



7 PM COMPILATION

January, 2026

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic
- ❖ Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer
- ❖ Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world
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Aravallis - Significance & Recent Controversy - Explained Pointwise

The recent SC order regarding the Aravalli Range & mining in the region has stirred the controversy. The order that adopted a uniform definition to identify the “hills & ranges” & froze the new mining leases until the MoEFCC had prepared a sustainable mining plan for the landscape, and said mining should be prohibited in the “core” areas, with an exception for critical, strategic & atomic minerals notified under MMDR Act – which the court has called a ‘strategic exemption’.

What are Aravallis?

- The Aravallis (or Aravalli Range) are one of the oldest mountain systems in the world (>2bn years old), predating even the Himalayas.
- They are a series of ancient fold mountains that act as the “ecological spine” of Northwest India.
- The range stretches approximately 670 to 800 km in a northeast-to-southwest direction.
- States Covered: It spans four major regions: Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.
- Highest Point: The highest peak is Guru Shikhar on Mount Abu in Rajasthan, standing at 1,722 meters (5,650 feet).
- While they were once as high as the Himalayas, millions of years of weathering and erosion have reduced them to “residual” mountains or hills.
- The range is primarily made of metamorphic rocks like quartzite, marble, and granite. It is a major source of minerals including copper, zinc, lead, and high-quality marble.



What is the significance of Aravallis?

The “Green Shield” Against Desertification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Sand Barrier: Without these hills, the desert sands would have long ago encroached upon the fertile agricultural lands of Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. Dust Filtration: They act as a physical filter, trapping massive amounts of dust and particulate matter from the desert, which would otherwise devastate the air quality of the Delhi-NCR region.
Groundwater & Water Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Sponge Effect: The Aravallis act as a massive recharge zone of groundwater. The fractured and weathered rocks of the range allow rainwater to percolate deep into the earth, recharging the aquifers that sustain the drinking water and irrigation needs of cities like Gurugram, Jaipur, and Delhi. Source of Rivers: Several seasonal and perennial rivers, including the Luni, Banas, and Sahibi, originate here, supporting local ecosystems and agriculture.
Climate & Monsoon Regulator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding Monsoons: The Aravallis help guide monsoon clouds towards the northern plains and the Himalayas, ensuring more even rainfall distribution. Temperature Buffer: Studies have shown that forested areas of the Aravallis can be 2-3°C cooler than surrounding urban areas, helping mitigate the “urban heat island” effect during intense heatwaves.
Biodiversity Hotspot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wildlife Corridors: They serve as a critical corridor for animals like leopards, striped hyenas, and jackals to move between protected areas like Sariska Tiger Reserve and the Delhi Ridge. Medicinal Flora: The range is home to diverse native plant species adapted to semi-arid conditions, many of which have significant medicinal value.
Historical & Economic Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cradle of Civilization: The range supported early metallurgical hubs, providing copper and gold to the ancient Harappan Civilization. Source of Critical, Strategic & Atomic Minerals: Aravallis are believed to have potential for minerals which are strategically important for India, including base metals in certain established belts, minerals such as Tungsten & other bulk minerals including stones & rocks.

What is the recent controversy regarding the Aravallis?

- The controversy revolves around a recent Supreme Court ruling that redefined what technically qualifies as an “Aravalli hill,” sparking fears that vast portions of the range could lose legal protection.

- In November 2025, a Supreme Court bench led by the then Chief Justice accepted a new uniform definition for the Aravalli Hills.
- According to the new definition accepted by the SC, only landforms rising 100 metres or more above the local ground level were to be legally classified as “Aravalli Hills.”
- The government argued this provided a “scientific and uniform” standard to replace the vague definitions that varied across Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, and Delhi.
- Environmentalists, scientists, and local communities immediately protested the ruling, leading to the #SaveAravalli movement.

What are the concerns raised against the SC order?

1. The “100-Metre” Exclusion:
 - According to an internal assessment by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), this definition would exclude nearly 90% to 92% of the Aravalli system.
 - Unlike the “young” Himalayas, the Aravallis are ancient and heavily eroded. Most of their ecological value lies in low-lying ridges and hillocks that are much shorter than 100 metres but serve as critical barriers and water recharge zones.
 - Critics also argue that the committee suggesting this definition was dominated by bureaucrats rather than independent ecologists, leading to accusations of “pro-industry” bias.
2. Fragmentation of the “Green Barrier”:
 - The order defined a “range” as two or more such 100-metre hills within 500 metres of each other. Critics argued this creates a “structural paradox.” By protecting only the “peaks,” the valleys and lower slopes between them could be opened for mining or construction.
 - Breaking the continuity of the range creates “gaps” through which the sands of the Thar Desert can drift into the fertile plains of Haryana and Delhi, accelerating desertification.
3. Further Deterioration of Air Quality: Lower ridges below 100 metres are crucial as wind-breaks; breaching them would open “gaps” in the Aravalli green wall, allowing dust and hot winds from the Thar Desert to sweep more freely into Delhi, Haryana and western UP.
4. Threat to Water Security: The lower hills & slopes are the most effective at groundwater recharge. These areas act as a “sponge” for rainwater. If they are de-classified as Aravallis and handed over for real estate or mining, it could lead to a catastrophic drop in the water table for cities like Gurugram, Faridabad, and Delhi, which are already water-stressed.
5. Opening the Door to Mining: If a hill is less than 100 metres tall, it would no longer be legally protected as “Aravalli land.” This would allow state governments to grant mining leases in areas previously considered sensitive.
6. Contradiction of Previous Jurisprudence: Since the early 2000s, the Supreme Court has traditionally used a 3-degree slope criterion (any land with a slope steeper than 3 degrees) to identify hills. Moving to a height-based threshold was seen as a major “U-turn” that ignored decades of established environmental law.

The Court has stayed its November 2025 judgment & proposed a high-powered expert committee and frozen the use of the 100-metre definition until a full, scientific and holistic reassessment of Aravalli protection is completed.

What can be the way forward to save the Aravallis?

1. Re-defining “The Range” Scientifically:

- The 3-Degree Slope Rule: Reverting to the Forest Survey of India's (FSI) long-standing recommendation to define a hill based on its slope ($>3^\circ$) rather than its absolute height. This protects the low-lying ridges that are functionally vital.
- Landscape Continuity: Defining the Aravallis as a continuous geological unit. Instead of protecting isolated "peaks," the valleys, foothills, and small hillocks between them must be treated as a single, protected ecosystem.

2. The Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM): The Supreme Court has mandated the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to create a master plan – which includes:

- No-Go Zones: Permanent bans on mining in "inviolate" areas like tiger corridors (Sariska-Delhi), wetlands, and groundwater recharge zones.
- Calibrated Extraction: Allowing mining only for critical minerals (like copper or zinc) in designated, low-impact zones, rather than a blanket ban which often leads to the rise of illegal "sand mafias."
- Restoration Bonds: Requiring mining companies to deposit funds upfront for the mandatory ecological restoration of a site once mining is completed.

3. The Aravalli Green Wall Project (2026-2030): This massive restoration project is the primary "offensive" strategy to save the range:

- The 5-km Buffer: Creating a continuous green belt across 29 districts in four states to block the eastward march of the Thar Desert.
- Native Species Reforestation: Moving away from monoculture plantations and planting native species like *Kikar*, *Dhok*, and *Salai* that can survive with minimal water and provide a habitat for local wildlife.
- Rejuvenating Water Bodies: Using ancient techniques like *Johads* (check dams) to catch rainwater within the hills to recharge the drying aquifers of Gurugram and Delhi.

4. Technological Oversight:

- Satellite Monitoring: Using real-time GIS and satellite imagery to track changes in hill volume and forest cover.
- Drone Patrols: Deploying "Anti-Mining Task Forces" equipped with drones to monitor remote parts of the range that are otherwise inaccessible.

5. Community-Led Conservation:

- Eco-Tourism: Promoting sustainable trekking and nature parks (like the Gurugram Biodiversity Park) to create local jobs that don't depend on mining.
- Village Forest Committees: Empowering local communities (Van Mitras) to protect the hills, as they are the first to feel the impact of falling water tables and leopard sightings.

UPSC GS-1: Geography
Read More: [The Hindu](#)

Solid Waste Management in India – Explained Pointwise



The **Solid Waste Management in India** remains an Achilles heel for India. The Supreme Court of India **recently criticized the solid waste management in New Delhi**. There are more than **3,800 tones of untreated solid waste** in Delhi alone. This waste reaches landfills and threatens public health and the environment. Proper steps need to be undertaken for safe disposal and treatment of solid waste in India.

What is a Solid Waste?

- Solid Waste: Solid waste refers to any **unwanted or discarded material** that is not in a liquid or gaseous state. The solid waste includes a **wide range of materials** generated from various sources such as **households, industries, commercial establishments, construction sites, and institutions**.
- Types of Solid Waste:
 - Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) – Household, commercial, market waste.
 - Biomedical Waste – Hospitals, clinics (requires special handling).
 - Electronic Waste (E-waste) – Phones, laptops, appliances.
 - Construction & Demolition (C&D) Waste – Debris, bricks, tiles.
 - Industrial Waste – By-products from factories, often hazardous.
 - Plastic Waste – Single-use plastics, packaging material.

What is the status of Solid Waste generation in India?

Status of Solid Waste Generation in India:

- According to a study published in 'Nature' – India is the biggest plastic polluter in the world – releasing 9.3mT of plastic waste annually – which is equivalent to around 20% of global plastic emission.
- According to CPCB report, only ~50% of total solid waste generated in the country is treated. The processing of solid waste in India has improved significantly, from **19% in 2015-16** to **~50% in 2020-21**. In the corresponding period, the proportion of solid waste landfilled has **fallen from 54% to 18.4%**.

The total quantity of Solid waste generated in India per Day	~1,60,000 Metric Tonnes Per Day (TPD)
Waste Collection per day	~1,53,000 Metric Tonnes Per Day (TPD) Waste Collection efficiency is ~96%.
Waste treatment per day	~80,000 Metric Tonnes Per Day (TPD) Only 50% of the total waste is treated.
Waste Landfilled per day	~30,000 Metric Tonnes Per Day (TPD) 18.4% of the total waste generated ends in landfill.
Unaccounted Waste Generation	~50,000 Metric Tonnes Per Day (TPD) 31.2% of the total waste generated remains unaccounted.

About 50-55% of the waste generated in Indian cities is biodegradable wet waste, about 35% is non-biodegradable wet waste and 10% is an inert component.

What are the Challenges with Solid Waste Management in India?

1. **Rising Waste Generation:** Rapid economic growth has raised the consumption levels in the economy, which has in turn increased the waste generation. Further, the expansion of digital economy is leading to a multifold increase in e-waste generation. Rising plastic waste generation in eco-sensitive regions like Himalayas are choking the fragile ecosystems present there. *For ex- A Planning Commission Report had estimated that India will generate 165 million tonnes by 2030.*

2. **Lack of proper Waste Management:** India lacks proper waste management and disposal techniques.

- Inadequate Infrastructure:** Many urban and rural areas lack proper infrastructure for waste collection, segregation, transportation, processing, and disposal.
- Collection & Treatment:** While collection rates are improving, a significant portion of the generated waste remains uncollected.
- Poor Processing:** Only 50% of the waste produced is actually processed in India. ~30% of waste is not accounted and ~20% ends up in landfills, reflecting poor waste disposal method.

- Incorrect and Inadequate Segregation Techniques: There is poor segregation of waste at source. Hazardous waste and e-waste is not sealed and labelled leading to improper disposal. *For ex- Valuable materials like aluminum and plastics end up in landfills instead of being recycled.*
- Reuse/recycling of waste: Reuse and recycling of waste is predominantly an informal economy, lacking access to advanced technology.
- Financial Constraints: Local municipal bodies often face budget limitations hindering investments in modern waste management systems.

3. Littering and Illegal Dumping: Due to poor disposal methods, **almost half of waste is placed in uncontrolled dumps and landfills**. A substantial amount of untreated waste, approximately 24%, ends up in landfills, many of which are unscientific and overflowing. These landfills are the **source of generation of methane gases, leachates, and landfill fires**, adversely affecting the surrounding environment

4. Lack of land resources: The urban areas in India lack adequate land resources to set up waste processing plants. *For ex- Waste processing plants in Delhi need large land parcels, of about 30-40 acres each for treatment.*

5. Lack of public awareness: Lack of **public awareness regarding proper waste management practices**, contributes to littering and improper disposal habits.

6. Lack of regular waste collection services: The **lack of regular waste collection services** adds up to the **building up of waste as well as littering**. Illegal dumping in open areas and waterbodies increases the pressure on the municipal body, warranting more resources for clean-up.

7. Lack of proper data: Lack of data regarding the quantity & quality of waste generated & processed in India is a major roadblock in its management. The data regarding the rate of waste generation in India is under-estimated & of waste collection is over-estimated. For e.g. according to the official estimates, the plastic waste generation rate in India is 0.12 kg/capita/day, while according to the study published in 'Nature', it is as high as 0.54 kg/capita/day. The agencies in India claim to collect 95% of the waste generated, however, these official statistics do not include rural areas, open burning of uncollected waste or the waste recycled by the informal sector.

8. Informal Sector: The informal sector, consisting of ragpickers and recyclers, plays a crucial role in managing and extracting value from waste, though often under hazardous conditions.

9. Waste Composition: A large percentage of Indian waste is organic, offering potential for composting and bio-methanation. However, the increasing proportion of non-biodegradable waste like plastics and e-waste presents management challenges.

What are the harmful impacts of poor Waste Management?

1. Health Issues: The improper waste management leads to several health issues such as:

- Open burning of waste leads to formation of harmful particles which can cause **lung diseases**.
- Poor collection of solid waste leads to garbage dumps which act as **breeding ground for rats and mosquitoes** etc. Mosquitoes act as carriers of diseases like malaria and dengue.

2. Environmental Issues: Improper waste management techniques lead to various environmental problems such as:

- **Unscientific dumping in landfill** leads to **formation of harmful chemicals** which permeate into soil and groundwater. This renders groundwater unfit for drinking and cause multiple diseases

- Waste in landfills leads to formation of harmful gases leading to air pollution. *For ex- Around 90-98% of landfill gases are made up of methane and carbon dioxide, remaining 2-10% includes nitrogen, oxygen, ammonia, sulphides, hydrogen and various other gases.*
- A lot of land-based waste eventually **ends up in sea leading to marine pollution.**

3. Economic Impacts: Improper waste management usually has grave economic impacts such as:

- Expansion of landfills occupy useful land**, leading to wasteful utilization of an economic resource.
- Poor waste collection leads to clogging of drains, which has become a factor in urban flooding, leading to economic losses.
- Poor waste management leads to general filth in cities**, which impacts tourism potential.

What have been the Government interventions for Solid Waste Management?

Policy and Legal Framework for Waste Management in India	<p>The Government of India (GoI) has formulated various Rules and Regulations. These rules are updated periodically and have been formulated under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Solid Waste Management Rules e-Waste Management Rules Plastic Waste Management Rules
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Mechanism	<p>EPR is a policy approach in waste management that makes producers responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including their collection, recycling, and disposal. In 2022, EPR initiatives utilizing market mechanisms were implemented for plastic packaging, E-waste, battery waste, and used oil.</p>
Swachh Bharat Mission for Solid Waste Management	<p>Central assistance is provided under Swachh Bharat Mission for solid waste management, including plastic waste management in urban and rural areas.</p>
Compost Banao, Compost Apnao Campaign	<p>It is a multi-media campaign launched by MoHUA on waste-to-compost under SBM-(U). The aim is to encourage people to convert their kitchen waste into compost to be used as fertilizer and to reduce the amount of waste getting to landfill sites.</p>
Promotion of Waste to Energy	<p>The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) launched Program on Energy from Urban, Industrial, Agricultural waste/residues and Municipal Solid Waste to promote setting up of Waste-to-Energy projects and to provide central financial assistance.</p>

GOBAR-Dhan Scheme	This scheme promotes the conversion of cattle dung and organic farm waste into biogas and organic compost in rural areas.
National Action Plan for Municipal Solid Waste Management	This plan by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) outlines strategies for waste minimization, utilization, recycling, processing, and environmentally sound disposal.
Mission LiFE	<p>Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) is an India-led global mass movement to encourage individuals and communities to adopt sustainable, climate-friendly lifestyles and reduce mindless consumption.</p> <p>Mission LiFE actions are organised around themes such as energy conservation, water saving, waste reduction, sustainable food systems, reduced single-use plastics, healthy lifestyles, and e-waste management.</p>

What should be the Way Forward?

1. Scientific Waste Management: The waste management planning should be based on **sound scientific and engineering studies**. They should consider **waste composition, capital and long-term operating costs, transport distances**, and the **geographical location of waste processing and disposal facilities**.
2. Smart Waste Management System: In the long term, technology like (Internet of Things) can be integrated into waste management. *For ex- RFID-enabled door-to-door waste collection monitoring can enhance collection efficiency and GPS based vehicle tracking can help in real time monitoring.*
3. Emphasis on Recycling, Resource recovery & Processing: Policies supporting recycling and recovery of resources from waste must be implemented stringently. Waste processing methods like **composting, vermicomposting** and **bio-methanation** should be adopted for treating organic waste. Establish efficient material recovery facilities (MRFs) and support the formalization of the recycling sector.
4. Scaling up Waste-to-Energy: Bio-methanation (anaerobic digestion) which uses microorganisms to convert the organic waste into methane, can be used as fuel. **Bio-methanation plants** should be scaled up. Also, **Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF)** which consists of plastics, paper, and textile waste, having good calorific value, can be used to generate power in waste-to-energy projects.
5. Polluter Pays Principle:
 - Waste Management Rules which have incorporated '**Polluter Pays Principle**', need to be stringently implemented to penalize non-compliance.
 - Polluter pays principle casts absolute liability on the polluter for the harm caused to the environment & extends not only to compensate the victims of pollution but also the cost of restoring environmental degradation.
 - While the liability is clear under this principle, but the process of determining an equitable compensation is difficult as it must account for both tangible & intangible damages inflicted on environment & the affected communities. To overcome this, the Courts have modified the principle into '**Government Pays Principle**' under which it is the government which has to pay the compensation

to the affected individuals & recover the same from the polluters, until the damage caused to the ecology is fully reversed.

