rules, interoperability standards, and sector-specific use cases.
3. **Leverage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Use PPPs to expand regional data centres and AI compute while ensuring public interest safeguards.
4. **Embed Sustainability by Design:** Mandate renewable energy use, energy-efficient chips, and water-sensitive cooling systems.
5. **Adopt Trust-Centric Governance:** Implement phased regulation, strong data protection norms, and ethical AI frameworks.
6. **Invest in Capacity Building:** Provide subsidised compute, training, and research grants to start-ups, MSMEs, academia, and States.

Conclusion: The white paper's central message is clear: **AI access is destiny**. By democratising AI infrastructure through DPI, sustainability, partnerships, and trust-based governance, India can ensure inclusive growth, digital sovereignty, and long-term global competitiveness. The real determinant of India's AI future lies not in code, but in infrastructure.

Question: In light of India's AI policy discourse, examine why democratising AI infrastructure is critical for India. Discuss the challenges involved and suggest a way forward.

Should corruption charges need prior sanction?

Source: The post “Should corruption charges need prior sanction?” has been created, based on “Should corruption charges need prior sanction? | Explained” published in “The Hindu” on 22nd January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: Corruption undermines public trust, weakens institutions, and affects the quality of governance. The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, is India’s principal anti-corruption legislation. The constitutional validity of Section 17A of the Act, which mandates prior approval before investigating public servants for decisions taken in official capacity, has recently come under scrutiny following a split verdict of the Supreme Court, thereby reviving the debate between accountability and administrative protection.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

1. The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, was enacted following the recommendations of the Santhanam Committee of 1964 to consolidate laws dealing with bribery and criminal misconduct.
2. The Act applies to government officials, judges, and other persons performing public duties. It criminalises offences such as bribery, abuse of official position, and obtaining undue advantage.

Section 17A: Mandate and Rationale

1. Section 17A was inserted into the Act in 2018 and requires prior approval from the appropriate government before initiating any inquiry or investigation into offences related to decisions taken by a public servant in the discharge of official duties.
2. The primary objective of this provision is to protect honest officers from vexatious and frivolous complaints.
3. The provision seeks to encourage fearless and timely decision-making by distinguishing bona fide administrative actions from intentional acts of corruption.

Earlier Supreme Court Rulings

1. In Vineet Narain versus Union of India (1998), the Supreme Court struck down the “Single Directive” that required prior sanction for investigating certain public servants, holding it to be violative of the principle of equality before law.
2. In Subramaniam Swamy versus Director, CBI (2014), the Court invalidated Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act for creating an unjustified classification among public servants, thereby violating Article 14 of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court’s Split Verdict (2026)

Justice K. V. Viswanathan

1. Justice Viswanathan upheld the constitutional validity of Section 17A subject to conditions.
2. He observed that the absence of such protection could lead to a “play-it-safe syndrome” in the bureaucracy.
3. He held that prior approval should be granted by an independent mechanism and recommended that it be based on a binding opinion of the Lokpal or Lokayuktas rather than the government alone.

Justice B. V. Nagarathna

1. Justice Nagarathna declared Section 17A to be unconstitutional. She held that the provision was merely a reintroduction of mechanisms earlier struck down by the Court.
2. She found that Section 17A failed the test of intelligible differentia and rational nexus under Article 14.
3. She also noted that adequate protection to honest officers already exists under Section 19 of the Act, which requires prior sanction before prosecution.

Challenges with Prior Sanction Requirement

1. The requirement of prior sanction can lead to delays and executive interference in corruption investigations.
2. It can dilute the deterrent effect of anti-corruption laws by delaying accountability.
3. The provision carries the risk of shielding powerful officials from scrutiny.
4. It may undermine the functional independence of investigative agencies.

Way Forward

1. **Independent Approval Mechanism:** The power to grant prior approval should be vested in independent constitutional or statutory bodies such as the Lokpal and Lokayuktas instead of political executives.
2. **Time-bound Sanction and Trials:** Statutory timelines should be prescribed for granting sanction and fast-track courts should be established for corruption cases.
3. **Penalty for Malicious Complaints:** Penal provisions should be introduced to deter false, frivolous, and motivated complaints.
4. **Strengthening Institutional Autonomy:** Investigative agencies such as the CBI and vigilance bodies should be granted greater functional independence.
5. **Balancing Accountability and Protection:** Legal frameworks should protect honest decision-making while ensuring zero tolerance for corruption.

Conclusion: The constitutional debate surrounding Section 17A reflects the tension between administrative efficiency and anti-corruption accountability. While honest public servants require safeguards against harassment, corruption investigations must remain independent, prompt, and effective. A balanced framework based on institutional independence, speedy justice, and proportional safeguards is essential to uphold constitutional values, governance integrity, and public trust.

Question: Examine the constitutional debate surrounding Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, the Supreme Court's split verdict, and suggest systemic reforms to tackle corruption effectively.

A Dangerous March Towards a Himalayan Ecocide

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 -Environment

Introduction:

In 2025, India experienced nearly **331 days of climate impacts**, exposing the growing vulnerability of the Himalayan region. More than **4,000 deaths** were reported as cloudbursts, landslides, avalanches and flash floods struck repeatedly. Despite these warnings, large infrastructure projects continue in fragile mountain zones, accelerating ecological damage and increasing long-term disaster risks.

Why Are Himalayan Disasters Increasing?