6. Increasing Public Awareness: **Self- help groups, residents' welfare associations, and community-based organizations** should be encouraged to educate and acquaint people with beneficial waste management strategies, including separation, recycling modes, and drop off centers for recyclables, as well as composting.

7. Data collection: There is an urgent need to collect & provide reliable data about waste generation & its composition in the country for its effective management. We need to know how much of the waste is being generated, where & how it is being managed for finding an effective solution. We also need to have data regarding the infrastructure that has been built over the years for waste management & such infrastructure needs to be geotagged to help in proper disposal of waste.

8. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR): To effectively operationalize the EPR, the producers, importers & and brand owners that have a legal obligation to collect the waste, can collectively form kiosks across the country to collect the waste from local bodies – so that all the waste that is covered under EPR can be deposited & effectively managed.

9. Circular Economy Model: The circular economy model underlines waste as a resource. India needs to move away from a linear to circular mode of waste management – with the twin objectives of minimizing waste & recovering energy & other resources.

Conclusion:

According to the SC of India, environmental protection is not only a regulatory obligation but also a constitutional imperative which aims to safeguard the fundamental rights of the individuals & preserve the ecological balance. Thus, it is the right time to hold the waste management system in the country accountable to the people whose health is impacted by the land, water & air pollution caused by unmanaged & mismanaged waste all across the country.

Read More: [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus: GS III, Conservation, Environment Pollution and Degradation.

Venezuela Crisis – Causes & Consequences – Explained Pointwise

Following months of pressure on Venezuela & blaming the Venezuela government & military for being involved in drug trafficking that are harming the American people, the U.S. under Trump administration decided to attack the Venezuelan capital & forcibly apprehended the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro & flies him to the U.S. He will now face the charges of drug trafficking & narco-terrorism in New York court. The military operation, known as Operation Absolute Resolve, has triggered a wide-range of short-term & long-term consequences.



Source: European Commission

What are the reasons behind USA's intervention in Venezuela?

1. Drug Trafficking: In 2020, the U.S. indicted Nicolás Maduro and other high-ranking officials for narco-terrorism, alleging they led the "Cartel de los Soles" to flood the U.S. with cocaine.
2. The "Backyard" Policy:
 - Intervention in Venezuela fits a long U.S. tradition of treating Latin America as a strategic sphere of influence under the Monroe Doctrine.
 - Under a revived Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. seeks to eliminate the influence of Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba, which have provided Maduro with financial, military, and intelligence support.
 - US leaders explicitly cast Venezuela, along with Cuba and Nicaragua, as part of an "axis of socialism" and a source of regional instability, suggesting regime change there is about reshaping the Western Hemisphere's ideological map.
3. Strategic Energy Asset: U.S. refineries, particularly on the Gulf Coast, are specifically designed to process Venezuela's heavy crude. Direct intervention is seen by the current administration as a way to secure a stable, non-Middle Eastern energy supply and lower domestic fuel prices.
4. Critical Minerals: Beyond oil, Venezuela possesses vast deposits of gold, bauxite, and rare earth elements. Access to these is increasingly viewed as a national security priority for the U.S. to compete with China's dominance in high-tech manufacturing.
5. Regional Instability: The collapse of Venezuela's economy led to one of the largest migration crises in history. U.S. officials argue that intervention is necessary to stabilize the region and facilitate the return of millions of displaced persons.
6. Human Rights: The U.S. State Department has frequently cited human rights abuses, the suppression of political opponents, and "fraudulent" elections (2013, 2018, 2024) as justifications for applying "maximum pressure" on the Maduro regime.
7. Economic Model: The nationalization of assets (including those of U.S. companies like ExxonMobil and General Motors) under Hugo Chávez and later Maduro created a deep-seated economic rift that the U.S. aims to "correct" by reopening markets.

What can be the consequences of such an intervention in Venezuela?

1. Political Instability:

- Maduro's capture and transfer to New York for trial on narcoterrorism charges leaves a fragmented leadership, with opposition figures and military remnants vying for control.
- The U.S. administration has expressed intent to "run" Venezuela temporarily. However, analysts warn this could lead to internal power struggles among the remaining Maduro loyalists and the fragmented opposition.

2. Civil Unrest: Pro-government militias (known as *colectivos*) and military factions may launch an insurgency or guerrilla-style resistance, leading to prolonged civil conflict or even a civil war.
3. Geopolitical Polarization: Rivals such as China, Russia, and Iran have condemned the "blatant use of force," viewing it as a return to "gunboat diplomacy." Critics fear this may embolden other nations to launch similar unilateral strikes elsewhere (e.g., tensions regarding Taiwan or Iran).
4. Long-term Oil Outlook: If the U.S. successfully modernizes Venezuela's decaying infrastructure, global oil supply could eventually increase by 2-3 million barrels per day, potentially lowering long-term energy prices. However, the short-term remains volatile due to the risk of sabotage on pipelines and refineries.
5. Refugee Crisis: Intense fighting or a collapse of public order could trigger a fresh wave of migration into neighboring countries like Colombia and Brazil, further straining regional resources.

What can be the impact on India's interests?

1. Energy Security: India is largely shielded from immediate supply shocks because its reliance on Venezuelan crude had already plummeted. In 2024-2025, Venezuela accounted for only 0.3% of India's total oil imports due to ongoing U.S. sanctions.
2. Oil Imports: Indian private refiners, like Reliance Industries (RIL), possess some of the world's most sophisticated "complex" refineries designed to process the heavy, sour crude that Venezuela produces. If the U.S. stabilizes the region and lifts sanctions, India could resume high-volume imports, helping to diversify away from Russian and Middle Eastern oil.
3. Recovery of "Stuck" Assets and Dividends: India has nearly \$1 billion in dividends and payments stuck in Venezuela's oil system. Projects like *San Cristóbal* and *Carabobo-1* have been non-functional or underpaid for years.
4. Resumption of Production: A post-Maduro administration backed by the U.S. might allow OVL (ONGC Videsh Ltd) and Oil India to restart operations at these stranded oilfields, turning "dead" assets back into active energy sources for India.
5. The "Monroe Doctrine" Precedent: Analysts suggest the intervention signals a "harsher global order" where sovereignty is increasingly conditional. This puts pressure on India to secure its overseas assets in other volatile regions (like Africa or Central Asia) that may be subject to similar great-power maneuvers.

What can be the way forward?

1. U.S. Provisional Oversight: President Trump has stated the U.S. will "run the country" via a designated group until a "safe and judicious" transition is arranged. Secretary of State Marco Rubio clarified this as "leveraging control" over key assets rather than day-to-day administrative governance.
2. Debt Restructuring: A new government will need to negotiate the massive sovereign debt (over \$150 billion) owed to Russia, China, and various private bondholders. The U.S. may use its "management" of oil revenues as a bargaining chip in these negotiations.
3. Counter-Insurgency: Neutralizing pro-Maduro *colectivos* (armed militias) and ensuring the military remains in barracks. A "peacekeeping" or "advisory" force may be needed to prevent Caracas from sliding into gang-led anarchy.

4. Engage multilaterally: Push through UN, BRICS, G20, and Global South forums for de-escalation, humanitarian aid, and respect for sovereignty, aligning with Brazil and others.
5. Humanitarian Surge: Activating the \$606 million UN Humanitarian Response Plan for 2026 to address the immediate food and medicine shortages that the conflict might exacerbate.
6. Energy & Economic Safeguards:
 - a. Diversify imports: Accelerate discounted Russian, US, and Middle Eastern crude deals to buffer price spikes; monitor heavy-sour premiums affecting refiners.
 - b. Pursue opportunities: Negotiate favorable contracts in restructured Venezuelan oil sector, potentially unlocking \$1B for Indian firms like ONGC.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

Read More: The Hindu

Anti-Defection Law & The Role of Speaker – Explained Pointwise

The Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, also known as the Anti-Defection Law, was inserted by the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985, to curb the growing menace of political defections which destabilized governments in the post-1967 era. However, in recent years, the issue has once again taken center stage due to partisan actions by Legislative Speakers, resulting in erosion of democratic values and legal safeguards. Recently, the Telangana Legislative Assembly's Speaker dismissed the petition to disqualify 10 MLAs who have allegedly defected after the 2023 Legislative Assembly election results. His actions have been criticized by the members of the opposition parties of the State as being unilateral & biased.

What is the Tenth Schedule?

- The 10th Schedule of the Constitution, also known as Anti-Defection Law, addresses disqualification of MPs and MLAs for defection, a response to the political instability of the late 1960s when “party-hopping MLAs” toppled multiple state governments.
- Under the 10th Schedule, a member of either Parliament (MPs) or a State Legislature (MLAs/MLCs) can be disqualified if:
 - Voluntary Resignation: They voluntarily give up their membership of the political party on whose ticket they were elected.
 - Defying the Whip: They vote or abstain from voting in the House contrary to the directions (the “whip”) issued by their political party without prior permission.
 - Independent Members: An independent candidate joins any political party after being elected.
 - Nominated Members: A nominated member joins a political party after six months from the date they took their seat.
- Exceptions:
 - Merger: If at least two-thirds of the members of a legislative party agree to merge with another party, they are not disqualified.
 - Presiding Officers: A person elected as the Speaker or Chairman can resign from their party to maintain neutrality and can rejoin it after they leave the office without facing disqualification.
- Deciding Authority: The power to decide on disqualification rests with the Presiding Officer of the House (the Speaker in the Lok Sabha/Assemblies and the Chairman in the Rajya Sabha/Councils).
- Judicial Review: Originally, the law stated the Presiding Officer's decision was final and could not be challenged in court. However, in the Kihoto Hollohan case (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that the

Speaker acts as a tribunal, meaning their decision is subject to judicial review by High Courts and the Supreme Court.

- The 91st Amendment (2003):
 - Removed the “Split” provision: Previously, a “split” by one-third of a party’s members was protected. This was removed to prevent mass defections.
 - Ministerial Limit: It capped the total number of ministers (including the PM/CM) at 15% of the total strength of the Lok Sabha or State Assembly.
 - Holding Office: A member disqualified under the 10th Schedule cannot hold any remunerative political post or ministerial position until they are re-elected.

Evolution of Defection Law

Period	Development/Event	Speaker's Role	Examples
1985	52nd Constitutional Amendment Act inserts the Tenth Schedule into the Constitution.	Speaker given sole adjudicatory powers on disqualification of members.	Speaker acts as quasi-judicial authority under Tenth Schedule.
1992	Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (SC) upholds the constitutionality of Tenth Schedule, but allows judicial review of Speaker's decision.	Speaker's decision subject to judicial review, though he remains the initial authority.	SC: “Speaker acts as tribunal; not above the Constitution”.
1998-2003	Rise in coalition politics; loopholes like split (1/3rd rule) used to avoid disqualification.	Speaker's bias becomes evident; mass defections legalized under ‘split’ provision.	Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Goa saw misuse of split clause.
2003	91st Constitutional Amendment removes the split provision (1/3rd) and introduces merger provision (2/3rd).	Speaker continues to decide on disqualification, including verifying mergers.	Aimed at tightening law but allowed mass defections under ‘merger’ loophole.
2020	Keisham Meghachandra v. Speaker, Manipur: SC suggests Speaker should not have exclusive powers.	SC recommends independent tribunal headed by a retired judge.	Speaker delayed decision for over 3 years; defector became Minister.

2023	SC in Maharashtra case (Shinde vs. Thackeray): directs Speaker to decide within reasonable time.	Court sets specific deadlines for Speaker's decision.	October 2023: SC orders Maharashtra Speaker to decide within 2 weeks.
Ongoing Debate	Law Commission (1999), Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990), and others suggest reforms.	Push to remove Speaker's adjudicatory power; proposal for independent authority.	Recommendations remain unimplemented; discussed in Presiding Officers' Conferences.

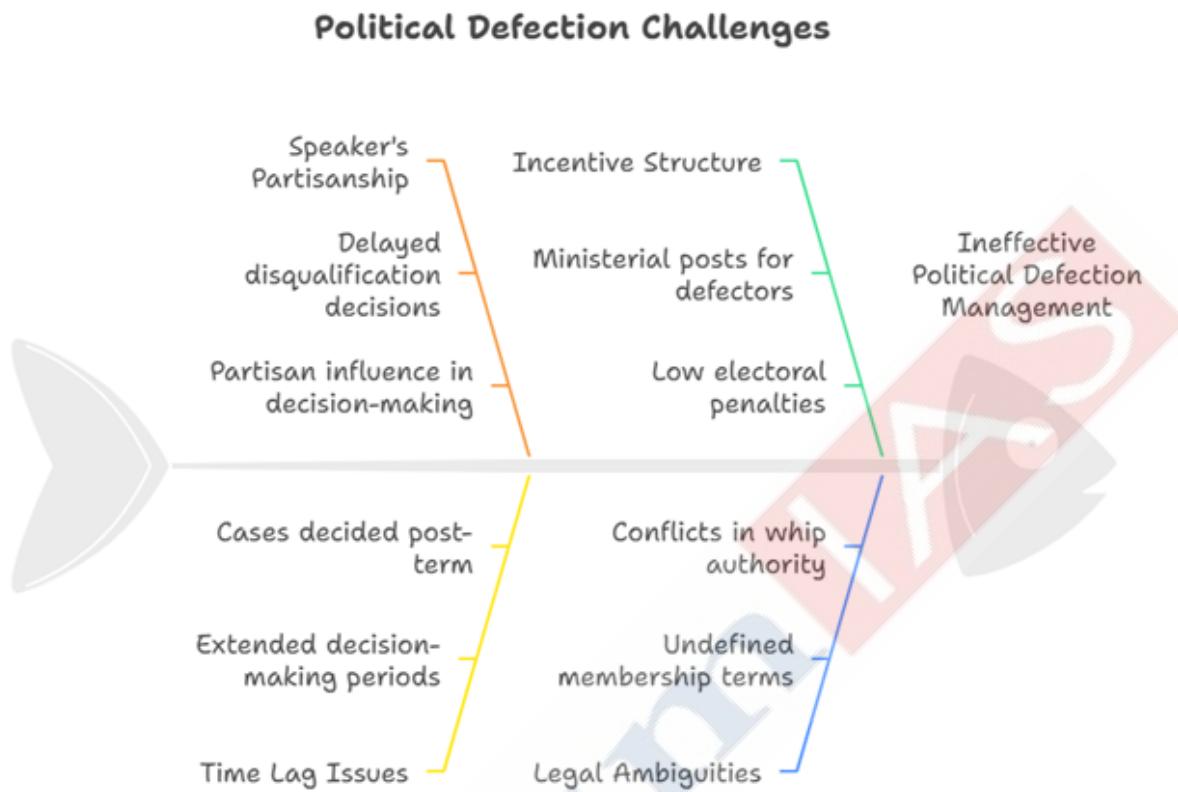
What is the Significance and Importance of an Independent and Neutral Speaker?

1. Guardianship of Legislative Integrity: The Speaker is expected to promote institutional neutrality, rule of law and to act as a quasi-judicial authority under the Tenth Schedule, but when partisanship takes precedence, it jeopardizes constitutional morality e.g. The 2020 Arunachal Pradesh defection case Supreme Court reiterated, "neutrality of the Speaker is critical to democratic stability".
2. Timely Adjudication and Trust in Institutions: The 2023 Constitution Bench in Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker Manipur reiterated that delays in disqualification proceedings violate the spirit of democracy.
3. Check on Political Horse-trading: The absence of an impartial Speaker allows post-election defections to the ruling party, as seen in Karnataka (2019) and Goa (2017).
4. Constitutional Expectation: The Speaker is expected to embody "propriety and impartiality," as noted by a five-judge Constitution Bench in May 2023, ensuring the Tenth Schedule's objective – to stabilize governments – is upheld.
5. Judicial Perspective: Erstwhile SC justice Gavai's observation that a speaker's "indecision" cannot defeat the anti-defection law's purpose emphasizes the need for neutrality. The Supreme Court's invocation of Article 142 powers in cases of non-compliance further reinforces this.

What are the government Initiatives and institutional Developments?

1. All India Presiding Officers Conference (2021-2023): Discussed reforms in Speaker's powers under the anti-defection law. Multiple officers expressed that "Speakers' roles must be reviewed".
2. 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003: Made merger provisions more stringent by raising the requirement to two-thirds of members for party mergers.
3. Supreme Court's Role as Constitutional Guardian: Article 142 has been invoked to "ensure justice is not defeated by technicality or partisan silence" – SC has directed Speakers in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana to act within a "reasonable time frame."

What are the challenges to the Autonomy and Integrity of Speaker's Role?



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1. Structural Partisanship & Political Capture: Speakers are elected by ruling parties and often act in a politically motivated manner e.g. Maharashtra defection case (2022) where delay benefited defectors who joined the ruling coalition.
2. Procedural Vacuum & Legal Ambiguity: The Tenth Schedule is silent on timelines for deciding petitions. Exceptions include a “merger” where at least two-thirds of a party’s members agree, as amended by the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 (up from one-third in 1985).
3. Limited Jurisdiction & Constitutional Boundaries: Courts cannot dictate the decision of the Speaker but can only ensure timely adjudication, limiting judicial recourse.
4. Legal Ambiguities: No definition of voluntary giving up membership and Whip’s authority vs. conscience vote conflicts e.g. Average 2.3 years for disqualification decisions (ADR 2022 study), 68% cases decided after MLA’s term ended (PRS 2023).
5. Misuse of Delay to Influence Governance: Defectors are inducted as Ministers or enjoy influence before eventual disqualification e.g. Defecting MLAs get ministerial posts in 71% cases (CMS 2021 study), only 12% of defectors lost subsequent elections (Trivedi Centre 2023).
6. Democratic Fatigue & Electoral Cynicism: Frequent defections with impunity undermine public faith in electoral processes.
7. Institutional Opacity & Role Ambiguity: No penalties or disciplinary procedures exist for Speakers who delay decisions.

What should be the Way Forward?

1. Independent Tribunal Mechanism: Establish a neutral tribunal headed by retired judges to decide disqualification pleas, as recommended by Law Commission and NCRWC.
2. Statutory Timeline for Decision: Amend the law to provide a maximum of 60 days to decide defection cases.
3. Code of Conduct for Presiding Officers: Create binding norms and codes for neutrality and accountability.
4. Constitutional Remedy & Democratic Safeguard: Allow courts to intervene if decisions are unduly delayed, using Article 142 for enforcing timelines.
5. Public Accountability and Electoral Penalty: Launch civic education campaigns and promote electoral punishment for defectors.
6. Strengthening Intra-Party Democracy: Empower parties to uphold ideological integrity and reduce dependence on post-election deals.
7. Global Best Practices:
 - In UK and Canada, Speakers are strictly non-partisan and elected by a secret ballot across party lines.
 - In South Africa, a Judicial Commission handles defection matters, not the Speaker.
8. Committees Recommendations:
 - The Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990) and Law Commission's 170th Report (1999) recommended divesting the Speaker of adjudicatory powers under the Tenth Schedule.
 - NITI Aayog and National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) have advocated for setting up an independent tribunal headed by a retired judge.

Conclusion: In the words of SC, "It is about time that the Parliament review its expectation that the Assembly Speakers & Chairmen will live up to the dignity of their high office & crush the evil of political defection by deciding disqualification proceedings against legislators in time & without favour".

Read more- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

Skill Development in India – Challenges & Initiatives – Explained Pointwise

Over the last decade, India has built one of the largest skilling ecosystems in the world. Between 2015 & 2025, India's flagship skilling programme, PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana, has trained & certified around 1.4cr candidates. Still, the employability outcomes remain uneven, and PLFS data show that wage gains from vocational training are modest & inconsistent, particularly in informal employment, where most workers are absorbed, offering limited recognition for certified skills & very less visible improvement in quality of life.



What are the challenges or limitations in India's skill development programme?

1. **Skill Mismatch:** According to the *India Skills Report 2025*, only about 54.8% of Indian graduates are considered employable. Many training programs still focus on outdated curricula that don't reflect current industry needs in AI, robotics, or the green economy.
2. **Low Placement Rates:** PMKVY 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 had placement rates of roughly 18-23 percent, dropping to about 10 percent in PMKVY 3.0, indicating limited translation of training into jobs.
3. **Lack of "Skin in the Game":** Many employers do not recognize government certifications, preferring their own internal training or private certifications (like those from Google or AWS) which they find more rigorous.
4. **Weak Apprenticeships:** While the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) has grown, it still accounts for a tiny fraction of the total workforce compared to countries like Germany.
5. **Failure of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs):** SSCs were created to act as industry-facing institutions that define standards, ensure relevance, and anchor employability. SSCs have not only failed to fulfill its mandate but have largely limited themselves to standard creation.
6. **Aspiration Gap:** Traditional degrees are still seen as the only path to social mobility. Vocational courses are often viewed as a "last resort" for those who fail in mainstream academics.
7. **Rural Disconnect:** Training centers are often clustered in urban hubs, leaving rural youth to deal with long travel times and high opportunity costs.
8. **Gender Barriers:** Women face additional hurdles including limited mobility, lack of childcare at centers, and societal restrictions, leading to lower participation in high-growth technical trades.
9. **Fragmented Ecosystem:** The entire skill development ecosystem in India is fragmented: training is delivered by one entity, assessment by another, certification by SSCs, and placement by someone else. This fragmentation has eroded trust & diffuses the responsibility without consequences.

What are the various initiatives for skill development of the labour force in India?

<p>Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides short-term training, reskilling, and upskilling. Introduces 400+ new courses in emerging technologies, including AI, 5G, cybersecurity, green hydrogen, and drone technology. Promotes on-the-job training (OJT) and recognition of prior learning to equip workers with globally recognized skills. Aligns with other government initiatives such as PM Vishwakarma, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, National Green Hydrogen Mission, and NAL JAL Mitra, enabling cross-sector skill impact. Target Beneficiaries: Individuals aged 15–59 years.
<p>Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aims to expand apprenticeship training across industries. Provides 25% of the stipend (up to Rs. 1,500 per apprentice per month) through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Expands apprenticeship opportunities in AI, robotics, blockchain, green energy, and Industry 4.0. Focuses on small establishments, MSMEs, aspirational districts, and the North-East Region. Target Beneficiaries: Individuals aged 14-35 years.
<p>Sector Skill Councils (SSCs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSCs are industry-led, autonomous bodies that act as the primary link between the government's skilling policy and the actual requirements of the workforce. They were established under the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to ensure that training isn't just happening in a vacuum but is directly aligned with what employers actually need. Core functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting Standards: They create National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Qualification Packs (QP). Assessment and Certification: They conduct exams and practical tests to certify that a trainee has actually mastered the required skills. Labour Market Information (LMIS): They track sector-specific data to predict which jobs will be in demand over the next 5 years, helping the government decide where to allocate funds.

	<p>iv. Train the Trainer (ToT): To ensure quality at the grassroots, SSCs train and license the instructors who work at various training centers across the country.</p>
Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community-driven vocational training program aimed at women, rural youth, and economically weaker sections. • Provides low-cost, flexible skill development programs. • Linked with initiatives like PM JANMAN and Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society (ULLAS) to ensure inclusive skilling. • Target Beneficiaries: Individuals aged 15-45 years.

What can be the way forward to improve skill development in India?

1. **Mandatory Apprenticeships:** Transitioning from optional to mandatory apprenticeship-linked degrees (e.g., the PM-NAPS expansion). This ensures students spend 50% of their time on the shop floor or in an office rather than just a classroom.
2. **Industry-Integrated ITIs:** Modernizing Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) where companies like Tata, Maruti, or Google “adopt” centers to install the latest equipment.
3. **Academic Credit Bank:** Under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, credits earned from a welding or coding certificate can now be transferred to a formal university degree. Embed vocational subjects as electives from Class 8 under NEP 2020, with credit transfer between academic and skill streams for seamless mobility.
4. **Global Mobility:** Signing Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreements (MMPAs) with countries like Germany, Japan, and France to ensure Indian certifications are recognized globally.
5. **Enforce Accountability:** India's skilling challenge is a failure of accountability, not of intent or government funding. Thus, focus on enforcing accountability in the institutions of the skilling ecosystem, especially in SSCs. Until SSCs are held accountable for employability, certification will remain symbolic rather than economic.

Conclusion: When skills are embedded in degrees, when industry is treated as co-owner, and when SSCs are made answerable for placement outcomes, skilling move from fragmented welfare intervention to a pillar of national economic empowerment.

UPSC GS-3: Indian Economy

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

Public Health Sector- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

India's public health system struggles with chronic underfunding, privatization, policy failure, and social inequalities. At the same time, the risk factors for disease are steadily rising due to policy gaps & systemic policy failures. The consumption of ultra-processed foods is driving an epidemic of non-communicable diseases, while unchecked air, water, and soil pollution, along with climate change are pushing millions into poverty. In this scenario, the role of public healthcare becomes even more important.

In this article, we will look at what constitutes a public health and the public health sector in India. We will look at the challenges faced by the public health sector in India. We will also look at the significance of a robust public health sector in India and the ways to achieve it.

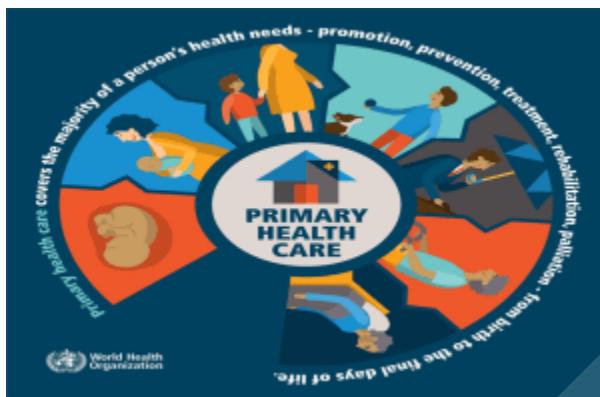


Figure 1. Source- WHO

What constitutes Public Health? What is the structure of public health sector in India?

Public Health: According to WHO, "Public health refers to all **organized measures** to **prevent disease**, **promote health**, and **prolong life** among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to **provide conditions** in which people can be **healthy** and **focus on entire populations**, not on individual patients or diseases."

Categorisation of Public Health: Public health needs can be broadly categorised into three groups.

Protection against Diseases of Poverty faced by the Poor and Vulnerable	It includes diseases such as tuberculosis , malaria , undernutrition , maternal death , bouts of illnesses due to food and water-borne infections leading to typhoid , hepatitis , and diarrhoeal diseases . These are faced by the poor and the vulnerable.
Protection against Environmental issue related diseases faced by the Middle Class	It includes air, water, waste management, lack of drainage facility, failure to ensure healthy foods and eateries, road traffic accidents, climate change and the rise of chronic illnesses .
Curative Public healthcare	Curative care needs of a population are the most popular needs in public health. Provisioning of curative care is the most critical and controversial policy question in public health.

Levels of Public Health Sector in India:

Primary Healthcare	<p>India's primary health sector consists of sub-centers (SCs) and primary health centres (PHCs), which form the foundation of the public healthcare system.</p> <p>Sub-centers: These are the most peripheral units, serving populations of 5,000 in plain areas and 3,000 in hilly/tribal areas.</p> <p>Primary Health Centers: These are the first point of contact with a qualified doctor, serving populations of 20,000-30,000. Each PHC is expected to have 4-6 beds and provide promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative care.</p> <p>The poor and the vulnerable rely on primary healthcare institutions of the public sector for primary-level care. It is the most affordable public health service and is closer to their places of residence.</p>
Secondary Healthcare	<p>The secondary health sector in India consists of Community Health Centers (CHCs), which serve as referral units for PHCs.</p> <p>CHCs are 30-bed hospitals providing specialist care in medicine, surgery, obstetrics & gynaecology, and paediatrics. There is one CHC for every 80,000-120,000 population in plain areas and 40,000-60,000 population in hilly/tribal areas.</p>
Tertiary Healthcare	<p>The tertiary health sector consists of district hospitals, medical college hospitals, and other highly specialized facilities.</p> <p>District Hospitals are 100-300 bed facilities providing specialist care, located at the district level.</p> <p>Medical College Hospitals are tertiary care teaching institutions, located in state capitals and major cities.</p> <p>Specialized Tertiary Healthcare Facilities: These include regional cancer centres, mental health institutes, trauma centres, and other super-speciality hospitals.</p> <p>The tertiary sector provides highly specialized care and acts as a referral point for the secondary and primary levels of the health system.</p>

What are the Government initiatives that have been launched for the development of Public Health Sector in India?

National Health Mission (NRHM) National Health Mission (NHM)	<p>Rural Mission and</p> <p>The NHM and NRHM have focused on strengthening public sector healthcare through architectural correction. Efforts have been undertaken to follow the principles of primary health by strengthening the primary healthcare institutions under these missions. These have led to the development of 1,53,655 sub centres, 25,308 primary health centres (PHC) and 5,396 community health centres (CHC) as per the rural health statistics, 2015.</p>
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Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)	It is a publicly funded health insurance scheme (PFHI) that provides financial protection to over 100 million families for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs)	The government is working towards transforming primary health centres into HWCs to provide comprehensive primary healthcare services, including preventive and promotive care .
Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana	PMSSY aims to enhance tertiary care capacities and strengthen medical education in the country by setting up new AIIMS (All India Institutes of Medical Sciences) institutions and upgrading existing government medical colleges .
Jan Aushadhi Scheme	The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) aims to provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices through Jan Aushadhi Kendras.
National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)	NDHM aims to create a digital health ecosystem , including health IDs for citizens and the establishment of a national digital health infrastructure.

What are the existing challenges in the public health sector in India?

1. Inadequate Access to Healthcare: Inadequate access to basic healthcare services remains a critical public health issue, particularly in rural and underserved areas. For ex- **Shortage of health Infrastructure and health professionals** (shortage of around 600,000 doctors).
2. Myopic focus on short-term results: There has been focus on promotion of initiatives that promise immediate results, such as **opening new hospitals, subsidised treatments, and populist health policies**. The **neglect of the holistic development of primary and secondary healthcare capabilities** has led to deterioration of public health sector in India.
3. Low Healthcare expenditure by the Govt: The **government** (Centre and states put together) spends about **Rs 2.8 lakh crore**, that is roughly around **1.1% of the GDP**. This is extremely low when compared to other government health expenditure in countries like **China (3%), Thailand (2.7%), Vietnam (2.7%)** and **Sri Lanka (1.4%)**.
4. Lack of adequate emphasis on critical areas: There has been lack of adequate attention to critical areas such as **sanitation, disease surveillance, and public health education**, which are important to maintain population health and prevent disease outbreaks. For ex- **Lack of long-term strategies** like **understanding vector control or developing effective vaccines** in case of dengue.

5. Profit-Driven Pharma Sector: The pharmaceutical industry's profit-driven nature **often sidelines areas such as public health**. There has been a loss of trust towards healthcare providers (private sector due to commercial interests). For ex- **Medical marginalisation of TB patients in India**.

6. Lack of a Comprehensive Approach: India's current public health approach is **physician-centric**, without **adequate focus on expertise from various fields** such as environmental science, sociology, urban planning, and economics.

7. Lack of Preventive Care: Preventive healthcare is undervalued in India, despite its importance in reducing disease incidence and healthcare costs. This is especially significant as India faces a '**triple burden**' of disease, comprising **communicable diseases** (like tuberculosis and malaria), **non-communicable diseases** (such as diabetes and heart disease), and **emerging infectious diseases**.

What are the advantages of robust public health sector in India?

1. Improved the Access to Healthcare: The Lancet in its latest study ranked **India at 145th among 195 countries in terms of quality and accessibility of healthcare**, behind its neighbours China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Thus, there is a need to improve the public health sector by making it more accessible by **improving the quality of medical professionals** and **infrastructure**.

2. Improved Health Outcomes: Robust public healthcare leads to early detection and treatment of diseases, resulting in improved health outcomes and a decrease in the burden of illness. For ex- **Early detection and treatment of Non-Communicable diseases like Cardiovascular Diseases**.

3. Reduction of Financial Burden: Improved public healthcare services can **alleviate the financial burden** and **improve household financial stability** by reducing the high out of pocket expenditure. For ex- According to the WHO, **55 million people fall into poverty or deeper poverty every year** due to catastrophic expenditures on health.

4. Social Justice: Universal healthcare and publicly funded health system provide timely, effective and free care, irrespective of social class. This in turn promotes social justice and **fulfillment of DPSP principles**.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. Implementation of the NITI Aayog Action Plan for Health: It has recommended to focus on public health through **significantly increasing government expenditure on it (2.5% of GDP)** and prioritize preventive care rather than provide curative care.

2. National Commission for Healthcare Cost Management: The government should appoint a **National Commission to make recommendations for the spending on healthcare systems** and monitor its performance.

3. Separating Health from Political Processes: Public health decisions should be based on **scientific evidence** and **long-term goals** rather than short-term political interests.

4. Nutrition Support: Investments in nutrition programmes will have positive long-term implications for health and productivity.

5. Comprehensive Approach: Effective public health management should **encompass preventive measures, policy formulation, community health, environmental health, etc.**

6. Universal health coverage: State governments should **draw up blueprints for universal health coverage** and begin experimenting and innovating with pilot programmes.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS Paper 2 Social Justice – Issues relating to Health.

Central-State Transfers – Explained Pointwise

Central transfers have become a subject of intense debate. In this article, we will explore the importance & criticisms against central transfers & what could be the way forward in this regard.

What does Central Transfers means?

- Central Transfers refer to the financial resources allocated by the central government to state governments in India to address fiscal imbalances and support public expenditure.
- These transfers primarily occur through tax devolution and grants recommended by the Finance Commission. They ensure equitable resource distribution across states with varying revenue capacities. Finance Commissions determine both the overall share to States & the formula for tax devolution.
- There are two main reasons for these transfers:
 1. Vertical Equity: Ensuring that states have enough money to perform the duties assigned to them by the Constitution.
 2. Horizontal Equity: Reducing the gap between rich and poor states. For example, a state with less industrial activity needs extra help to provide the same level of education or infrastructure as a wealthy state.

Types of Central Transfers:

Tax Devolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A fixed percentage of the total taxes collected by the Centre is shared with states. This is currently around 41%. ● e.g. Sharing of GST or Corporation Tax.
Grants-in-Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Specific sums of money given to states. These can be “untied” (spend on anything) or “tied” (must be used for a specific project). ● e.g. Disaster relief funds or revenue deficit grants.
Centrally Sponsored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funds provided for specific national priorities where the Centre and State share the cost.

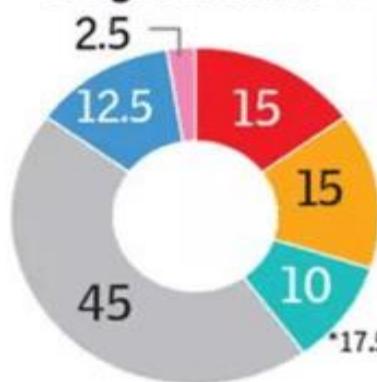
Schemes
(CSS)

- e.g. National Health Mission or PM Awas Yojana.

HOW THE BOOTY IS DIVIDED

FORMULA THAT DECIDES A STATE'S SHARE

Weight in 15th FC



Weight in 14th FC

Weight in 14th FC

- Population
- Area
- Forest & ecology
- Income distance
- Demographic performance
- Tax effort

*17.5% according to 1971 population,
10% by 2011 population

STATES' SHARE IN DIVISIBLE POOL (%)



*Effective share does not change due to change in J&K status

What is the importance of Central Transfers?

1. Correcting Vertical Imbalance:

- The Constitution gives the Centre more "buoyant" (high-growth) tax powers like Income Tax and Customs, while States handle high-expenditure items like health, education, and police.
- Without transfers, states would perpetually be in debt or unable to fund basic public services. Central transfers ensure that states have enough liquidity to function effectively.

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2. Promoting Horizontal Equity (Reducing Regional Gaps):

- Not all states have the same economic potential. A highly industrialized state like Maharashtra can generate more revenue than a landlocked or mountainous state like Bihar or Himachal Pradesh.
- Transfers use an “Equalization” principle. By giving a larger share of funds to poorer or geographically disadvantaged states, the system ensures that a citizen in a low-income state still gets access to a basic level of healthcare and schooling.

3. Maintaining Fiscal Stability & Insurance:

- The Central government can borrow money on better terms than individual states and has a larger “reserve” to handle shocks.
- During disasters (like floods or pandemics), the Centre provides emergency grants to help states recover without collapsing their local budgets.
- If one region’s economy slows down, transfers act as a form of “inter-regional insurance,” keeping the local administration running despite the dip in local tax collection.