1. **Rapid climate warming:** High-altitude Himalayan regions have warmed **50% faster than the global average since 1950**, leading to snowless winters and unstable mountain systems.
2. **Frequent extreme weather events:** Scorching heat, intense rainfall, cloudbursts and avalanches are occurring more often and with greater intensity.
3. **Accelerated glacial retreat:** The Gangotri Glacier, one of the world's fastest receding glaciers, feeds unstable moraine-rich glaciers that increase flood and avalanche risks.
4. **Construction in critical geological zones:** Areas north of the **Main Central Thrust (MCT)** are highly fragile, yet major infrastructure continues where it is officially discouraged.
5. **Unsafe land-use practices:** Wide highways, steep hill cutting, tunnel drilling and hydropower construction disturb natural slope stability.

Governance and Infrastructure Failures

1. **Flawed project design:** The Char Dham project relies on the **12-metre DL-PS road standard**, unsuitable for fragile terrain.
2. **Forest diversion approval:** On **November 12, 43 hectares of forest land** were diverted, including **10 hectares for muck dumping**.
3. **Avoidance of environmental assessment:** Environmental Impact Assessment was bypassed through project fragmentation.
4. **Unsafe hill cutting:** Vertical slope cutting violated the natural **angle of repose** of Himalayan geology.
5. **Unscientific muck dumping:** Debris was dumped into rivers and drainage channels.
6. **Infrastructure failure:** Border routes face repeated closures, and locals call the road an **"all-paidal road."**

What Are the Ecological and Human Implications?

1. **Large-scale human losses:** More than **4,000 people died in 2025**, with Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand facing the heaviest toll.
2. **Destruction of settlements:** Towns such as **Dharali, Harsil, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Kullu, Mandi and Kishtwar** suffered repeated flash floods and landslides.
3. **Loss of livelihoods:** Homes, agriculture, roads and local economies were wiped out by sudden disasters.
4. **Felling of Devdar forests:** Nearly **7,000 Devdar trees** are approved for removal for road widening.

5. **Weakening of natural slope protection:** Devdar root systems bind soil, stabilise slopes and reduce landslides and avalanches.
6. **Increased disaster vulnerability:** Forest clearance removes natural barriers against glacial debris flows and flash floods.

Why Are Devdar Forests Ecologically Critical?

1. **Natural disaster shields:** Devdar forests act as buffers against landslides, avalanches and debris movement.
2. **Protection of river systems:** These forests lie within the **Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone**, a **4,000 sq km buffer** protecting the Ganga's last pristine stretch.
3. **Water quality regulation:** Organic matter from Devdar trees supports healthy microbial activity in mountain streams.
4. **Antimicrobial properties:** Terpenoids, essential oils and phenolic compounds inhibit harmful bacteria and support river ecology.
5. **Maintenance of microclimate:** These forests keep air and water temperatures low and sustain dissolved oxygen levels.
6. **Irreversible ecological loss:** Deforestation leads to warmer water, lower oxygen, reduced bacteriophage activity and permanent ecological change.

Way Forward

1. **Prioritise disaster-resilient development:** Infrastructure must focus on safety and slope stability instead of excessive road widening in fragile zones.
2. **Follow science-based planning:** Road design, slope cutting and construction must respect geological limits and the natural angle of repose.
3. **Strengthen implementation of NMSHE:** The **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (2014)** must guide all development in the Himalayas.
4. **Protect old-growth Devdar forests:** Devdar forests must be preserved as natural stabilisers of slopes and protectors of river systems.
5. **Reject unscientific tree translocation:** Centuries-old Devdar trees cannot be relocated because their ecological functions are site-specific.
6. **Regulate unsafe land use:** Construction on unstable slopes, large tunnels and hydropower projects must be strictly controlled.
7. **Integrate climate risk into development planning:** Climate change must be treated as a risk multiplier that intensifies floods, landslides and glacial disasters.

8. **Manage human pressure in fragile zones:** Tourism, vehicular movement and waste management must follow carrying-capacity limits.
9. **Shift from disaster-prone to disaster-resilient infrastructure:** Connectivity and national interest must be secured through stability, not through ecological destruction.

Conclusion

The Himalayas are the ecological foundation of India. Repeated disasters show that ignoring geology, forests and climate science turns development into destruction. Infrastructure built without resilience weakens national security and livelihoods. Sustainable, science-based planning is not a choice but a necessity, because without the Himalayas, there is no India.

Question for practice:

Discuss how unsafe infrastructure development and climate change together are increasing disaster risks in the Himalayan region.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

How India Can Turn AI into Foreign Policy

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3- Science and Technology – Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Introduction

India's Global AI Summit marks a shift from symbolism to statecraft. The focus is not on displaying technological power but on building credibility. As trust becomes central to global AI adoption, India is positioning itself as a reliable partner through governance-first policy, real-world deployment, and AI diplomacy. By developing AI systems under real constraints such as low bandwidth, multiple languages, and uneven infrastructure, India is turning complexity into a strategic advantage that strengthens its foreign policy ambitions.

Current Status of India's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem

1. **Governance-first AI vision:** India follows a governance-led model instead of fear-based regulation. The **seven-pillar AI Chakras framework** focuses on **safe and trusted AI, democratized access, and inclusion by design**.
2. **Enablement over restriction:** Unlike Western regulatory caution or Chinese techno-nationalism, India supports innovation through enablement. The approach shows that safety and scale can coexist.
3. **Population-scale deployment:** AI is already in active use. **Millions of farmers receive AI advisories**, hospitals use AI tools to screen **TB and stroke**, and the **Supreme Court uses AI for multilingual translation**.

4. **From pilots to rollout:** While many countries remain at experimental stages, India has reached nationwide deployment, proving that AI can work for large populations.
5. **Digital Public Infrastructure foundation:** Platforms such as **Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and DEPA (Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture)** form an interoperable public stack. These systems are built openly and function at national scale.
6. **Trust-based credibility advantage:** India relies on transparent institutions and political legitimacy rather than competing on raw compute power.

What Are the Challenges of India's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem?