4. Implementing National Priorities:

- The Centre often wants to achieve nationwide goals, such as “Electricity for All” or “Universal Vaccination.”
- Through Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), the Centre provides “tied” funds that incentivize states to follow a national development roadmap. This ensures that even while states have autonomy, the country moves toward common developmental targets.

What are the criticisms against Central Transfers?

1. **The “North-South” Divide:** States like Karnataka, TN & Maharashtra argue that they contribute disproportionately to central tax revenue but receive relatively smaller shares through tax devolution. Southern states criticize transfers for using population as a metric. They argue they are being “punished” for successfully implementing population control and growing their economies, while “failing” states receive more funds.
2. **“Conditionality” and Tied Grants:** Many transfers come as “conditional grants” (like Centrally Sponsored Schemes). This forces the states to spend on central priorities rather than local needs, turning states into mere “administrative arms” of the center.
3. **One-Size-Fits-All Approach:** Centralized schemes often fail to account for regional diversity. A scheme designed for a mountainous region may be irrelevant or inefficient for a coastal state, yet the state must implement it to receive the funding.
4. **Political Favoritism:** Discretionary grants (those not mandated by a formula) are criticized for being used as political tools to reward “friendly” state governments or penalize opposition-led ones.
5. **Lax Tax Effort:** If states know they will receive a guaranteed transfer from the center, they may have less incentive to broaden their own local tax base or collect taxes efficiently. This is often called a “perverse incentive.”
6. **Gap-Filling Approach:** When transfers are designed to cover state deficits, it encourages states to overspend, knowing the central government will eventually “bail them out” to maintain national stability.

7. **Dependency Trap:** Over time, states may become “transfer-dependent,” where their entire budget planning relies on central volatility rather than sustainable local growth.
8. **Transfer of Inefficiency:** Taking money from high-performing, industrialized states and giving it to low-performing ones can sometimes lead to a “transfer of inefficiency,” where capital is moved from high-return areas to low-productivity regions.
9. **Transparency in the “Divisible Pool”:** Central governments are often accused of using “cesses and surcharges” (which are not shared with states) to keep a larger portion of the tax revenue for themselves, shrinking the actual pool of money available for transfer.

What should be the way forward?

1. **GSDP-based Formula:** A higher weightage for GSDP share in the central transfer formula would better reflect the accrual of central tax revenues, acknowledge the contributions of States to national income, and improve the perceived fairness & credibility of India's inter-governmental fiscal transfer system.
2. **Expansion of the Divisible Pool:** A major demand is to include Cesses and Surcharges in the pool of taxes shared with states. Currently, these are kept entirely by the Centre and have grown to over 10% of Gross Tax Revenue, effectively shrinking the states' actual share below the recommended 41%.
3. **Higher Devolution Target:** Some experts and states are calling for the vertical share to be increased from 41% to 50% to account for the states' increased burden in social sector spending (health, education, and climate resilience).
4. **Rewarding Performance:** Moving beyond just “population” and “income distance,” the 16th FC is expected to give higher weight to Tax Effort and Demographic Performance. This rewards states that have successfully controlled population growth and improved their own tax collection.
5. **Equity vs. Efficiency:** While “Income Distance” (giving more to poorer states) remains vital for national stability, there is a push to make the formula less “linear.” This ensures that developed states aren't disincentivized from further growth.
6. **Empowering Local Bodies:** Recommendations suggest doubling the Inter-Governmental Transfers (IGT) to urban and rural local bodies, recognizing cities as “engines of growth” that require massive infrastructure funding.
7. **Streamlining CSS:** Centrally Sponsored Schemes (like MGNREGA or Ayushman Bharat) are often seen as “one-size-fits-all.” The states should be given more flexibility to adapt these schemes to local needs rather than imposing rigid 60:40 or 50:50 funding ratios.
8. **Institutionalizing a “Loan Council”:** To manage the high debt levels of both Centre and States, a permanent body could oversee fiscal deficit targets, replacing the ad-hoc nature of current limits.
9. **Integrating Technology:** Using AI and data analytics to track “Tax Accrual” vs. “Tax Collection.” This would help identify where economic value is actually created (e.g., in manufacturing hubs) versus where corporate taxes are filed (e.g., headquarters in Mumbai).

UPSC GS-2: Indian Polity

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

POCSO Act - Salient Features & Challenges - Explained Pointwise

Over the past few years, courts around the country as well as human rights activists have sought a review of the POCSO Act with respect to cases that involve consensual sexual relationship between teenagers aged 16-18 years. In the present framework, a consensual adolescent relationship is hard to distinguish from coercive abuse. Thus, several members of the civil society have written about not to criminalize such consensual relationship & recommended adding an exception to the Act which would preserve the protective intent of the Act while preventing its misuse against adolescent relationship that are not exploitative in nature.

In this regard, let us understand the POCSO Act. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was enacted in June 2012 and came into force in November 2012. The Act has played an instrumental role in addressing sexual offences against children. Yet the frequency of sexual offences against children has risen alarmingly in the last few years. There have been several challenges in the implementation of the Act, including the rise in pendency of cases and low conviction rate.

What is the background to the enactment of the POCSO Act?

- Despite strong constitutional (Articles 15(3), 21A, 24, 45 etc.) and international legal frameworks towards strengthening child rights, India's legal system lacked any dedicated provision against child sexual abuse for long.
- The criminal law (IPC) failed to recognise sexual assault and exploitation of children as separate offences. The offences under IPC, intended to criminalize sexual offences against women, fell short of addressing the complexities, social impact & mental impact of sexual exploitation of children.
- In *State of Punjab v Major Singh (1966)*, while addressing the appeal in a child sexual assault case where the accused was charged with section 354 of IPC, (assault with the intent to outrage her modesty), the High Court of Punjab acquitted the accused holding that a girl of seven and a half months does not possess womanly modesty, and therefore, the provision does not apply to the case. The Judgment was later overturned but showed shortcomings of the (then) existing provisions.
- IPC provisions failed to criminalize the instances of sexual assault and molestation of boys. The nature of the criminal trial under the Code for Criminal Procedure, 1973 did not account for the special needs of child witnesses who were victims of sexual offences and the support they need to participate in the criminal justice process.

International Conventions on Child Rights

The Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924)

- The Declaration listed 5 principles directed toward the **development of children**. However, these principles considered children as an object of protection, **instead of holders of rights**. The Declaration **did not put any obligation** on the member States.

Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959)

- It was adopted by the UNGA in 1959. The Declaration recognised the need for the protection of children against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966)

- Article 10 recognised that children and young persons should be **protected from economic and social exploitation**. **Employment of children in work harmful** to their health, life or likely to hamper their normal development should be **punishable by law**.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1990)

- It was adopted by UNGA in 1989 and entered into force in 1990. It offered a **legally binding instrument** that recognised children's rights. It established a **Committee on the Rights of the Child** to monitor the progress of the member States in realising the goals envisioned by CRC. It recognised State parties' obligation to **protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation**.

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Reports of the Law Commission:

- **42nd Report (1971):** Inclusion of a dedicated provision to penalize the offence of sexual abuse of children of all ages and sex.
- **156th Report (1997):** Opined that the existing provisions against sexual offences were sufficient to address this issue.
- **172nd Report (2000):** Recommended a major amendments to address the offence of child sexual abuse and exploitation including amendment to IPC Section 375 to make it gender neutral, increase penalty in case of sexual offences committed by near relatives and persons in position of trust, penalizing touching any part of the body of an adolescent with sexual intent etc.
- **283rd Report (2023):** The Commission explicitly advised against lowering the age of consent from 18 to 16.

Precursor to POCSO Act:

- In 2003, the State Government of Goa enacted Goa Children's Act to promote child rights and children's development in the State and counter rise of child abuse rackets in the State.
- In 2005, the Department of Women and Child Development prepared the Draft Offences against Children (Protection) Bill, to address different offences targeted against children, including sexual offences. The Ministry of Home Affairs suggested that there should be separate comprehensive legislation against child abuse.
- In 2007, a Report 'The Study of Child Abuse' published by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (based on ~12,500 children) found that 50.76% of children surveyed reported having faced one or more form of sexual abuse, indicating seriousness of the issue.
- In September 2010, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, prepared the draft Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Bill, 2010. After long discussions, the POCSO Act

was passed by the Parliament in June 2012 and was enforced on the occasion of Children's Day on November 14, 2012.

What are the salient provisions of the POCSO Act?

1. Confidentiality of the victim's identity: The POCSO Act lays out the protocol for the media and imposes the obligation to conceal the name of the child victim, until the Special Court gives its permission for the information to be made public.
2. Gender-neutral Provisions: The Act doesn't make a difference based on the gender of the victim or the assaulter. Any person under the age of 18 is considered a child, and in some cases, the courts have even found women guilty of sexually abusing children.
3. Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Cases: Often families try to hide intra-family child abuse offences. In order for the POCSO Act to work properly, third parties who know or suspect these crimes must report them. These laws have been made based on the idea that children are weak and helpless and that it is society's job to protect their best interests.
4. Child-friendly Investigation and Trial: The POCSO Act lays down the procedure of investigation and trial which has been formulated keeping in mind the needs of a child. These include procedure for recording of statement, medical examination and designation of special child friendly courts.
5. Differentiate various sexual abuse: This Act distinguishes between a wide variety of forms of sexual abuse, including non-penetrative and penetrative assault, and sexual harassment among others. The Act lays down stringent punishment for exposing children to, or using them to create Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM or child pornography).

What revisions have been made to the POCSO Act?

In 2019, concerned with rising cases of sexual offences against children and in response to coming to light of certain heinous sexual crimes committed against children, the Ministry of Women and Child Development introduced an amendment to the Act to deter offenders and ensure safety for children. The amendment made the following changes:

1. It increased the minimum punishment for penetrative sexual assault from 7 years imprisonment to 10 years and aggravated penetrative sexual assault from 10 years imprisonment to 20 years.
2. It also introduced the punishment of the death penalty for the offence of aggravated penetrative sexual assault.
3. It introduced offences for transmitting or propagating pornographic materials involving a child and failing to destroy or report such pornographic materials.

What are the shortcomings in the working of the POCSO Act?

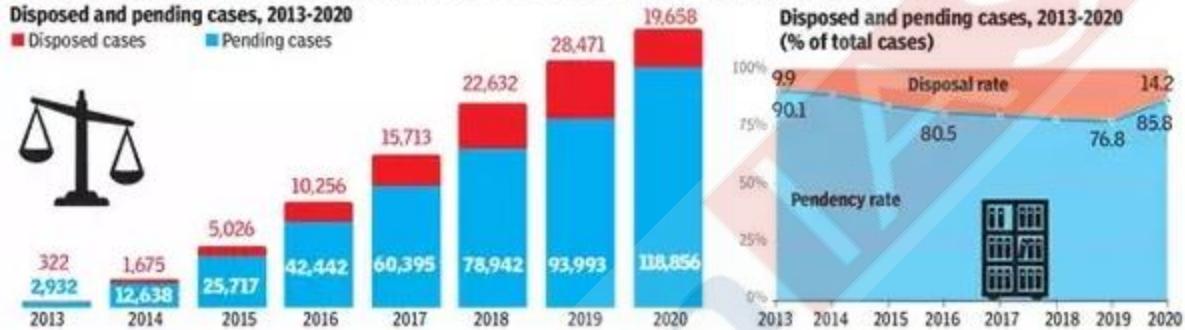
1. At the Trial Stage: The challenges at this stage include:
 - a. Lack of Special Courts in all the districts.
 - b. Lack of Special Public Prosecutors for Special Courts.
 - c. Non-compliance with the timelines prescribed by the Act.
2. At the Post-Trial Stage: While final compensation may find a mention in the sentence order, interim compensation finds no mention in any orders of the Special Courts. Often the disbursal of compensation is delayed.
3. Hurdles in implementation: There are several hurdles:

- a. The slow pace of designation of Special Courts.
- b. Delay in investigation and filing of chargesheets.
- c. Non-appointment of support persons for child victims.
- d. Delay in disposal of POCSO Cases.

4. Pendency of Cases: The pendency of POCSO cases has reached 85% in 2020.

Pendency Rose Sharply In 2020 As Covid Hit

The total number of POCSO cases reported on eCourts rose steadily between 2013 and 2020. But though the share of pending cases in total POCSO cases had been declining consistently, there was a sharp increase in 2020, which could be attributed to the fact that the district judiciary did not function at its usual capacity during the Covid-induced lockdowns, leading to poor disposal. While the number of cases disposed rose between 2013 and 2019, the number of cases disposed fell sharply from 2019 to 2020.



Source: Times of India

5. Legal Aids Create Nuisance: Many legal aids add extra information to make the case stronger. Many times false information is added in the complaint. This only creates issues in the moving forward of the case.
6. Inadequate awareness about the POCSO Act: A 2020 study on Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Attitudes by World Vision India found that only 35% children and 32% caregivers were aware about the POCSO Act. The awareness varied across urban, rural and tribal areas with tribal areas being the least aware.
7. Inadequate Training of Various Stakeholders: Child Protection System involves a lot of stakeholders like Private and Government Medical Practitioners, Juvenile Justice Boards, Law Enforcement Officials (Police), Judges, Public Prosecutors etc. All stakeholders should be aware of their own as well other stakeholders' responsibilities. At present, there is lack of adequate training for many stakeholders e.g., Private medical practitioners are usually the first point of contact for child victims but no mandatory training is provided to enable them to handle cases of child sexual abuse effectively.
8. Weaponization of the Act by the Families: Over the years, the POCSO Act is being weaponized by the families to punish the young persons, especially the young men in romantic relationship with young women. Thus, the statute which was designed to shield against predatory violence has been subverted into enforcing parental authority & traditional social boundaries.
9. Low Conviction Rate: Even though the disposal rate of the cases registered under POCSO Act by the fast track special court has increased to 109%, however, the conviction rate has declined from 35% in 2019 to 29% in 2023. Thus, faster trials have not meant fairer verdicts.

Disposals up, convictions down

The trend of faster case disposals raises questions about investigative capacity, forensic delays and support systems for children

Year-wise disposal and conviction data (2019–25)

Year	Disposal rate /Case resolution	Conviction rate
2019	10.8% of total pending trials completed	34.9% (National average, NCRB*)
2020	5.0% (Sharp decline due to COVID-19 lockdowns and court closures)	39.6% (Temporary spike reported during pandemic year)
2021	71% (67,734 cases disposed of out of 95,238 registered)	32.2% (Resumption of declining trend)
2022	88% (97,616 cases disposed of out of 1,11,357 registered)	~30% (National trend; variations reported across studies)
2023	90% (1,06,919 cases disposed of out of 1,19,016 registered)	29% (National average, NCRB)
2024	87% (1,06,982 cases disposed of out of 1,22,500 registered)	19% (Fast track special courts; ~81% acquittals)
2025	109% (87,754 cases disposed of against 80,320 registered)	Conviction outcomes uneven; State-wise variation remains high

(Sources: National Judicial Data Grid via Lok Sabha Q.1018;
*National Crime Records Bureau Crime in India 2019-2023)

Source: The Hindu

What steps can be taken to enhance effectiveness of the POCSO Act?

The Vidhi Center has provided several recommendations to improve the functioning of the Act:

1. Legislative and Policy Recommendations:
 - a. Reduce the age of consent from 18 to 16 years with adequate safeguards.
 - b. Hold public consultations with domain experts before making any substantive amendments to the Act.
 - c. Stipulate a time limit for consideration of disbursement of interim compensation to the victim.
2. Making POCSO Courts Functional:
 - a. Appoint adequately trained Special Public Prosecutors exclusively for POCSO courts where they have not been appointed. Progress for this can be monitored by respective High Courts.
 - b. Establish Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centres, with appropriate infrastructure, in all POCSO courts in accordance with the Supreme Court judgment in *State of Maharashtra v Bandu @ Daulat and Smruti Tukaram Badade v State of Maharashtra*.

- c. Employ a 'hybrid' approach for recording of evidence wherein the evidence of certain witnesses like doctors, forensic experts can be recorded virtually.
- d. Ensure the appointment and continuous presence of support persons in every pre-trial and trial stage.
- e. Create mechanisms to enable judges and prosecutors to have the required skill set to deal with the 'vicarious trauma' they experience when dealing with cases of heinous sexual offences committed against children.
- f. Specifically train judges to write operational compensation to allow for timely and effective disbursement of compensation to victims.

3. Increasing awareness about the POCSO Act:

- a. Include age-appropriate information about POCSO in school curriculum, including information on helplines like Childline.
- b. Impart POCSO awareness training to school staff. Include POCSO in the curriculum of students undergoing teaching courses like B.Ed, M.Ed etc.

4. Capacity building at all levels: Conduct periodic integrated capacity building programmes for stakeholders with a focus on sensitivity training.

5. Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs): The Report also recommends to set up more Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs) while improving the capacity and infrastructure of existing ones.

6. The "Romeo-Juliet" Clause: The Supreme Court has urged the Centre to consider a specific clause (often called the "Romeo-Juliet law" in other countries) that would exempt consensual adolescent relationships from the most severe rigors of the Act.

Conclusion: Despite its progressive provisions, the lacunae in the implementation of the POCSO Act has reduced its efficacy. The perennial problem of judicial pendency has affected the POCSO Special Courts with pendency rising, and time required to dispose cases increasing gradually. The advent of digital technologies and associated concerns (like child pornography) are going to make addressal of child abuse more challenging in future. The recommendations provided by the Vidhi Centre are worthwhile which, if implemented, can go a long way in addressing the issues with the functioning of the POCSO Act.

Read More: [Indian Express](#), [The Times of India](#), [The Times of India](#), [Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy](#), [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus GS-2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Article 6 (A6) of Paris Agreement – Explained Pointwise

The adoption of the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (Article 6.4) at COP29 marked a milestone in the transition from the Clean Development Mechanism & has paved the way for a more rigorous, transparent, and globally aligned crediting framework under the Paris Agreement. In this entire scenario of climate finance, India has transformed from a cautious negotiator into one of the most proactive global players in the Article 6 landscape.

What is Article 6 of Paris Agreement?

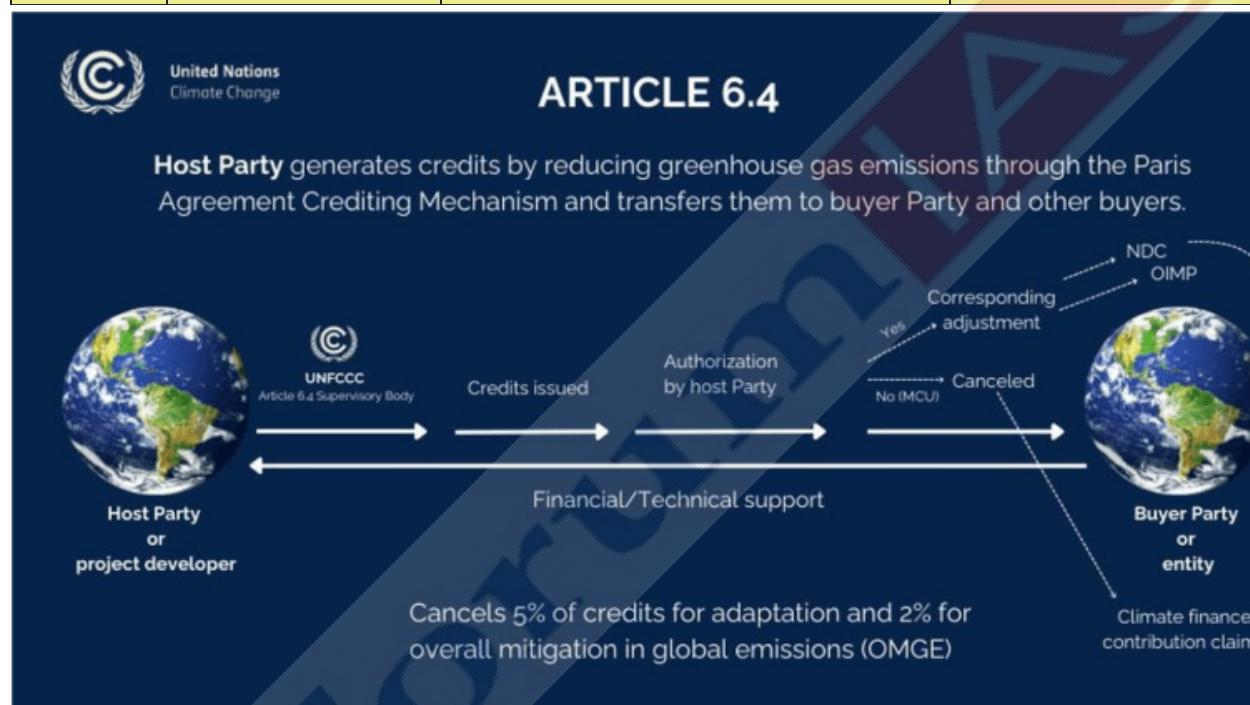
- Article 6 (A6) of the Paris Agreement deals with international cooperation between countries to help them meet their climate targets (NDCs – Nationally Determined Contributions) in a cost-effective and transparent way.
- It allows countries to work together, trade emission reductions, and support sustainable development, instead of acting completely alone. Thus, it effectively creates the framework for a global carbon market.

3 Pillars/Pathways of Article 6:

Article 6 is divided into three main “paths” for international cooperation:

Pathway	Known As	How it works	Key Terminology
Article 6.2	Bilateral/Multilateral Trading	<p>Countries can transfer emission reductions between themselves.</p> <p>Requires corresponding adjustments so the same reduction is not counted twice.</p> <p><i>e.g. If India reduces extra emissions and transfers them to Japan, India subtracts them from its count, and Japan adds them to its own.</i></p>	ITMOs (Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes)
Article 6.4	UN Carbon Market	<p>Creates a centralized global carbon market, supervised by the UN.</p> <p>Generates verified carbon credits from projects (renewables, afforestation, methane capture, etc.).</p> <p>It replaces the old Kyoto Protocol's "Clean Development Mechanism."</p> <p>The Article 6.4 mechanism is now active, allowing companies and countries to trade credits under a unified UN standard.</p>	PACM (Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism)

Article 6.8	Non-Market Approaches	<p>Focuses on cooperation without carbon trading.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Technology transfer ○ Climate building ○ Climate finance ○ Policy coordination 	NMAs (Non-Market Approaches)
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Source: The Hindu

What is the potential of Article 6?

1. **Cost Reduction:** The World Bank and IETA estimate that Article 6 could reduce the total cost of implementing national climate targets (NDCs) by more than \$250 billion per year by 2030.
2. **Efficiency:** It allows “buyer” countries (often wealthier nations with high domestic costs for greening heavy industry) to fund projects in “seller” countries where the same dollar can remove much more CO2 (e.g., through massive reforestation or rapid solar deployment).
3. **Emission Gap:** If countries reinvest the \$250 billion they save, Article 6 has the potential to remove an additional 5 gigatonnes of CO2 per year by 2030 at no extra cost. This is roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of the United States.
4. **Beyond Net Zero:** The Overall Mitigation in Global Emissions (OMGE) rule means that every trade under the UN-led market (Article 6.4) automatically “retires” 2% of the credits. This ensures that the market isn’t just a zero-sum game but actually results in a net benefit for the atmosphere.

5. **High-Integrity Standards:** Article 6 creates a “Gold Standard” for carbon credits. Credits authorized by the UN are seen as lower risk for investors, potentially unlocking trillions in private capital for projects in the Global South.
6. **Adaptation Funding:** Unlike previous agreements, Article 6 has a built-in “tax” for good. A 5% levy on trades under Article 6.4 goes directly to the Adaptation Fund, providing a predictable stream of billions of dollars for vulnerable nations to build sea walls, drought-resistant crops, and early warning systems.

What has been various initiatives undertaken by India with respect to Article 6?

1. **The “Positive List” of Eligible Activities:** To operationalize both Article 6.2 & 6.4, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) released a finalized list of 13 eligible activities. The list prioritizes capital-intensive, emerging technologies rather than old-style offsets such as Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia, Renewable Energy with Storage (specifically the stored component) etc. It can fundamentally shift the country’s emission profile & significantly contribute to the acceleration of India’s economic growth trajectory.
2. **India-Japan Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM):** Signed in August 2025, this is India’s most significant Article 6.2 deal. It allows Japanese companies to invest in Indian green projects (like Green Hydrogen) in exchange for a share of the carbon credits (ITMOs). India is currently in advanced negotiations with the EU, Singapore, and the UAE to create similar corridors for trading high-integrity carbon credits.
3. **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS):** Launched by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), this scheme creates a compliance market for heavy industries (like steel and cement).
4. **National Carbon Registry:** India has established a centralized digital registry to track every credit generated. This prevents “double counting” – a major requirement for Article 6 compliance – by ensuring a credit sold to Japan is subtracted from India’s national tally (Corresponding Adjustment).
5. **NDAIAPA:** India established the National Designated Authority for the Implementation of the Paris Agreement. This high-level inter-ministerial committee is the “gatekeeper” that decides which projects get the green light for international sale.

What should be the way forward for India with respect to Article 6?

1. **Prioritizing “Hard-to-Abate”:** India’s “Positive List” focus on high-cost, emerging technologies. India should use Article 6 funds specifically for sectors where domestic capital is insufficient – such as Green Hydrogen in steelmaking and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF).
2. **Finalizing “Corresponding Adjustments”:** India must operationalize its National Carbon Registry to seamlessly subtract any credits sold to countries like Japan or Singapore from its own national inventory. This prevents “double counting” and maintains global trust.
3. **Digital MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification):** India should lead in using blockchain, AI, and satellite imagery to track carbon sequestration (especially in the new Mangrove and Forestry methodologies) to provide real-time, tamper-proof proof of impact.
4. **Price Stability Mechanisms:** India should implement a Price or Supply Adjustment Mechanism (PSAM). This would prevent the market from being flooded with cheap credits, which could crash the price and discourage industry investment.
5. **Expanding Bilateral Corridors:** Beyond Japan, India should fast-track Article 6.2 deals with the EU (to help Indian exporters navigate the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism/CBAM) and ASEAN countries.

6. **Leading on Article 6.8 (Non-Market):** India can use this often-ignored “non-market” path to secure technology transfers and direct grants for climate-resilient infrastructure, moving beyond just “trading” to “transforming.”
7. **Streamline Project Clearance:** According to a research done by CEEW, the carbon projects in India take over 1600 days to register for Agriculture, Forestry & Other Landuse Projects, as compared to just 400 days elsewhere in Asia. To correct this, a Steering Committee should be created at the cabinet level to offer broader guidelines & regularly take stock. For A6 projects, where land & multiple stakeholders are often involved, a single-window clearance system is essential.
8. **Build & Strengthen Removal Market:** The global demand for carbon removals is rising. A6 provides an ideal platform to build a domestic market for activities like Biochar & Enhanced Rock Weathering, positioning India as a supplier of high-quality removal credits.
9. **Strengthen South-South Collaboration:** India can take the lead in building shared systems, knowledge networks, and financing models across developing countries.

Conclusion: India’s participation in the A6 mechanism hold critical significance as it can translate into transfer of advanced tech, support to R&D, strengthen bilateral relations & channel much needed climate finance into the economy. This can be a lever for socio-economic transformation that aligns with India’s domestic climate goals.

UPSC GS-3: Climate Change

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

Digital Arrest Fraud- Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise

Amidst the rising number of digital arrest cases, the Central govt has constituted a high-level Inter-Ministerial Committee (IDC) with the mandate to examine the real-time issues faced by the enforcement agencies, and to identify the relevant legislations & implementation gaps related with the digital arrest fraud cases.

Digital arrest fraud is a new form of cybercrime in India. As of January 2026, the Supreme Court of India has noted that victims (primarily the elderly) have lost over ₹3,000 crore to this fraud. These cyber crimes have **seriously grave concerns** and, hence, these must be addressed at the earliest.

What is Digital Arrest? What is the modus operandi?

- Digital arrest is a cyber fraud technique in which criminals psychologically trap a person online, making them believe they are under arrest or investigation and coercing them into transferring money.
- Digital arrest involves cybercriminals **posing as law enforcement agents** (from the CBI, Narcotics Department, or Reserve Bank of India) who claim that the **victim is involved in illegal activities** like movement of drugs or a suspicious package. The victims are tricked into **remaining under constant visual surveillance** via Skype or other video conferencing platforms until the criminals’ demands are met.
- The victim is not physically detained, but is mentally confined through fear — hence the term ***digital arrest***.

'DIGITAL ARREST'

PTI
GRAPHICS

What exactly is 'Digital arrest'?

- New cyber fraud
- Accused video call and pose as law enforcement agency officials, like CBI or customs officials
- They give threats of arrest in the name of fake international parcels of banned drugs
- Organised economic crime operated by cross-border crime syndicates



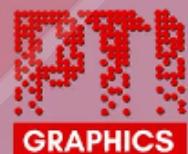
Source- PTI Graphics

Modus Operandi of Digital arrest:

Caller ID Spoofing	Scammers disguise their phone number to look like it is from a legitimate government office or police department . Scammers also reach out via video calls using WhatsApp or Skype .
Intimidation	Victims are falsely accused of crimes like drug trafficking or money laundering , and are shown fake documents and setups that mimic police stations. The scammers use fear tactics, such as threatening for jail-term or property seizure, to create urgency.

Isolation	<p>Victims are instructed to remain on the call and not to contact anyone else. This creates a sense of urgency and fear. The fraudsters also use deepfake videos and fake arrest warrants to impersonate officials of law enforcement agencies.</p>
Demands for Money and Personal Identity Theft	<p>The fraudsters demand immediate payment, often via gift cards, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency, which would make the money transfer difficult to trace. Some scammers ask for Aadhaar Details, Bank account details, and other personal information, which are later used for identity theft.</p>

‘DIGITAL ARREST’



How Fraudsters Trick Victims and Evade Police (1/2)

➤ They use **studios** modelled on police stations and government offices while video-calling victims



➤ They wear **uniforms** to appear genuine

➤ They play **police sirens** in the background and send **fake IDs** to make the 'digital arrest' seem real

Source: PTI Graphics

‘DIGITAL ARREST’

PTI
GRAPHICS

How Fraudsters Trick Victims and Evade Police (2/2)

- They use **third-party bank accounts**
- They tell victims that the investigation is **confidential**, deterring them from discussing it with anyone
- They transfer money received from victims into **fraudulent accounts**, cash it out and split it among themselves



Source: PTI Graphics

Examples of Digital Arrest Fraud Cases:

Digital arrest fraud cases have not only targeted the vulnerable groups, but also wealthy individuals as well. Vast sums of Money have also been stolen from wealthy individuals.

Vardhman Director's case	Group	Scammers duped the textile industry doyen S P Oswal into transferring Rs 7 crore to their bank accounts , by posing as CBI Officers and intimidating him on false money laundering cases.
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Fake impersonation as CJI	There have been cases where a person impersonated Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, faked hearing a matter on skype and thereafter passed an order.
NRI Doctor Couple Defrauded in Delhi	In a sophisticated “digital arrest” scam, an elderly NRI doctor couple in South Delhi’s Greater Kailash was duped of around ₹14.85 crore by fraudsters. Scammers posed as law enforcement and investigative officials, claiming the couple was under investigation and threatening immediate legal action if they didn’t cooperate. Over more than two weeks, the couple was kept under continuous video calls, intimidated and coerced into transferring huge sums of money to accounts controlled by the criminals.

Rise in Digital arrest cases:

- a. The **Ministry of Home Affairs** (MHA) in March 2024, issued a press release, **alerting people against incidents of blackmail and digital arrest** by **cyber criminals** impersonating Police authorities, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Narcotics Department, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Enforcement Directorate and other law enforcement agencies.
- b. As per the **National Crime Records Bureau** (NCRB) **data**, a significant rise in cybercrimes have been reported in the last few years- **10,395** in 2020, **14,007** in 2021 and **17,470** in 2022.

What are the reasons behind rise in the digital arrest cases in India?

1. **Rapid Digitalisation without Matching Awareness:** There has been an explosion of smartphones, online banking, UPI & digital payments in India. However, the legal awareness about arrest procedures has not growth at the same pace. Many citizens are not aware that arrests cannot happen online. This creates a trust gap which has been exploited by the scammers.
2. **Fear of Law Enforcement & Social Stigma:** Fraudsters exploit the fear of police, courts, ED, CBI & the shame linked to the allegations like money laundering or drugs. Victims comply silently instead of verifying with the authorities.
3. **Sophisticated Social Engineering:** Scammers use fake official uniforms, IDs, court orders & caller ID spoofing to confine the victim into a psychological trap. Thus, cybercriminals are using technological and psychological tactics to target citizens.
4. **Availability of Digital Tools to Criminals:** Criminals have easy access to devices & tools like SIM Box, encrypted communication apps, mule bank accounts – using which they are able to route calls & SMSes, bypassing international charges, making foreign calls appear local & funnel the stolen money through mule accounts within minutes, making it impossible for Police to freeze the funds in time.
5. **The “Shame” Factor:** Many victims, especially high-ranking professionals or the elderly, do not report the crime due to the embarrassment of being “duped,” allowing scammers to operate without fear.

6. Serious Allegations: By accusing victims of “Money Laundering,” “Narcotics Trafficking (MDMA),” or “Terror Financing,” scammers trigger a “fight or flight” response. The fear of social stigma and a permanent criminal record makes people desperate to “settle” the matter.

What are the concerns with the rising Digital Arrest Fraud cases in India?

- 1. Financial Losses:** The financial losses to the victims become impossible to recover because the scammers request payments through untraceable methods like **cryptocurrency, gift cards, or wire transfers**. The financial loss due to digital arrest have grown from ₹91 crore in 2022 to ₹1,935 crore in 2024.
- 2. Negative emotional and Psychological Impact:** Victims feel intimidated and psychological pressure, which can lead to anxiety, stress. The scammers use **threatening language** and **claim serious consequences** like **jail time, asset seizures, or even deportation**.
- 3. Data Leaks:** Large-scale data breaches (from insurance portals, travel sites, etc.) provide scammers with a “lead list” that includes the victim’s name, Aadhaar number, and financial status, making the initial “official” call sound incredibly credible.
- 4. Targeting the “Wealthy & Vulnerable” (Seniors):** Senior citizens and retired professionals often have significant life savings but may not be fully aware of the latest cyber-tactics.
- 5. Organized Cross-Border Syndicates:** These are no longer individual hackers but organized “Cyber-Slavery” hubs, mostly operating out of Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar). Scammers are given scripts, trained in Indian accents/languages, and taught how to navigate Indian legal terminology (BNS/BNSS).
- 6. Use of ‘Deepfakes’ & AI:**
 - a. Visual Authenticity:** Scammers now use AI to create high-quality deepfake videos of real IPS officers, CBI directors, or even sitting judges.
 - b. Virtual Courtrooms:** Fraudsters set up elaborate “studio” backgrounds that mimic police stations or courtrooms. On a WhatsApp or Skype call, a victim sees what looks like a genuine judicial proceeding.
 - c. Voice Cloning:** AI can now mimic the voice of a family member “calling from the police station,” adding an emotional layer of panic that overrides logical thinking.

What have been the efforts of the government to control these frauds?

Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC)	Formed in December 2025, this high-powered panel is chaired by the Special Secretary (Internal Security) and includes members from RBI, MeitY, DoT, and Ministry of Law. Their mandate is to identify legal gaps and ensure “time-bound compliance” by social media platforms to block scammers.
Role of CBI	In 2025, the Supreme Court granted the CBI a countrywide jurisdiction to probe digital arrest cases. This allows the CBI to bypass the need for specific state permissions, enabling them to dismantle interstate and international syndicates more effectively.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)	The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), part of the cyber and information security division of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, is dedicated to address rising cybercrime . Between January and April 2024, I4C recorded Rs 120.30 crore in losses by Indians due to digital arrest scams.
Joint Cyber Coordination Teams (JCCTs)	Based at the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), these teams focus on “hotspots” like Mewat, Jamtara, and Ahmedabad. They coordinate raids across state lines to catch the “mule account” holders and technical operators.
International Spoofed Calls Prevention System	The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has deployed a system that identifies and blocks international calls that manipulate the “Calling Line Identity” (CLI) to appear as Indian phone numbers (+91).
Mass Blocking of Identifiers	By the end of 2025, the government had successfully blocked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.8 lakh+ SIM cards linked to fraud. 2.9 lakh+ IMEI numbers (mobile devices). 83,000+ WhatsApp accounts and 3,900+ Skype IDs used for digital arrests.
Inter-ministerial committee against transnational crime	In May 2024, an inter-ministerial committee, comprising various law enforcement and intelligence agencies , was established to address the increase in transnational cybercrimes targeting Indians, especially from Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia.
1930 Helpline & NCRP	The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (cybercrime.gov.in) and the 1930 toll-free number allow for the immediate reporting of fraud.
CFCFRMS (Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting System)	This backend system links police with banks. If a victim reports a fraud within the “Golden Hour,” the system can freeze the funds in the scammer’s account before they are siphoned off.