1. **Trust without capacity risk:** Trust alone cannot sustain leadership. Without infrastructure support, credibility may weaken over time.
2. **Limited compute accessibility:** AIRAWAT national compute infrastructure remains difficult to access. Opaque processes restrict use by startups and academic institutions.
3. **Slow scaling of indigenous models:** Bharat GenAI efforts remain confined to pilots, limiting large-scale model development.
4. **Weak safety research ecosystem:** AI safety research lacks dedicated institutional funding, despite increasing deployment risks.
5. **Data constraints:** Public datasets, especially for **low-resource Indian languages and regulated sectors**, are limited and often not audit-ready.
6. **Institutional guardrails lag:** Governance systems are not evolving at the same speed as deployment, creating regulatory gaps.
7. **Unclear liability framework:** There is no clarity on responsibility when AI systems fail. **Developer, deployer, and data custodian roles remain undefined**, raising risks for industry.
8. **Absence of strong sandboxes:** India lacks sector-specific, regulator-backed AI sandboxes with legal protection for testing high-risk systems.

India's 'Third Path' for the Global South

1. **Global governance dilemma:** Developing countries face limited choices. Western AI systems are costly and compliance-heavy. Chinese systems come with strategic dependencies.
2. **India's alternative model:** India offers a **third path based on openness, interoperability, and inclusion**, avoiding both restriction and control.
3. **Growing global interest:** Countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America are studying India's DPI architecture.

4. **Adoption of Indian systems:** Some nations are adopting **UPI-based payment models**, while others test **Aadhaar-like digital identity systems**.
5. **From technology export to capacity export:** India's approach shifts focus from selling tools to building national capabilities.
6. **From follower to framer:** By shaping governance models, India moves from being an AI user to a rule-setting contributor.

AI as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

1. **Emergence of AI diplomacy:** India is using the Global AI Summit as a diplomatic platform to extend cooperation beyond national borders. Through this platform, it brings Global South researchers together, invites global impact challenges, and co-creates AI solutions with multilateral institutions.
2. **Alignment without coercion:** India does not demand ideological alignment. It offers cooperation on mutually acceptable terms.
3. **Ecosystem-building strategy:** The focus is not on winning markets but on shaping long-term AI ecosystems.
4. **Soft power expansion:** AI becomes a tool of diplomacy, strengthening influence through shared governance and joint capacity building.
5. **Replacing dependency with partnership:** India's model emphasizes **mutual capacity instead of technological dependence**, enhancing global trust.

Way Forward

1. **Compute access reform:** AIRAWAT must move from concept to access, with transparent procedures so startups, researchers, and academic institutions can use national compute easily.
2. **Scale Bharat GenAI:** Model development efforts under Bharat GenAI must expand beyond pilot projects to build domestic AI capability at meaningful scale.
3. **Fund safety research:** AI safety research requires dedicated institutional funding to manage risks as deployment expands into governance and public services.
4. **Open public datasets:** Public datasets, especially for low-resource languages and regulated sectors, must be made open, usable, and audit-ready.
5. **Clear liability norms:** A clear framework is needed to define accountability among developers, deployers, and data custodians when AI systems fail.
6. **Regulatory sandboxes:** Sector-specific, regulator-backed sandboxes with legal cover must be created to test high-risk AI systems before formal regulation.

Conclusion

India's AI strategy blends trust, deployment, and diplomacy into foreign policy. The summit places India at the center of the global trust debate. Yet credibility depends on delivery. With stronger coordination, infrastructure, and governance, India can show that **democratic AI at scale is not a contradiction, but a workable global model.**

Question for practice:

Examine how India is using artificial intelligence as a tool of foreign policy by leveraging trust-based governance, large-scale deployment, and cooperation with the Global South.

Source: [Businessline](#)

U.S. Greenland Claim and Its Impact on Arctic Politics

Source: The post "U.S. Greenland Claim and Its Impact on Arctic Politics" has been created, based on "U.S. Greenland Claim and Its Impact on Arctic Politics" published in "Indian Express" on 23rd January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- International Relations

Context: Greenland is an autonomous territory under Danish administration and has significant strategic importance in the Arctic region. Recent indications of possible American control over Greenland have raised serious geopolitical concerns. Such a development can affect NATO unity, strengthen Russia and China, and alter Canada's security outlook.

Impact on NATO

1. NATO functions on the principle of collective security under Article 5 and mutual respect for sovereignty.
2. A US takeover of Greenland would violate these foundational principles of the alliance.
3. Denmark may invoke Article 5, which would lead to an unprecedented internal conflict within NATO.
4. Such a situation may weaken trust and cooperation among member states.
5. The credibility and effectiveness of NATO may be seriously undermined.

Strategic Gains for Russia and China

1. Internal divisions within NATO would directly benefit Russia, especially during the ongoing Ukraine conflict.
2. A weakened alliance would reduce strategic pressure on Russia in Europe and the Arctic region.
3. China is expanding its Arctic presence through economic investments and military cooperation with Russia.
4. Joint military exercises near Alaska indicate growing strategic coordination between the two countries.
5. Therefore, American action may unintentionally strengthen its major rivals.

Existing US Presence in Greenland

1. The United States already operates in Greenland under the 1951 defence agreement with Denmark.
2. It earlier maintained several military bases in the region.

3. These facilities can be revived if required for security purposes.
4. Existing arrangements are sufficient to safeguard American strategic interests.
5. Therefore, territorial takeover is unnecessary and unjustified.

Domestic Political and Economic Drivers in U.S.A

1. Some influential business leaders view Greenland as an important economic opportunity.
2. They are interested in rare earth minerals, real estate, and strategic projects.
3. President Trump's background as a real estate developer influences his expansionist approach.
4. As a result, strategic decisions may be influenced by commercial considerations.