Samanvaya & Pratibimb Platforms	These AI-driven tools provide real-time mapping of cyber-criminal locations and help law enforcement agencies track the movement of money across different states.
Uniform Inter-State Laws	Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the government is working to ensure that "Digital Arrest" is explicitly defined as a distinct criminal act of extortion and impersonation, removing any legal ambiguity.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. Instant Freezing without FIR: Building on the Supreme Court's December 2025 directive, I4C and banks should be allowed to freeze suspicious accounts immediately upon a 1930 report, even before a formal FIR is filed. The first 60-120 minutes (called the 'Golden Hour') after a fraud occurs are critical for fund recovery.
2. AI-Driven Transaction Monitoring: Mandating banks to deploy AI/ML models that flag "unusual velocity" (e.g., a senior citizen suddenly transferring a large sum to a new account). This "speed-breaker" approach can halt transactions until a secondary verification is performed.
3. SIM & IMEI Blacklisting: Aggressive use of the Sanchar Saathi portal to block not just the SIM, but the entire handset (IMEI) of identified scammers. By January 2026, over 9 lakh SIMs have been blocked, but the goal is to make the hardware itself unusable for any network.
4. Mule Account Liability: Making banks legally and financially accountable for "Mule Accounts" opened with weak KYC. If a bank branch consistently hosts accounts used in scams, then penalize the branch or its management.
5. "Cyber-Diplomacy": India is pushing for a specialized BRICS or G20 Cyber-Task Force to allow for the rapid extradition of scammers and the dismantling of "Cyber-Slavery" compounds across borders.
6. VoIP Regulation: Tightening the gateway for international VoIP (Internet) calls that spoof Indian numbers (+91). The DoT is moving toward a system where unverified international headers are automatically dropped by telecom providers.
7. Specialized Cyber-Courts: To improve the currently low conviction rates, set up dedicated courts to handle digital fraud. The first conviction in 2025 (West Bengal) where nine scammers were given life imprisonment has set a precedent for "deterrence through harsh sentencing."
8. Actions at the personal level:
 - a. Staying Calm: On receiving a suspicious call, one should do not panic. A person should take a moment to assess the situation.
 - b. Verification of Identity: The personal information should not be shared over the phone or video calls.
 - c. Documenting Evidence: A person should try to record the call or take screenshots for evidence. This documentation can be crucial in the times of need of reporting the scam.
 - d. Contacting Authorities: In case of digital arrest cases, a person should report the incident to local police or through national cyber helplines (1930).

9. Education and awareness: Education and awareness is the key to avoid digital arrest frauds. Understanding that digital arrests are fraudulent can help the masses recognize and avoid such scams.

Conclusion: In a recent *Mann Ki Baat*, the Prime Minister issued a specific mantra to combat this: "Ruko, Socho, Action Lo" (Stop, Think, Take Action). This should become the immediate mantra at the individual level to prevent the digital arrest scam in India.

<h3>'DIGITAL ARREST'</h3> <p>What to do if someone calls and threatens you with arrest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stop all further communication and disconnect from the internet immediately Report the incident to local police or cyber crime authorities by calling 1930 (24/7 helpline number) Contact your bank and freeze accounts or change passwords if necessary Keep evidence like call recordings and screenshots <p>Source- PTI Graphics</p>	<h3>'DIGITAL ARREST'</h3> <p>How do you avoid getting arrested?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never trust unsolicited calls claiming to be from law enforcement agencies Verify caller's identity by contacting directly through official numbers  <p>Source- PTI Graphics</p>	<h3>'DIGITAL ARREST'</h3> <p>Steps to take if you're already a victim and have lost money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately contact your bank and re-freeze accounts File a First Information Report (FIR) with the Cyber Crime Police Seek help from a lawyer to protect your rights  <p>Gather all evidence for the authorities, including logs, messages, and transaction details</p> <p>Source- PTI Graphics</p>
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Read More- [The Indian Express](#), [The Hindu](#)
 UPSC Syllabus- GS-3 Internal security challenges (Cyber Security)

Iran Protests – Causes & Consequences – Explained Pointwise

Iran has plunged into another crisis. What began as a localised strike by shopkeepers in Tehran's Grand Bazaar on December 28 has now snowballed into the largest uprising against the Islamic Republic since 1979 Revolution that toppled the Shah regime & brought the Islamic regime to power. The severe repression by the security forces against the protestors has led to killing of over 2500 people. The US President has warned Iran that the US may take military action over the killing of peaceful protestors. The Indian government has also issued the advisory to Indians in Iran to leave the country immediately.



Source: Indian Express

What are the reasons behind the protests?

ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hyperinflation: Annual inflation has consistently exceeded 40-50% in recent years, with food and housing prices soaring even faster. This has utterly eroded purchasing power and savings, pushing millions into poverty. ● Unemployment & Underemployment: Official youth unemployment is around 20-25%, but real figures are likely higher, especially among educated youth and women. This creates a massive pool of disillusioned, frustrated young people with little future prospects. ● Currency Collapse: The Iranian rial has lost over 90% of its value against the dollar in the past decade. This collapse makes imports prohibitively expensive and destroys real wages.
SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Women's Rights and State-Mandated Morality Laws: The 2022 uprising is built on the social foundation laid by the 2022 Mahsa Amini protests. These protests have moved beyond specific dress code laws to a broader social demand for the dismantling of the theocratic legal system that treats women as second-class citizens. ● Youth Frustration: Over 60% of Iran's population is under 30. This young, urban, and connected generation has grown up with access to global culture (via VPNs and social media) but lives under a system with strict social codes and limited political expression. ● Ethnic and Religious Minority Grievances: The protests started in the Kurdish region and quickly spread to Baluch, Arab (Khuzestan), and Azeri regions. These groups face cultural repression, economic marginalization, political under-representation, and harsh state crackdowns.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption: Social justice in the country has fallen victim to structural & systemic corruption that has spread from highest levels of power to the lowest layers of the bureaucracy. • Water and Energy Shortages: Chronic mismanagement has led to a severe water crisis and frequent power blackouts. In a resource-rich country, the inability to provide basic utilities has become a symbol of state failure.
POLITICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theocratic Structure: Iran's political system combines elements of a theocracy and a republic, with ultimate authority vested in the Supreme Leader (Ayatollah Khamenei), who is not elected by popular vote and controls the military, judiciary, and state media. This structure marginalizes the elected government (President and Parliament) on key issues, leading to public frustration with unaccountable power. • Suppression of Dissent: Systematic repression of political opposition, civil society, independent media, and labor unions has left citizens with few legal channels to express discontent. The protests thus become an outlet for pent-up political frustration. • Israel-US Strikes (2025): In mid-2025, a series of military strikes by Israel and the US severely damaged Iran's nuclear and missile infrastructure. This exposed "cracks" in the regime's security, emboldening protesters who saw the state as vulnerable.
EXTERNAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S.-Led Sanctions: Severe economic sanctions, particularly those reimposed by the U.S. after its withdrawal from the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) in 2018, have crippled Iran's economy. This led to hyperinflation, currency devaluation, unemployment, and shortages of essential goods, fueling public anger. • Global Solidarity Campaigns: Hashtags like #MahsaAmini (2022 protests) trended globally, drawing international attention and moral support. Diaspora communities and activists abroad helped amplify voices from inside Iran. • Strategic Reversals: The fall of the Assad regime in Syria (2024) and the military degradation of Hezbollah and Hamas throughout 2024-2025 have shattered the regime's image of regional dominance.

What has been the response by major players/stakeholders?

1. Iranian Government:

- **Official Narrative:** State media and officials consistently label protests as "riots" instigated by "foreign enemies" (primarily the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia) to undermine national security and stability.

- Security Response: Deployment of security forces (IRGC, Police), mass arrests, internet shutdowns, and harsh judicial measures (including death sentences for some protesters).

2. Iranian Civil Society & Protestors:

- Sustained Resistance: Despite crackdowns, sporadic protests continue, often adapting to tactics like nighttime chanting, graffiti, and strikes.
- Broadened Demands: Initial triggers (e.g., hijab enforcement, economic woes) have evolved into calls for systemic change, with slogans like "Woman, Life, Freedom" and explicit rejection of the Supreme Leader.

3. International Actors:

- United States: Trump has issued a series of "MIGA" (Make Iran Great Again) warnings, stating that if the regime hangs protesters, the U.S. will "come to their rescue." The U.S. has threatened a 25% tariff on any country that continues to do business with Iran.
- Russia: Backed Iranian government, blaming the West for destabilization. Strengthened military and economic ties with Tehran amid Ukraine war isolation.

4. United Nations: Independent fact-finding missions established by the Human Rights Council to investigate violations.

What could be the impact of the crisis on the region?

1. Economic Disruptions: The region is critical to global energy (Iran produces 4% of global demand), food, or trade routes (e.g., the Strait of Hormuz (20% of global supply passes through the Strait), Suez Canal), disruptions can spike prices and cause shortages worldwide. Economic collapse can exacerbate poverty, unemployment, and inequality.
2. Escalation of Proxy Wars: Iran supports non-state actors across the region (e.g., Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen, Shia militias in Iraq/Syria). Internal instability or a shift in Iran's foreign policy could either reduce support (if Iran turns inward) or increase aggression (if hardliners escalate to project strength).
3. Regional rivals' actions: Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the UAE could see an opportunity to weaken Iran's strategic position, potentially increasing covert or diplomatic pressure.
4. Refugee Crisis: If violent repression occurs, increased refugee movements could affect neighboring Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
5. Ideological Ripple Effects: Successful protest movements in Iran could inspire reformists or opposition groups in other regional states, especially where youth frustration and economic grievances are high. Conversely, a harsh crackdown might demoralize democracy movements elsewhere, showing the difficulty of challenging entrenched authoritarian systems.

What could be the consequences of the crisis on India or Indian interests in the region?

1. Chabahar Port: Chabahar is India's most critical strategic asset in the region, serving as a bypass to Pakistan for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. While India secured a 10-year agreement for the Shahid Beheshti terminal in 2024, the U.S. recently revoked a long-standing sanctions exception. India is currently operating on a temporary waiver valid only until April 2026.
2. Trade Disruptions: Iran has historically been one of India's top markets for agricultural exports, but this trade is currently in a state of suspension. The collapse of the Iranian Rial has made it impossible for Iranian importers to honor contracts. Over ₹2,000 crore in dues to Indian Basmati exporters are currently stuck.

3. **Energy Security & Inflation:** India has not imported Iranian oil since 2019, but the regional crisis still impacts its energy bill. Instability in the Strait of Hormuz (a chokepoint for 20% of global oil) has led to price volatility. For every \$10 increase in oil prices, India's current account deficit typically widens by billions, driving up domestic fuel costs and inflation.
4. **Safety of Indian Diaspora:** Escalation could fuel proxy wars in the region, affecting Indian expatriate communities (≈8 million in the Gulf), and raising security concerns for India. India has issued a "Strong Leave Now" advisory for its 10,000+ citizens in Iran (mostly students and pilgrims).
5. **Afghanistan Impact:** Iran is a key player in Afghanistan. Instability could spill over, affecting India's interests in Afghan stability and development projects.
6. **Terrorism & Radicalization:** Regional unrest could embolden extremist groups, potentially affecting India's internal security, especially in Kashmir.
7. **Balancing Act:** India maintains relations with Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S. A crisis would force difficult diplomatic balancing, especially if pressured to choose sides. If the crisis involves U.S.-Iran tensions, India may face secondary sanctions pressure, complicating energy and trade ties with Iran.
8. **China's Role:** China's influence in Iran (via Belt and Road Initiative, strategic partnerships) could grow during a crisis, potentially marginalizing India's regional role.

Read More: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

Road Safety in India- Reasons and Impact- Explained Pointwise

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highway (MoRTH) & the NGO SaveLIFE Foundation has released a joint report shedding light on the gaps in road safety in India. India ranks first in the world in road accidents fatalities. Its numbers are also far ahead of the second & third ranked countries (China accounts for just 36% & USA for just 25% of India's total road deaths).

Key Findings of the Report:

- The report highlights India's slow progress toward meeting international goals of reducing road accident fatalities.
- The report also emphasises on the organic connection between road construction, mobility, and the need for a differentiated approach to mitigate road accidents.
- Key observations of the Report:

Road engineering	59% of all road accidents fatalities do not involve any traffic violation, indicating that road engineering is one of the biggest contributory factors for deaths. According to the report, damaged crash barriers, absent or faded pavement marking, unprotected hard structures, damaged or wrong signage, and inadequate illuminations are among the top 20 most common engineering issues on the road.
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Crash-prone Sites	<p>Most accidents are concentrated in known locations, including specific road stretches & crash-prone spots (58% of the total deaths were recorded on the crash-prone locations). The report suggested that if the govt schemes & budgets are directed toward such locations, a significant number of deaths could be prevented.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">• RECURRING PROBLEMS ON THE ROAD</p> <p>42% of all fatalities were recorded on critical corridors.</p> <p>58% fatalities were recorded on critical crash-prone sites.</p> <p>72% of the fatalities were recorded in rear-end, head-on and pedestrian crashes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Around 8 in 10 victims were hospitalised by means other than the government's 108 ambulance service, or not hospitalised at all. <p>Source: Zero Fatality Districts: A Collaborative Framework to Reduce Road Crash Deaths, for 2023 and 2024</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Source: Indian Express</p>
States with road accidents	<p>UP (20 districts) > Tamil Nadu (19) > Maharashtra (11) > Rajasthan (8)</p>

Findings of India Status Report on Road Safety (2024):

Road accidents remain a major public health challenge	<p>Road traffic injuries remain a major public health challenge in India. There has been little progress in reducing fatalities, despite advancements in other sectors. Road traffic injuries were the 13th leading cause of death in India and the 12th leading cause of health loss (measured in Disability-Adjusted Life Years, or DALYs) in 2021.</p>
Indian states unlikely to meet the UN target	<p>Most Indian States are unlikely to meet the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety goal to halve traffic deaths by 2030.</p>

Most common victims of road accidents	Pedestrians, cyclists, and motorised two-wheeler riders are the most common victims of road accidents. Trucks are responsible for the highest proportion of impacting vehicles.
Lack of Basic Traffic Measures	India lacks basic traffic safety measures like traffic-calming, markings, and signage. Helmet usage in rural areas is particularly low, and trauma care facilities are inadequate.
Increase in India's road accident fatalities	India has large gap in road safety as compared with other developed countries like Sweden and other Scandinavian nations, which have excelled in road safety governance. An Indian was 40% more likely to die in a road accident than someone in these countries, in 1990. By 2021, this figure had soared to 600%, indicating a sharp rise in road fatalities.

What are the reasons for high number of Road accidents in India?

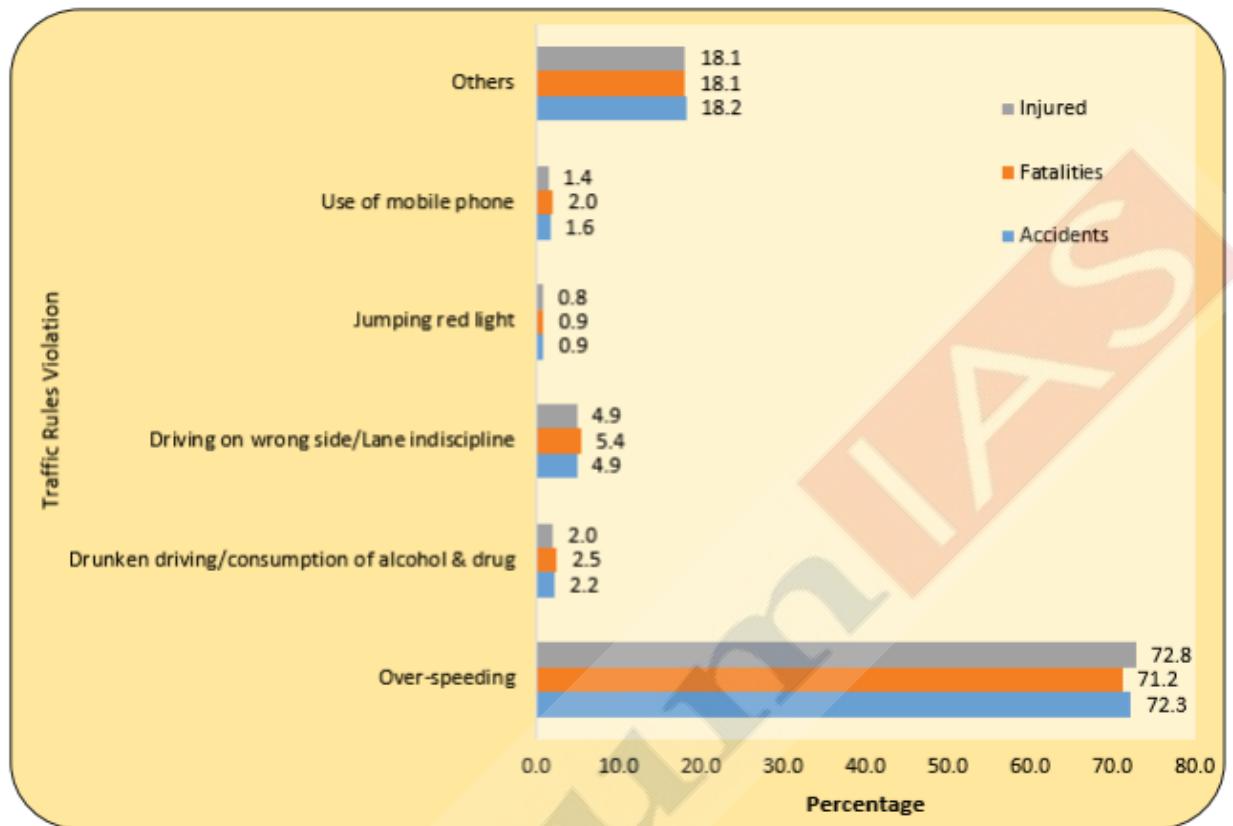
India's high rate of road accidents is a complex issue resulting from the interplay of multiple systemic, behavioral, and infrastructural factors.

1. Human & Behavioral Factors:

a. Reckless Driving: Speeding, aggressive overtaking, jumping signals, and lane indiscipline. Over speeding is the major cause and it accounts for 71.2% of the persons killed due to road accidents in India. Driving on the

wrong side is the second reason accounting for 5.4% deaths.

Chart 3.1: Road Accidents by type of Traffic Rules Violation during 2022



- b. **Driving Under Influence:** Widespread drink-driving, especially among commercial and private vehicle drivers.
- c. **Driver Fatigue:** Long, uninterrupted shifts for commercial drivers (trucks, buses) leading to loss of concentration.
- d. **Lack of Training & Licensing Lapses:** Corruption in driving tests, poor training standards, and fake licenses.
- e. **Non-use of Safety Gear:** Helmets (especially among two-wheeler riders) and seat belts are often ignored.

2. Vehicular & Mechanical Factors:

- a. **Poor Vehicle Maintenance:** Old vehicles, faulty brakes, worn-out tires, and inadequate lighting.
- b. **Overloading:** Especially in trucks, buses, and three-wheelers, affecting stability and braking.
- c. **Poor Safety Standards:** Many vehicles lack basic safety features like airbags, ABS, or crashworthy structures. 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's frontal impact crash test.

3. Road Infrastructure & Design Deficiencies:

- a. **Poor Road Design & Engineering:** Faulty road engineering leading to blackspots, poor designing of junctions, inadequate signage, haphazard planning of state highways and city roads are also some major factors causing road accidents.

- b. **Mixed Traffic Flow:** High-speed vehicles share space with slow-moving vehicles, cyclists, and even animals on the same road.
- c. **Uncontrolled Access Points:** Too many entry/exit points on highways without proper merging lanes.

4. Systemic & Governance Issues:

- a. **Weak Enforcement of Laws:** Corruption, understaffed traffic police, and inconsistent penalty systems reduce deterrence.
- b. **Lack of Emergency Medical Care:** Delayed ambulance services and inadequate trauma care increase fatalities.
- c. **Lack of Golden Hour Treatment:** Lack of rapid trauma care on highways leads to high fatalities.
- d. **Delayed Implementation of Safety Laws:** The **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019** introduced stricter penalties, but enforcement is uneven across states.

What are the impacts of road accidents in India?

1. **Loss of Life and Disability:** India has one of the world's highest numbers of road accident fatalities (over **1.5 lakh deaths annually**). Survivors often suffer severe, life-altering disabilities (spinal cord injuries, amputations, brain damage).
2. **Economic Burden:** The World Bank estimates road accidents cost India **3-5% of its GDP annually**. This includes:
 - o **Medical Costs:** Immediate emergency care, long-term treatment, and rehabilitation.
 - o **Loss of Productivity:** Victims' lost income and reduced earning capacity, plus caregivers' lost work time.
 - o **Administrative & Legal Costs:** Police, insurance, and court expenses.
3. **Gender-Specific Impact-** According to World Bank's report "Traffic Crash Injuries and Disabilities: The Burden on Indian Society 2021", about 50% of Indian women were severely affected by the decline in their household income after a crash.
4. **Increased Poverty:** Medical expenses and loss of income push millions of households below the poverty line each year.
5. **Overburdened Courts:** Millions of accident-related cases clog the judicial system, leading to long delays in compensation.

What measures have been taken in India to reduce road accidents?

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 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.

Read More- Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019

4. Other technical initiatives: Further more, other technical initiatives have been taken which are mentioned below:

- a. Front and side crash tests for new car models.
- b. New cars are required to have airbags fitted as standard.
- c. Installation of Roadside Safety Crash barriers and speed warning boards.
- d. Rectification of identified Black spots.

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.

What measures must further be adopted to reduce road accidents in India?

1. Indian Vehicles safety features must conform to global best standards: The European Union's General Safety Regulation which prescribes features like advanced emergency braking technology and intelligent speed assistance must be adopted in India.

2. 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.

3. Separation of lanes for different types of Vehicles: There should be separation of lanes for 2-Wheelers and heavy vehicles.

4. Strict implementation of the existing rules: The enhanced fines for traffic rules violations will also help in reduction of road accidents in India.

5. Database for fatal crashes: A national database for fatal crashes should be established. The central and the state governments must undertake efforts towards it.

Conclusion: The approach to road safety has to be proactive, rather than reactive. The public has as much role to play as the Government. A concerted and focused effort from both the government and the citizens can help bring down road accidents and help save precious lives.

Read More: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

India-EU Relationship – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The India-EU trade agreement, which is expected to be signed on January 26, is considered to be most comprehensive & mutually advantageous agreement for both the sides. The India-EU trade agreement has been decades in the making. Both have finally come close to signing the agreement after talks were re-launched in 2022. Negotiations were started in 2007, but abandoned in 2013. In this context, let us try to understand the significance & challenges of India-EU relationship & what can be the way forward to take this relationship to its desired potential.



What is the SIGNIFICANCE of India-EU relations?

- Major Trading Partner:** The EU is India's **2nd largest trading partner** (after the US), with annual bilateral trade in goods nearing \$137 billion in 2024-25. The EU is also India's number one export destination. India is the EU's **10th largest trading partner**.
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** The EU is a major investor in India, accounting for 17% of total FDI inflow, contributing to significant employment opportunities. Between 2015 & 2022, the FDI from EU to India grew by 70%, with France's investment alone increasing by >370%.
- Shared Values:** Both India and the EU are the world's largest democracies and are committed to a rules-based international order, multilateralism, and shared values such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights. This forms a strong foundation for their strategic cooperation.
- Counterbalance to a Unipolar or Bipolar World:** Both India and the EU are major poles in a multipolar world order. They share an interest in ensuring that global governance is not dominated by a single power or a tense bipolar rivalry (U.S.-China). Their partnership promotes a more balanced and rules-based international system.
- Supply Chain Diversification:** Post-pandemic and Ukraine war, both seek to de-risk and diversify supply chains away from over-concentration in China ("China +1" strategy). They are natural partners for this, with India's manufacturing capabilities ("Make in India") and the EU's technology and capital.
- Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) Negotiations:** Ongoing negotiations for a comprehensive FTA are expected to boost market access for Indian goods and services, facilitate investment, lower trade barriers, and further integrate India into European and global value chains. The FTA also aims to support resilient supply chains, digitalization, and sustainable trade.
- Climate and Clean Energy Leadership:** Both, India & EU, are committed to fighting climate change and promoting sustainable energy solutions. Cooperation in green hydrogen, solar energy, and energy efficiency supports India's ambitious renewable energy targets and decarbonization efforts.
- China Factor:** Both India and the EU view China's increased assertiveness—military, economic, and technological—as a central strategic challenge.

What are the CHALLENGES to the India-EU relationship?

- Stalled Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations:** The **Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** talks started in 2007, paused in 2013, and have seen slow, difficult restarts. This is the single most symbolic hurdle. The key sticking points include:
 - Market Access:** The EU wants lower tariffs on automobiles, wines, spirits, and dairy products. India seeks greater access for its professionals (mode-4 services) and easier visa regimes.
 - Geographical Indications (GIs):** The EU strongly protects GIs (like Champagne, Parmesan), which can conflict with generic names used in India (e.g., "Scotch Whisky").
 - Data Localization & Digital Trade:** India's data privacy and localization rules are a major concern for EU digital firms.
 - Sustainable Development:** EU insists on linking trade to strict labor and environmental standards, which India views as potential non-tariff barriers.
- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** This new tax on carbon-intensive imports (like steel, cement, aluminum) is seen by India as discriminatory and a de facto trade barrier that could hurt its exports.

3. **Technology Transfer and Digital Regulations:** While India seeks greater technology transfer, concerns over data privacy, digital sovereignty, and cybersecurity regulations (like the EU's GDPR) create hurdles for Indian businesses.
4. **Visa and Mobility Issues:** Indian students and professionals face strict **visa, work permit, and mobility regulations** in the EU, limiting people-to-people and business links.
5. **Defence and Strategic Divergences:** India's dependence on Russian defence systems limits deeper collaboration with Europe on advanced military technology for e.g. Despite projects like submarine collaborations with France and C-295 Aircraft with Spain, EU-India defense ties lag behind those with the US or Russia.
6. **Ukraine-Russia Conflict:** This is the most acute recent divergence. The EU's primary strategic focus is countering Russia and supporting Ukraine. India, while calling for peace, has maintained a neutral stance, increased oil imports from Russia, and avoided voting against it at the UN. This has created strain and trust deficits, with the EU concerned about India's close ties with Russia.
7. **China Factor:**
 - a. **Trade with China:** Despite concerns, both, India & EU, retains substantial economic links with China. China is the EU's largest trading partner, well ahead of India. India also maintains significant trade with China (China was India's largest source of imports in 2024).
 - b. **Different Threat Perceptions:** For India, China is a direct neighbor and military competitor, whereas for the EU, the China question is entwined with economic security and global standards, with Russia still representing a higher immediate security threat.

What have been the INITIATIVES to bolster the India-EU relationship?

1. **Resumption of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations:**
 - a. After a 9-year hiatus, negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a stand-alone Investment Protection Agreement (IPA), and a Geographical Indications (GI) Agreement were formally restarted in 2021. This is the most significant economic initiative.
 - b. The FTA covers goods, services, investment protection, and geographical indications. It aims to boost market access, facilitate resilient supply chains, support digital and green transitions, and align with modern regulatory standards.
2. **India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC):** Launched in 2022, this is a major geopolitical upgrade, placing India on a similar footing as the US and EU. It has three working groups:
 - a. **Strategic Technologies & Digital Governance:** Collaboration on 5G/6G, AI, semiconductors, digital public infrastructure.
 - b. **Green & Clean Energy Technologies:** Focus on solar, hydrogen, circular economy, battery storage.
 - c. **Trade & Investment Resilience:** Deepening supply chain cooperation and addressing barriers.
3. **High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment:** This ministerial-level dialogue provides political guidance to the bilateral trade and investment relationship, ensuring regular discussions and addressing market access issues and trade barriers.
4. **India-EU Strategic Partnership – A Roadmap to 2025:** Adopted in 2020, this roadmap guides joint action and aims to further strengthen the strategic partnership across various sectors, including trade, climate change, security, and sustainable development.

5. **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and Maritime Security Strategy:** India has joined the EU's IPOI and Maritime Security Strategy, highlighting shared strategic priorities in maintaining a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Joint naval exercises, such as those in the Gulf of Guinea and Gulf of Aden, further enhance maritime security cooperation.
6. **Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP):** Established in 2016 and recently updated for its third phase (2025-2028), the CECP focuses on deeper cooperation in Green hydrogen, Offshore wind energy, Energy efficiency etc. India was an exclusive country partner at **European Hydrogen Week** in 2024, and the EU was a key partner at the International Conference on Green Hydrogen in Delhi in 2024.
7. **Research & Development Cooperation:** Agreements for R&D cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy and India's associate membership in CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research) signify deepening scientific collaboration.
8. **India-EU Connectivity Partnership (2020):** A joint initiative to promote **rules-based, transparent, and sustainable connectivity** projects in regions like South Asia, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific, seen as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
9. **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC):** While not exclusively an India-EU initiative, IMEC is a significant project that aims to strengthen connectivity between India and Europe via the Middle East, enhancing trade routes and energy security. The IMEC has the potential to become the modern age Silk Road linking geographies not only in trade, but also in enterprise, energy & innovation. It is an answer to the Indo-Pacific's demand for infrastructure that is transparent, sustainable & sovereign in spirit.

What can be the WAY FORWARD?

1. **Accelerating FTA Negotiations with Flexibility:** Both sides need to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to finalize the FTA, addressing sensitive sectors gradually and enhancing regulatory alignment through mutual recognition agreements. This includes finding solutions for issues like market access, intellectual property rights, and sustainability standards.
2. **Enhancing Technology Cooperation:** Continued focus on establishing dedicated frameworks for technology transfer, ensuring balanced access, and strengthening collaboration in emerging technologies like AI, semiconductors, and cybersecurity. Facilitating data-sharing agreements that balance privacy protection with business innovation needs is also vital. Europe's leadership in deep tech, digital manufacturing & semiconductors dovetails with India's dynamism in software, digital public good (e.g. UPI) & scalable platform. Together, they can lead in clean energy innovation, biotechnology, ocean sustainability, food security & resilient healthcare systems.
3. **Addressing Climate and Energy Policy Concerns:** Developing a joint roadmap for implementing green energy solutions, aligning policies on renewable energy investments, and finding solutions for issues like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) to prevent adverse impacts on Indian exports. Increased funding and technology-sharing for green hydrogen and carbon-neutral initiatives are also important.
4. **Deepening Security and Defence Cooperation:** Exploring opportunities for joint production of military equipment, enhancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, and strengthening cybersecurity and intelligence sharing. India's interest in joining projects under the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and negotiating a Security of Information Agreement (SoIA) further indicates this direction.

5. **Strengthening Multilateral Engagement:** Both India and the EU should continue to work together in multilateral forums like the UN, G20, and WTO to address global challenges and promote shared values, aiming to reform institutions to better reflect 21st-century realities.
6. **Human Mobility:** A comprehensive mobility agreement for students, scientists & scholars will enrich talent pools, ease Indian unemployment issue & fertilise bilateral innovation. In the age of ideas, cross-border thinkers are as valuable as cross-border capital.

CONCLUSION:

India & EU needs to harness the immense potential of their partnership by collaborating on critical & emerging technologies, build resilient supply chains & bolstering strategic & security cooperation. They need to promote mutual trust, shape global governance & champion the shared values of democracy, rule of law & multilateralism.

Read More: [The Indian Express](#), [Wikipedia](#)

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

Child Trafficking in India – Explained Pointwise

Child trafficking remains a grim reality in India. According to the latest NCRB data, in 2022, ~3100 children below the age of 18y were rescued from getting trafficked. Between Apr 2024 & Mar 2025, 53000 children were rescued from child labour, trafficking & kidnapping across India. The SC in recent K.P. Kiran Kumar Case has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

What is child trafficking?

- **Palermo Protocol (UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress & Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women & Children):** Defines child trafficking as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation,” crucially noting that *consent is irrelevant for children*, meaning it's trafficking even without force, fraud, or coercion, as a child cannot legally consent to exploitation.
- **Section 143 of BNS 2023:** Whoever, for the purpose of exploitation, recruits, transports, harbours, transfers, or receives, a person or persons by:
 - using threats; or
 - using force, or any other form of coercion; or
 - by abduction; or
 - by practicing fraud, or deception; or
 - by abuse of power; or
 - by inducement, including the giving or receiving of payments or benefits, in order to achieve the consent of any person having control over the person recruited, transported, harboured, transferred or received, commits the offence of trafficking.

What are the causes of child trafficking?

Socio-Economic & Cultural Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extreme Poverty: This is the most significant driver. Desperate families in impoverished regions (often rural or urban slums) may be deceived by traffickers' false promises of a good job, marriage, or education for their children. Sometimes, families are complicit in selling children due to dire economic circumstances. Debt Bondage: Intergenerational debt traps families, and children are forced into labor to pay off the debt, effectively becoming property of the creditor. Gender Discrimination: Deep-seated patriarchy devalues girls, leading to their trafficking for forced marriage, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation. Sex selection and female foeticide also create skewed gender ratios, fueling the trafficking of women and girls for brides. Caste-Based Discrimination: Marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Dalits and Adivasis), face systemic exclusion from resources and justice, making them easy targets for traffickers who operate with impunity in these communities. Child Marriage: Although illegal, the practice persists, often acting as a facade for trafficking where girls are "married off" and then forced into exploitation.
Governance Failures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak Law Enforcement: Corruption within police and local authorities, lack of training to identify trafficking, and low prosecution rates allow trafficking networks to operate with minimal risk. Often, victims are treated as criminals. For e.g. the conviction rate in trafficking related cases was only 4.8% between 2018 & 2022 in India. Porous Borders & Migration: India's long, porous borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar are hotspots for cross-border trafficking. Internal migration for work also leaves children unprotected and invisible to systems. Poor Birth Registration: Millions of children, especially in marginalized communities, are not registered at birth. This lack of legal identity makes them "invisible" and prey to traffickers.
Demand-side Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand for Cheap, Exploitable Labor: In sectors like agriculture, brick kilns, garment workshops, and domestic work, there is a high demand for submissive, cheap labor that children provide. Demand for Child Brides: In regions with skewed sex ratios or cultural practices, there is a demand for young girls as brides. Organized Begging Rings: Children are maimed or drugged to become more "effective" beggars, driven by profits for organized criminal gangs.

Other Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural Disasters & Climate Change: Floods, droughts, and crop failures devastate livelihoods, forcing distressed migration and breaking down community protections. ● Armed Conflict & Instability: Insurgency in certain regions (e.g., parts of Northeast India) displaces families and creates lawless zones where trafficking thrives. ● Social Media: Spread of social media & online platforms has contributed to child trafficking in recent times. Children are brainwashed & recruited in the name of jobs or opportunities for 'modelling'.
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What are the rights of the children?

1. Constitutional Rights:

- i. **Right to Equality (Article 14):** Equality before the law and equal protection.
- ii. **Right Against Discrimination (Article 15):** Prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Allows special provisions for children.
- iii. **Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21):** Includes the right to live with dignity, education, and protection.
- iv. **Right to Education (Article 21A):** Free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years.
- v. **Protection Against Exploitation (Articles 23-24):**
 - **Anti-Trafficking (Article 23):** Protects children from being trafficked or forced into bonded labor.
 - **Prohibition of Child Labor (Article 24):** No child below the age of **14** can be employed in any factory, mine, or hazardous occupation.
- vi. **Right to Early Childhood Care (Article 45):** State shall provide early childhood care and education for all children until age 6.