Implications for Canada

1. US control of Greenland would geographically surround Canada.
2. This situation would increase Canada's strategic vulnerability in the Arctic region.
3. Canada has begun debating the need for stronger defence capabilities.
4. Some experts have suggested reconsidering the country's nuclear policy.
5. Canada's traditional security posture may therefore undergo major changes.

Risk of Nuclear Proliferation

1. Weakening of NATO may encourage countries to seek independent nuclear deterrence.
2. Germany and Poland may reconsider their dependence on collective security.
3. Japan and South Korea may also rethink their nuclear policies.
4. Such developments would weaken the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
5. This situation may trigger a global nuclear arms race.

Challenges

1. Challenge of Alliance Fragmentation: A conflict between NATO members would weaken the institutional unity of the alliance. It would significantly reduce confidence in collective security mechanisms.

2. Challenge of Legal and Diplomatic Disputes: A territorial takeover would violate international law and established sovereignty norms. It would lead to prolonged diplomatic tensions and the possibility of economic and political sanctions.

3. Challenge of Strategic Instability in the Arctic: Increased militarisation in the Arctic region would raise the risk of military confrontation. Competition over natural resources and strategic sea routes would intensify.

4. Challenge of Arms Race and Militarisation: Countries may increase defence spending and expand their nuclear and conventional military programmes. Arms control and disarmament agreements may weaken over time.

5. Challenge of Marginalisation of Smaller States: Denmark and Greenland's political autonomy may be seriously undermined. Smaller NATO members may feel insecure and politically marginalised within the alliance.

Way Forward

1. Strengthening Diplomatic Engagement: U.S.A, Denmark, and other NATO members must prioritise continuous diplomatic dialogue. All disputes should be resolved through peaceful negotiations and mutual consultation.

2. Upholding International Law: Territorial integrity and sovereignty must be respected by all countries without exception. The United Nations Charter and international conventions should guide state behaviour.

3. Reforming and Reinforcing NATO: NATO must strengthen its internal consultation and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Clear and transparent protocols should be developed for managing internal disagreements.

4. Promoting Cooperative Arctic Governance: Arctic states should strengthen multilateral platforms such as the Arctic Council. Environmental protection and sustainable development should be given high priority.

5. Implementing Confidence-Building Measures: Transparency in military activities and deployments should be ensured. Joint exercises, data sharing, and communication channels can reduce mutual mistrust.

6. Strengthening the Non-Proliferation Regime: Major powers must reaffirm their commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Diplomatic initiatives should be strengthened to discourage the spread of nuclear weapons.

Conclusion: A US takeover of Greenland would undermine NATO unity, strengthen adversaries, and destabilise regional security. It would also increase nuclear proliferation risks and weaken international norms. Long-term stability can be ensured only through diplomacy, cooperation, and respect for sovereignty.

Question: What are the implications of a possible US takeover of Greenland for NATO, Russia, and Canada? Discuss the challenges and suggest a way forward.

Reforms needed to make agriculture more viable

Source: The post “Reforms needed to make agriculture more viable” has been created, based on “Reforms needed to make agriculture more viable” published in “Business Line” on 23rd January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: Agriculture continues to remain a vital sector of the Indian economy despite its declining share in Gross Value Added. In 2023–24, the sector contributed nearly 18 per cent to GVA and employed about 46 per cent of the workforce. The average growth rate of agriculture during 2011–2025 was around 4 per cent, which was lower than the overall GVA growth. There exist wide inter-State disparities in agricultural productivity, income, and access to resources. The Agriculture Development Index has been developed to analyse these regional variations.

Agriculture Development Index: Framework

1. The Agriculture Development Index is based on **six major parameters** that reflect income, productivity, and input use.
 - a. It includes **the average annual income of agricultural households** as per the Situation Assessment Survey 2019.

- b. It **considers the value of crop output per hectare** reported by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
 - c. It **incorporates cropping intensity** as an indicator of land use efficiency.
 - d. It **measures fertiliser consumption per hectare** to assess input usage.
 - e. It **includes institutional credit advanced per hectare** to reflect financial access.
 - f. It **takes into account gross value added per agricultural worker** to measure labour productivity.
2. All indicators are normalised and given near-equal weights to ensure comparability across States.

Key Findings from the ADI

Overall Performance

1. Punjab and Haryana rank highest on the Agriculture Development Index.
2. Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh occupy middle positions.
3. Nagaland, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Manipur rank at the bottom.
4. These rankings indicate serious structural and institutional weaknesses in low-performing States.

Farm Household Income

1. The average annual income of agricultural households varies widely across States.
2. It ranges from about ₹58,470 to more than ₹3 lakh in Punjab and Meghalaya.
3. Haryana, Kerala, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh also report high farm incomes.
4. Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Uttarakhand record comparatively low incomes.
5. Farm income growth between 2012 and 2019 was only around 8 per cent.
6. This low growth rate is insufficient to achieve the target of doubling farmers' income.

Value of Crop Output per Hectare

1. The national average value of crop output is about ₹1.39 lakh per hectare.
2. Tripura records the highest value, exceeding ₹3 lakh per hectare.
3. Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Sikkim also show strong performance.
4. Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra show relatively low output values. This indicates inefficient utilisation of land and agricultural inputs in several States.

Cropping Intensity

1. The national average cropping intensity is about 155.
2. Punjab, West Bengal, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana record higher cropping intensity.
3. Cropping intensity does not show a strong relationship with household income.
4. It also does not have a strong correlation with fertiliser use. Therefore, increasing cropping intensity alone is not sufficient to improve farmers' income.

Fertiliser Use

1. The average fertiliser consumption in India is about 137 kilograms per hectare.
2. Punjab, Haryana, and Telangana record the highest fertiliser usage.

3. Sikkim and several North-Eastern States show negligible fertiliser use due to organic farming practices.
4. The weak correlation between fertiliser use and crop output indicates excessive and imbalanced application. This results in declining soil health and lower input efficiency.

Credit per Hectare

1. The average outstanding agricultural credit per hectare is around ₹0.88 lakh.
2. Credit availability varies widely from ₹0.07 lakh in Nagaland to ₹4.5 lakh in Tamil Nadu.
3. States with better access to institutional credit generally show superior agricultural performance.
4. This highlights the importance of financial inclusion in rural areas.

Labour Productivity

1. Haryana records the highest gross value added per agricultural worker at about ₹5.69 lakh.
2. Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura, and Mizoram also demonstrate high labour productivity.
3. Several eastern and central Indian States continue to exhibit low labour productivity.
4. Low productivity reflects disguised unemployment and limited mechanisation.

Major Issues

1. There is widespread inefficiency in fertiliser use across many States.
2. High fertiliser consumption does not always translate into higher agricultural output.
3. Farm household income does not always correspond with crop productivity.
4. Non-crop activities such as dairying, fisheries, and poultry play a significant role in income generation.
5. Access to institutional credit remains highly uneven across regions.
6. Small and fragmented landholdings restrict mechanisation and economies of scale.
7. Inadequate marketing infrastructure reduces farmers' share in consumer prices.
8. Structural and policy constraints continue to hinder balanced agricultural development.

Way Forward

1. Fertiliser subsidies should be rationalised by promoting soil health cards and balanced nutrient application.
2. Direct benefit transfer and income support through PM-KISAN should be strengthened.
3. Agricultural market reforms should be accelerated to create a unified national market.
4. Inter-State trade barriers should be removed and logistics infrastructure should be improved.
5. Institutional credit systems should be reformed to reduce regional disparities.
6. Cooperative banks and regional rural banks should be strengthened.
7. Precision farming, mechanisation, and digital agriculture should be promoted for small farmers.
8. Farmer Producer Organisations should be strengthened for collective input purchase and marketing.
9. Land consolidation and collective farming models should be encouraged through legal support.
10. Farm reforms should be promoted through fiscal incentives and cooperative federalism.

Conclusion

Agriculture continues to play a crucial role in employment generation and social stability. The Agriculture Development Index highlights deep inter-State disparities in income, productivity, and institutions. These

disparities can be addressed through efficient input use, market integration, and credit expansion. Technological adoption and institutional reforms are essential for sustainable agricultural growth. Coordinated efforts by the Centre and the States are necessary to ensure higher and stable farm incomes.

Question: “Regional disparities in agricultural development continue to hinder inclusive growth in India.” In this context, analyse the factors responsible for inter-State differences in farm productivity and income. Suggest suitable policy measures to promote balanced and sustainable agricultural development.

One District One Product (ODOP)

Source: The post “One District One Product (ODOP)” has been created, based on “One District One Product (ODOP)” published in “PIB” on 24th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: One District One Product (ODOP) initiative was launched in **Uttar Pradesh in 2018**. It identifies one unique product from each district and provides it with **branding, market access, institutional support, and visibility**. It aims to empower local artisans, revive traditional skills, create livelihoods, and promote **district-specific economic growth**. Moradabad’s brassware was the first product recognized, which **later reached international markets**.

Objectives of ODOP

1. **Balanced Regional Development:** Reduce regional disparities by leveraging local resources and skills.
2. **Empowerment of Artisans and Producers:** Provide **training, modern toolkits**, and institutional support to artisans, farmers, and weavers.
3. **Promotion of Exports:** Integrate districts with global markets, enhancing **India’s export portfolio**.
4. **Preservation of Heritage:** Protect traditional crafts and cultural identity.
5. **Job Creation & Rural Entrepreneurship:** Generate livelihoods under **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative.
6. **Alignment with National Missions:** Supports **Make in India, Vocal for Local, and Districts as Export Hub**.

Key Features

1. It is governed collaboratively by **DPIIT, state governments, and district administrations**.
2. Products are selected based on **existing local ecosystem**.
3. **Over 1,200 products listed** across sectors like textiles, handicrafts, minerals, and food.
4. **Digital Market Access:** Products showcased through **GeM-ODOP Bazaar** and state e-commerce portals.
5. **PM Ekta Malls:** National hubs to promote ODOP and GI-tagged products, with **₹5,000 crore support**, experience zones, and retail spaces for every state/UT.

Impact of ODOP:

In Uttar Pradesh (Pioneer State):

1. Exports rose by **76%** (₹88,967 Cr in 2017-18 → ₹1.71 Lakh Cr in 2023-24).
2. **₹6,000 crore projects sanctioned** under ODOP Margin Money Scheme.
3. Over **1.25 crore artisans trained** with modern toolkits.
4. **UPITS 2025 & Mahakumbh 2025:** Boosted **national and global visibility** for 466 ODOP stalls, GI-tagged products, and regional crafts.

National Level:

1. Scaled to **770+ districts**, impacting millions of entrepreneurs, artisans, and farmers.
2. **Global Recognition:** ODOP products promoted through **80+ Indian missions**, G-20 gifting, and stores in **Singapore and Kuwait**.

Significance:

1. It converts **traditional skills into sustainable economic engines**.
2. It promotes **inclusive growth, rural employment, and international trade**.
3. It strengthens **India's cultural identity and global brand**.
4. It bridges **local heritage with modern development goals**, supporting Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Challenges in Implementing ODOP:

1. **Awareness and Outreach Deficit:** Many local communities, including artisans, farmers, and producers, are unaware of their district-specific products or the economic opportunities under ODOP. Limited marketing skills and exposure restrict participation.
2. **Infrastructure Gaps:** Poor transport networks, inadequate storage, lack of processing units, and weak logistics hamper efficient production, distribution, and market access.
3. **Limited Market Access:** ODOP products often struggle to reach regional, national, and international markets due to weak supply chains, absence of dedicated marketing platforms, and lack of e-commerce integration.
4. **Skill and Quality Constraints:** Artisans may lack modern design, production, packaging, and marketing skills, affecting product quality and competitiveness.
5. **Resource and Funding Challenges:** Unequal or insufficient allocation of financial and technical resources can delay implementation and reduce the scheme's effectiveness.
6. **Sustainability Issues:** ODOP initiatives may face difficulties in scaling successful products, maintaining momentum, and ensuring long-term viability.
7. **Competition and Differentiation:** ODOP products face competition from mass-produced or similar items from other regions, making branding and differentiation crucial.

Way Forward:

1. **Awareness and Capacity Building:** Conduct campaigns and workshops at district levels to educate communities about ODOP benefits, cultural significance, and entrepreneurship opportunities.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in transportation, storage, packaging, and processing facilities to strengthen supply chains and enable efficient distribution.
3. **Market Access and Digital Integration:** Facilitate linkages with domestic and international markets, establish e-commerce platforms, and promote ODOP products through trade fairs, exhibitions, and Government e-Marketplace (GeM).
4. **Skill Development and Quality Enhancement:** Provide training in modern design, craftsmanship, quality control, branding, and sustainable production practices to improve competitiveness.

5. **Transparent Resource Allocation:** Ensure equitable distribution of financial and technical support, coupled with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
6. **Branding and Promotion:** Develop a strong national and global brand identity for district-specific products to differentiate them from competitors.
7. **Sustainability and Scaling:** Encourage long-term planning, integration with tourism, exports, and entrepreneurship programs to sustain and scale successful ODOP initiatives.
8. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Promote coordination among central/state governments, local authorities, trade bodies, and artisans for smooth implementation and monitoring.

Conclusion: ODOP has transformed local streets into **global shelves**, turning artisan aspirations into economic opportunities. From Moradabad's brassware to PM Ekta Malls and international stores, the initiative exemplifies how **district-level products can achieve national pride and global outreach**.

Question: One District One Product (ODOP) initiative has transformed India's local economies and traditional crafts. Discuss its objectives, impact, and global outreach.

Source: [PIB](#)

Merits of user tax on infra services

Source: The post "Merits of user tax on infra services" has been created, based on "Merits of user tax on infra services" published in "BusinessLine" on 24th January 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: Raising government revenue is challenging because **direct taxes are politically sensitive**, and GST rates have recently been lowered. A **user-based tax** on infrastructure-related goods and services like vehicles, telecom, railways, airlines, and freight can generate **significant revenue** without being a burden, as these goods are **price inelastic**, meaning demand is unaffected by small cost increases.

Merits of User Tax on Infra Services

1. **Revenue Generation:** Even a **small tax or cess** on high-volume goods and services can raise **substantial revenue**, estimated at ₹20,000 crore. Given the large number of users for telecom, travel, and vehicle purchases, revenue accrues steadily over time.
2. **Minimal Consumer Impact:** For a ₹75,000 two-wheeler, a ₹1,000 tax is only **1.3%**, barely noticeable to the buyer. Similarly, ₹10 per mobile connection or per rail ticket is insignificant relative to the **average revenue per user or ticket price**, ensuring affordability.
3. **Price Inelastic Demand:** Services like railways, airlines, and telecom continue to see **stable demand** despite price hikes, as evidenced by **dynamic pricing in railways**. Freight transport must happen irrespective of minor cost increases, ensuring predictable revenue.
4. **Limited Inflationary Impact:** Components such as rail, air, or vehicles have **low CPI weights** (rail 0.18%, air 0.077%, vehicles 0.48–0.79%), so adding small taxes will **barely affect overall inflation**. This ensures the tax is **non-disruptive to the broader economy**.
5. **Sustainable and Flexible:** Taxes can be **graded** by usage, class, or capacity (e.g., higher for cars, lower for two-wheelers). Periodic revisions are possible to **stabilise revenue** as demand patterns and infrastructure needs evolve.

6. **Encourages Efficient Usage:** Small user charges may encourage **judicious consumption**, e.g., choosing an appropriate travel class or mobile plans. At the same time, essential services remain accessible due to low tax incidence.

Challenges

1. **Equity Concerns:** Even small taxes can impact **low-income users**, especially for frequent users of public transport or mobile services.
2. **Implementation Complexity:** Efficient collection across millions of transactions, especially for rail freight or telecom connections, requires **robust digital systems**.
3. **Resistance from Industry:** Transport, telecom, and vehicle sectors may **oppose additional charges**, fearing reduced demand or administrative burden.
4. **Indirect Inflation Risk:** Freight and transport taxes can **increase goods costs**, which might be passed on to consumers indirectly.

Way Forward

1. **Graded and Fair Taxation:** Scale the tax based on **vehicle type, travel class, or usage**, so low-income users are minimally affected.
2. **Digital Collection Mechanism:** Implement e-payment and **automatic collection** to reduce leakages and ensure transparency.
3. **Periodic Revision:** Adjust charges periodically to **match revenue needs and inflation trends** without disrupting demand.
4. **Awareness and Communication:** Publicise that funds will be used for **infrastructure improvements** to gain citizen support.
5. **Direct Link to Infrastructure Investment:** Allocate revenue to **roads, railways, airports, and telecom upgrades**, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Conclusion: A **user-based tax on infrastructure services** leverages **price-inelastic demand** to generate **sustainable revenue**, minimally impacts consumers, and supports long-term infrastructure development. With **grading, digital collection, and transparency**, it can provide a stable funding source while remaining affordable.

Question: Discuss the merits of imposing a user-based tax on infrastructure-related goods and services. How can such a tax help in revenue generation without affecting consumption? Also, highlight its challenges and suggest ways forward.

Source: [BusinessLine](#)

Delimitation after 2027, Redrawing Power in India

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS paper2- Polity- issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Introduction

Delimitation is the constitutional process of adjusting electoral boundaries according to population change. Although routine in principle, the delimitation due after Census 2027 will be the most decisive redistribution of political power since Independence. It will determine Lok Sabha seat allocation, influence women's

reservation, reshape coalition politics, and raise difficult questions on fairness, federalism, and democratic balance among Indian States.

What is Delimitation?

Delimitation refers to the process of redrawing the boundaries of electoral constituencies to ensure fair representation based on population changes.

Delimitation Commission:

- The Delimitation Commission is a statutory body responsible for determining the boundaries of various constituencies in the country for the purpose of elections.
- It is governed by the Delimitation Act, 2002 and is conducted by the Delimitation Commission under Articles 82 and 170 of the Indian Constitution.
- The objective is to provide equitable representation to all regions while maintaining the principle of one person, one vote.

Freeze on seat redistribution since 1976:

- Inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats has remained unchanged since 1976, based on the 1971 Census. The freeze was introduced to prevent States that adopted population control measures from losing political representation.
- **Extension through the 84th Constitutional Amendment:** In 2001, the freeze was extended until the first Census conducted after 2026.
- **Present representational mismatch:** India's parliamentary representation still reflects a population of 548 million, while the actual population has crossed 1.47 billion.

Why the Upcoming Delimitation Is Unprecedented

1. End of constitutional suspension: With Census 2027, the legal protection against seat redistribution expires, making delimitation unavoidable.

2. First inter-State redistribution since 1976:

- The next Delimitation Commission will reallocate Lok Sabha seats among States after nearly five decades.
- Complete redrawing of constituencies: Unlike the 2002–08 exercise, all parliamentary constituencies will be redrawn, not merely internal boundaries.
- Integration of women's reservation: The Commission must also create reserved constituencies for the 33% women's quota.

3. Delay in execution:

- Even if Census data is released in 2028, delimitation before 2031–32 appears unlikely.
- Impact on women's reservation rollout: Due to these delays, women's reservation may not be implemented before the 2034 general election.

What are the concerns associated with Delimitation Exercise?

- 1. Population vs. Development-** Southern states argue that delimitation based solely on population would penalize them for successful family planning and economic development. **E.g.** Tamil Nadu's fertility rate is 1.6, while Bihar's is 3.0.
- 2. Federalism at Risk-** States with low population growth may feel politically marginalized, leading to North-South divide concerns. There are concerns that the Delimitation Exercise can create federal Imbalance as states with better governance may feel punished for controlling population. **E.g.** Sarkaria Commission (1983) warned against excessive centralization of power.
- 3. Manipulation-** There are concerns that political parties may influence constituency boundaries for electoral gains. **E.g.** Allegations of bias in the J&K delimitation process (2022).
- 4. Delays and Political Resistance-** There are instances of increased political resistance as seen in the case of Justice Kuldeep Singh-led Commission (2002) facing pushback from political parties unwilling to lose seats.
- 5. Economic Disparities-** Southern states argue that higher revenue generation (GST collections, per capita income) should be factored into representation.
- 6. Moral Contradiction:** The exercise conflicts with decades of national policy that promoted population control, as States following the policy now risk political loss.
- 7. Constitutional Uncertainty:** Extending the seat freeze or modifying redistribution may invite legal challenges because unequal representation undermines the principle of equal suffrage under Article 14.
- 8. Reservation Concerns:** While the number of SC and ST seats follows population share, the choice of constituency locations depends on Commission discretion.

Possible Approaches and Reform Options

- 1. Extend the freeze beyond 2026:** The current freeze on inter-State seat redistribution may be extended until fertility rates across States converge. This protects the existing political balance but denies fair representation to fast-growing States and may face constitutional challenge under Article 14 due to unequal suffrage.
- 2. Expand the size of the Lok Sabha:** The Lok Sabha may be expanded from 543 to around 750 or 888 seats so that no State loses its existing seats. However, population-based allocation would still give larger States a much bigger share, leaving southern concerns unresolved.
- 3. Adopt a weighted population–development formula:** Seat allocation could follow a composite formula giving 70–80% weight to population and 20–30% weight to development indicators such as literacy, health, and fertility control. This approach rewards governance outcomes instead of population growth alone.

4. Strengthen the Rajya Sabha as a federal chamber: The Rajya Sabha's federal role can be restored by reintroducing domicile requirements and reforming seat distribution. A tier-based system with equal seats within large, medium, and small State groups can reduce population dominance and balance federal power.

5. Bifurcate Uttar Pradesh to reduce concentration of power: Uttar Pradesh may be divided into three or four States to prevent excessive political dominance. If its projected 151 Lok Sabha seats are distributed among smaller States, no single State would command disproportionate influence.

6. Implement phased redistribution of seats: Seat reallocation may be carried out in two stages, with half implemented in 2034 and the remainder in 2039. This gradual approach reduces political shock while still complying with constitutional requirements.

Conclusion

Delimitation after 2027 will redefine India's political balance for decades. The challenge lies in reconciling population-based equality with governance fairness and federal stability. Transparent procedures, expert participation, and political consensus are essential. If guided by justice and dialogue, delimitation can strengthen democracy; if driven by numbers alone, it risks deepening regional distrust.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the delimitation exercise due after Census 2027 is likely to reshape political representation in India, and examine the constitutional, federal, and governance-related concerns associated with it.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Walkouts by Governors test constitutional limits

UPSC Syllabus GS2-Indian Polity

Introduction

The walkouts by Governors during inaugural sessions of State Legislatures in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have raised serious constitutional questions. These actions challenge the limits of discretion allowed to Governors. The issue has brought renewed focus on Articles related to the Governor's address, the role of the elected Cabinet, and the balance between constitutional duty and political neutrality.

Constitutional Role of the Governor (gubernatorial powers)?

Gubernatorial powers are the constitutional, legal, administrative, legislative, executive, judicial, and discretionary powers vested in the **Governor** of a state.

These powers are derived mainly from **Articles 153 to 167 and 200–213** of the Constitution.

These powers enable the **Governor to act as the constitutional head of the state**, oversee its governance, and safeguard the Constitution while working with the state government.

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 153:** Provides for a Governor for one or more than one states.
- **Article 154:** The executive powers of the state are vested in the Governor and can be exercised directly or through subordinate officers in accordance with the Constitution.
- **Article 155:** Provides for the appointment of the Governor by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
- **Article 156:** Provides the term of office of Governor- Appointed for a period of five years and holds office during the pleasure of the President. Pleasure of the President means that he can be removed anytime by the President, even before the expiry of five years.
- **Article 157:** Qualifications- He should be a citizen of India and must have completed the age of thirty-five years

3. Aid and advice principle: Under Article 163, the Governor must act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers except in areas where discretion is expressly provided.

4. Discretionary Powers = Governor has two types of discretion in the execution of his work:

- **Constitutional discretion** which is discretion mentioned directly in the Constitution. This is exercised in matters such as reserving a bill for the consideration of the President, recommendation of the President's rule under Article 356.
- **Situational discretion** which means hidden discretion that is derived from the exigencies of political situations. For instance, the appointment of Chief Minister of a state when no party has a clear cut majority in the state legislative assembly or when the chief minister in office dies suddenly and there is no obvious successor, dissolution of the state legislative assembly if the council of ministers has lost its majority etc.
- **Representative role:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated that the Governor has no independent governing function. He acts as a representative of the people as a whole, not of any political party.

Judicial Interpretation on Governor Conduct

1. Shamsher Singh judgment (1974):

- A seven-judge Bench ruled that **Governors cannot publicly oppose Cabinet policy**. Such conduct violates the parliamentary system.
- **Warning against constitutional overreach:** The court said free discretion in every function would weaken democracy and elevate the Governor beyond constitutional limits.
- **Remote control principle:** Even the limited freedom of the Governor is controlled by the Union Council of Ministers, which is accountable to Parliament.

2. Tamil Nadu Governor case (Supreme Court judgment):

- The Supreme Court ruled that **gubernatorial discretion cannot have the effect of negating the powers of an elected and responsible State government**.

- The Governor was described as a “guide, philosopher, and friend” of the government and the people, not an alternative power centre.

3. Nabam Rebia vs Deputy Speaker (2016):

- A five-judge Constitution Bench held that the Governor’s discretionary powers are strictly limited and clearly stated in the Constitution.
- **Interpretation on legislative functions:** The Court ruled that **summoning the House under Article 174 cannot be done at the Governor’s discretion and must follow Cabinet advice.**
- **Interpretation on Governor’s address:** The Court stated that addressing the **House under Article 175(1) or delivering the special address under Article 176(1) are executive functions** performed only on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

Governor’s Address and Legal Precedents

1. **Mandatory constitutional duty:** Article 176(1) requires the Governor to address the Legislature at the first session each year and after Assembly elections.
2. **Purpose of the address:** The address informs the Legislature of the reasons for its summons and outlines the policies of the elected State government.
3. **Executive nature of the address:** The Supreme Court clarified that Articles 175 and 176 involve executive functions performed on Cabinet advice.
4. **No authority to alter content:** The speech reflects government policy. Any unilateral change by the Governor can make the speech politically indefensible.
5. **Rajasthan High Court ruling (1966):** A partial speech was held sufficient as long as the Governor communicated directly with elected representatives.
6. **Calcutta High Court view:** The address is mandatory, but partial delivery is only an irregularity, not illegality. Legislative proceedings remain valid.

Recent Crisis and Its Impacts

1. **Walkouts from Assembly sessions:** Governors in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala either skipped portions of the address or walked out during delivery.
2. **Departure from constitutional practice:** Such actions go beyond the “limited freewheeling” allowed under the Constitution.
3. **Cabinet authority questioned:** State leaders argue Governors cannot skip paragraphs approved by the Council of Ministers.
4. **Possible judicial intervention:** The Karnataka government may approach the Supreme Court seeking clarity on the constitutionality of such walkouts.

5. **Risk of constitutional crisis:** Selective reading or refusal to read the speech disrupts legislative accountability and undermines federal balance.
6. **Budget session exception:** In 2022, Telangana began its Budget Session without the Governor's address as the session was treated as a continuation, not a new one.

Conclusion

The recent walkouts highlight growing strain between Governors and elected governments. Constitutional provisions, judicial rulings, and Assembly debates clearly limit gubernatorial discretion. Ignoring Cabinet advice weakens parliamentary democracy and federal balance. Clear judicial guidance and strict adherence to constitutional roles are essential to prevent recurring institutional conflict.

Question for practice:

Examine how recent walkouts by Governors during State Legislative Assembly sessions have tested constitutional limits on gubernatorial discretion and affected the balance between elected governments and constitutional authority in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#) and [Deccan Herald](#)