2. Legislative Rights:

- i. **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:** The **Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015** handles two categories of children:
 - **Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP):** Those who are abandoned, orphaned, or victims of abuse. They are entitled to rehabilitation through **Child Welfare Committees (CWC)**.
 - **Children in Conflict with Law (CCL):** Children who commit crimes.
- ii. **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009:**
 - Ensures free, compulsory education for children aged 6-14.
 - Prohibits discrimination, capitation fees, and screening.
- iii. **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:**
 - A gender-neutral law specifically designed to protect children from sexual abuse, harassment, and pornography.
 - It mandates child-friendly courtrooms, prevents the victim from coming face-to-face with the accused, and ensures the child's identity is kept confidential.

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iv. Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (Amended in 2016):

- Prohibits employment of children under 14 in all occupations and processes.
- Adolescents (14-18 years) barred from hazardous work.

v. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:

- Prevents child marriage and protects victims.
- Sets the legal age for marriage at **18 for women** and **21 for men**.

vi. Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005: Establishes National and State Commissions for Child Rights to monitor safeguards.**What have been the Supreme Court's views on rights of the children?**

1. **Laxmi Kant Pandey vs. Union of India (1984 & onwards):** While primarily on inter-country adoption, this series of judgments laid down strict guidelines to prevent the trafficking of children in the guise of adoption, emphasizing "best interests of the child" as the paramount consideration.
2. **Vishal Jeet vs. Union of India (1990):** SC held that trafficking & child prostitution are serious socio-economic problems & hence a preventive & humanistic approach is essential to deal with them.
3. **MC Mehta vs. State of Tamil Nadu (1996):** The Court issued guidelines with the view to prohibiting employment of children in hazardous industries.
4. **Bachpan Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India (2011):** A watershed moment. The Court recognized "the right of children to be free from trafficking and forced labor" as a fundamental right under Article 21. It issued detailed guidelines for:
 - **Rescue and Rehabilitation:** Mandating the creation of a rehabilitation fund for immediate care.
 - **Railway Protocol:** Directing Railways to cooperate in identifying and rescuing trafficked children.
 - **Central Database:** Emphasized the need for a national database of missing children.

What are the various initiatives that have been taken to prevent child trafficking?**1. Legal Framework:**

- **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA):** Criminalizes trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.
- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**
- **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**

2. Institutional Mechanisms:

- **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and State Commissions (SCPCRs):** Monitor child rights violations and recommend actions.
- **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs):** Specialized police units in districts to investigate trafficking cases. Over 750 AHTUs have been established.
- **Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs):** Statutory bodies for care, protection, and justice for children.
- **Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS):** A centrally sponsored scheme that supports child protection services, including rehabilitation.

3. **Childline (1098):** This toll-free emergency service is now integrated with the **National Emergency Number 112**. It acts as the “eyes and ears” for reporting children in distress.
4. **TrackChild & Khoya-Paya:** These portals, now unified under **Mission Vatsalya**, allow police and citizens to upload data on missing and “sighted” children. The system uses AI to match photos of children found in one state with those reported missing in another.
5. **GHAR Portal (Go Home and Re-Unite):** Specifically designed to track the digital repatriation of children in the Juvenile Justice system, ensuring they are sent back to their home districts and monitored post-restoration.
6. **Operation AAHT:** The Indian Railways is the primary conduit for trafficking syndicates. **Operation AAHT**, led by the Railway Protection Force (RPF), is the most effective transit-point intervention. Since 2022, this operation has rescued over **2,300 children** and apprehended nearly 700 traffickers.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Strengthen Legal & Policy Frameworks:**
 - **Strict enforcement of existing laws** like the **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015**, **POCSO Act, 2012**, and **Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Act, 2021**.
 - **Fast-track courts** for trafficking cases to ensure timely justice and reduce delays.
 - **National database and tracking system** for missing children with real-time coordination between states.
2. **Enhance Law Enforcement & Border Control:**
 - **Specialized anti-trafficking units** in every district with trained personnel (including women officers).
 - **Strengthen cross-state and cross-border coordination** with Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, etc., using technology and intelligence sharing.
 - **Regular monitoring** of trafficking hotspots (railway stations, bus stands, border areas, orphanages, shelter homes).
3. **Awareness & Community Mobilization:**
 - **Grassroots campaigns** in rural/tribal areas to educate parents and children about trafficking tactics (fake job offers, marriage traps, etc.).
 - **Engage local NGOs, Panchayati Raj institutions**, and youth groups as watchdogs.
 - **Helpline integration** (e.g., **Childline 1098**) with prompt response and rescue mechanisms.
4. **Rehabilitation & Reintegration:** The Supreme Court has mandated the implementation of the **BIRD Report (2023)** recommendations to prevent re-trafficking:
 - **Immediate RTE Enrolment:** Every rescued child must be enrolled in a school within 15 days of rescue.
 - **Family Restoration:** Rescued children are provided with long-term vocational training, and an adult member of their family is prioritized for a government job to ensure the child isn't pushed back into the same cycle of poverty.
5. **Technology & Data-driven Interventions:**
 - **Use of AI and data analytics** to identify trafficking patterns and hotspots.
 - **Digital identity and birth registration** for all children to track missing cases.
 - **Platforms like “TrackChild”** to be integrated with police and child protection agencies.

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India-UAE Relations – Explained Pointwise

The President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has recently visited New Delhi. Both the countries have agreed upon a range of bilateral agreements & outcomes – from defense to space & LNG. This visit holds significant importance particularly against the backdrop of growing military tension in the Gulf region.



Agreements signed during the 2026 visit:

1. Strategic Defense Partnership: Signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) to establish a formal framework for defense industrial collaboration, cybersecurity, and joint technology development.
2. Space Ecosystem: An LoI between IN-SPACe (India) and the UAE Space Agency was signed to develop joint infrastructure, including launch complexes, satellite fabrication facilities, and joint space missions.
3. 10-Year LNG Deal: A \$3 billion agreement was signed between HPCL and ADNOC Gas. The UAE will supply 0.5 million tonnes of LNG per annum to India for 10 years, starting in 2028.
4. Civil Nuclear Push: Following India's new SHANTI Law (2025), both nations agreed to explore partnerships in advanced nuclear technologies, specifically focusing on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and large nuclear reactors.
5. Digital Embassies: Both sides agreed to explore the establishment of "Digital/Data Embassies" to store sovereign data across borders under mutually recognized sovereignty arrangements.
6. Supercomputing Cluster: An agreement between C-DAC (India) and G42 (UAE) was reached to set up a supercomputing cluster in India as part of the AI India Mission.

7. **Agri-Export Boost:** An MoU was signed between APEDA (India) and the UAE Ministry of Climate Change to streamline food safety and technical standards, facilitating easier export of Indian rice and produce.
8. **House of India:** Announced the establishment of a permanent cultural space called the 'House of India' in Abu Dhabi to showcase Indian art and heritage.

Evolution of India-UAE Relations:

Historical & Maritime Foundations (Pre-1971)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The bond predates the formation of the UAE. For centuries, the Malabar coast and the Arabian Peninsula were linked by maritime trade. ● Indian seafarers exchanged spices, textiles, and precious stones for dates and pearls. ● Until 1966, the Gulf Rupee (issued by the Reserve Bank of India) was the official currency in the region, illustrating the deep economic integration.
Diplomatic Birth & The "Oil-Labor" Era (1971-2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Following the unification of the UAE in 1971, formal diplomatic ties were established in 1972. ● The relationship was primarily defined by two factors: India's need for crude oil and the UAE's need for labor to build its infrastructure. ● This era saw a massive influx of Indian blue-collar workers.
The Strategic Leap (2015-Present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The visit of PM Narendra Modi in 2015 marked a "renaissance" in bilateral ties. ● Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2017): The relationship was formally elevated during MBZ's visit as the Chief Guest for India's Republic Day. ● The signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 transformed the economic landscape.

Significance of India-UAE Relations:

Geopolitical Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bridge to the Arab World: The UAE, under its visionary leadership, is a pivotal state in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the wider Islamic world. Strong ties with the UAE enhance India's standing and diplomacy across the Middle East.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing Act in a Multipolar Region: Both nations share a preference for strategic autonomy. The partnership helps balance other regional powers and provides India a stable, influential partner amid complex regional dynamics (e.g., Iran-Saudi tensions). Counter-Balancing: The partnership provides India with a stable anchor in West Asia, especially as a counterweight to shifting dynamics like the 2025 Saudi-Pakistan defense pact. Multilateral Forums: The UAE is a key partner for India in mini-laterals like the I2U2 Group (India-Israel-UAE-USA) and within BRICS and the UN. This amplifies India's voice on global issues.
Economic & Trade Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade Powerhouse: The UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner (after US and China) and 2nd largest export destination. Bilateral trade reached \$100 billion in FY 2024-25, aided by the landmark Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in 2022. Investments: UAE sovereign wealth funds are major investors in India across infrastructure, renewable energy, technology, and logistics. The UAE committed to a \$75 billion investment in India's infrastructure, signaling a move from being just a trade partner to a long-term stakeholder. Gateway to West Asia & Africa: The UAE's world-class logistics hubs (like Jebel Ali Port) serve as a critical trade and connectivity corridor for Indian goods to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.
Energy Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The UAE is a stable and reliable energy supplier for India, meeting a significant portion of its crude oil and LNG needs. Growing collaboration in renewable energy, with UAE investing in India's massive solar energy sector.
Diaspora & Remittances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 3.5 million-strong Indian community in the UAE (~35% of its population) is the largest expatriate group and the backbone of the UAE's workforce, contributing significantly to its economy and society. The UAE is the largest single-source of remittances to India (over \$15-18 billion annually), vital for India's foreign exchange reserves and household incomes in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. The community acts as a living bridge, fostering deep people-to-people ties and cultural understanding.

Strategic & Security Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter-Terrorism & Intelligence: Close cooperation on counter-terrorism, deradicalization, and intelligence sharing is crucial for regional stability and for addressing mutual security threats. • Defense Ties: Regular joint military exercises (air force 'Desert Eagle', naval exercises), port calls, and defense dialogues. The UAE is a key security partner in the volatile Gulf region. • Maritime Security: Collaboration to secure vital sea lanes in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf, which are lifelines for India's energy and trade flows.
Cultural & Soft Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The inauguration of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi is a historic symbol of religious tolerance and deep cultural respect, significantly boosting India's soft power.

Challenges in India-UAE Relations:

1. Economic & Trade Frictions:

- Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs): Despite the CEPA, issues like stringent product standards, certification hurdles, and customs procedures can act as de facto barriers for Indian exporters.
- Trade Imbalance: While trade volume is huge, the balance often tilts toward the UAE (due to oil & gold imports). Increasing Indian exports to correct this is a work in progress.
- Oil Dependency: While the relationship is diversifying into renewables and nuclear (under the SHANTI Law), the bulk of trade is still anchored in hydrocarbons. This makes both economies vulnerable to global oil price shocks and the accelerating global shift toward green energy.

2. Geopolitical Tightrope:

- Balancing Relations with Pakistan: The UAE maintains close ties with Pakistan. While the UAE has clearly prioritized its relationship with India, it expects India to manage tensions with Pakistan responsibly, as instability affects the entire region.
- Engagement with Iran: India maintains significant economic and strategic interests in Iran (Chabahar Port, energy). The UAE, while now engaging diplomatically with Iran, remains historically suspicious. India's balancing act requires nuanced diplomacy.
- The "New Middle East" Dynamics: The UAE's normalization of ties with Israel (Abraham Accords) and its deepening ties with China (a strategic competitor for India) add layers of complexity.

3. Diaspora-related Issues:

- Visa and Labor Reforms: The UAE's evolving labor laws (like the "Emiratization" policy) and visa regulations, while progressive, can create uncertainty for the large Indian workforce, especially blue-collar workers.

- **Rights and Welfare:** Ensuring fair working conditions, timely wages, and legal protection for Indian workers remains a constant diplomatic priority, especially for low-skilled laborers vulnerable to exploitation.

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Pax Silica – Importance & Challenges for India – Explained Pointwise

In January 2026, the U.S. Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, in his arrival speech invited India to join the Pax Silica initiative. In this regard, let us understand what Pax Silica is & its importance as well as challenges – especially from India's perspective.

What is Pax Silica?

- Pax Silica is a U.S.-led geopolitical and economic initiative launched in December 2025 aimed at securing the global supply chain for semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- 'Pax' in Latin means Peace & 'Silica' is a key compound used in chip manufacturing – thus, together they suggest that the supply chain for new technologies should promote peace & prosperity.
- The term implies a potential shift in power from petrostates to "silica states" because of the growing global dependence on high-purity silica sand (especially quartzite) for the 21st-century economy, and the potential for this dependency to shape international relations, similar to how oil ("Pax Petrolia"/"Pax Americana") did in the 20th century.
- The Pax Silica Declaration noted that the initiative seeks to reduce coercive dependencies, secure global tech/AI supply chains, and build trusted digital infrastructure.

Who are the major participants in Pax Silica?

- **Formal Signatories:** These nine nations have formally committed to the Pax Silica Declaration, aligning their export controls, investment screening, and supply chain security protocols:
 1. United States: The lead architect and convener
 2. Japan: A primary partner in semiconductor materials and advanced manufacturing equipment.
 3. South Korea: A critical hub for memory chip production
 4. Singapore: A global leader in semiconductor fabrication and logistics
 5. Israel: A powerhouse for AI software, defense technology, and specialized R&D
 6. United Kingdom: A major player in AI research and semiconductor design (ARM)
 7. Australia: The "resource anchor," providing critical minerals like lithium and rare earths
 8. Qatar: Brings significant sovereign wealth and energy resources for data centers
 9. United Arab Emirates (UAE): Strategic partner in energy, capital (via funds like MGX), and regional tech infrastructure.

- **Observers:** These entities attend the summits and collaborate on specific projects but have not yet signed the full operational declaration:
 1. **The Netherlands:** It is a crucial partner through ASML (the world's only producer of EUV lithography machines).
 2. **Taiwan:** Despite its dominance in advanced chip manufacturing (TSMC), it remains an observer to manage the complex geopolitical sensitivities with China.
 3. **European Union (EU):** Participates in discussions but maintains a separate industrial policy, though individual member states (like the Netherlands) engage more directly.
 4. **Canada:** Contributing through its critical mineral reserves and AI research hubs.
 5. **OECD:** Acts as an advisory guest on global standards and economic impact.
- **India:** The U.S. Ambassador to India announced that India will be formally invited to join in February 2026. India is seen as the vital "alternative manufacturing base" and a source of skilled human capital for the alliance.

What are the objectives of Pax Silica?

1. **Secure supply chains:** Build resilient supply chains from critical minerals and energy inputs through advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, and AI infrastructure.
2. **Reduce dependencies:** Reduce coercive dependencies and protect materials and capabilities foundational to artificial intelligence.
3. **Economic cooperation:** Create coordinated investment and policy alignment among partner nations.
4. **Counter non-market practices:** Address non-market practices that undermine innovation and fair competition, including overcapacity and dumping.
5. **Maintaining the "18-Month Moving Gap":** A core strategic objective of Pax Silica is to institutionalize a permanent lead over competitors. The policy allows for the sale of older-generation technology to rivals to fund the R&D for the next generation, ensuring that the members of Pax Silica always remain at least 18 months ahead.

What is the importance of Pax Silica?

1. **Countering China's Dominance:** China accounts for approximately 69% of global rare-earth mining and nearly 90% of global refining, including a near monopoly over heavy elements essential for high-performance magnets. Pax Silica represents an effort to counter this dominance by creating alternative, trusted supply chains among aligned nations.
2. **Reducing Critical Supply Chain Vulnerability:** Covid pandemic demonstrated the limitations of supply chains that are heavily reliant on a single country. Pax Silica aims to reshore or friend-shore these supply chains to prevent economic and national-security risks from over-reliance on geopolitical rivals.
3. **Securing Semiconductor Sovereignty:** The CHIPS and Science Act is part of this broader "Pax Silica" vision - bringing advanced semiconductor manufacturing (which starts with silicon wafers) back to the U.S. and allied countries.

4. Defining the “Silicon Age”: The term itself reflects a historical transition. While Pax Americana was built on oil, steel, and naval dominance, Pax Silica is built on:
 - a. Compute Power: High-end processing is now the “currency” of global influence.
 - b. The Full Stack: Unlike previous chip alliances, it covers the entire lifecycle: from critical minerals (mining/refining) to semiconductors (design/fabs) and AI infrastructure (data centers/energy).
5. Trusted Ecosystems: By aligning export controls and investment screening among members, it ensures that sensitive technologies (like EUV lithography machines) do not reach strategic rivals.
6. Importance for India:
 - a. Alternative Manufacturing Hub: Pax Silica views India as the primary alternative to China for large-scale manufacturing and a massive source of human talent.
 - b. Domestic Boost: Joining the bloc will accelerate India’s Semiconductor Mission, providing access to advanced “know-how” and coordinated global investments.

What are the challenges of joining Pax Silica for India?

1. Dilution of Strategic Autonomy: Pax Silica isn’t just a trade forum; it demands alignment on export controls and investment screening. India has historically resisted being part of “blocs” that dictate who it can trade with (e.g., maintaining ties with Russia or recalibrating with China).
2. Policy Sovereignty: As a developing country, India has relatively young semiconductor & AI ecosystems compared with those of other Pax Silica countries. Consequently, India will seek to protect its semiconductor & AI ecosystems by granting domestic firms preferential treatment through subsidies, govt procurement, and calibrated import regulations. But, to be a “trusted partner,” India may have to align its domestic electronics and AI regulations with U.S.-led standards, which could limit its ability to create “India-first” industrial policies or preferential subsidies for local firms.
3. Supply Chain Retaliation: Despite its “Semiconductor Mission,” India remains heavily dependent on China for legacy chips, electronic components, and processed minerals. Analysts warn that China could weaponize its licensing conditions on rare-earth magnets (crucial for EVs and electronics) as a response to India joining Pax Silica – similar to what it did in 2025 when China suspended the supply of rare-earth magnets to India, negatively impacting the country’s automobile & electronics industry.
4. The “Capability-Leverage” Gap: India was initially left out of the inaugural Pax Silica summit because it lacked “indispensable” technology. Unlike Taiwan (fabrication) or the Netherlands (machinery), India is currently seen as a “useful participant” (for talent and market) rather than a “critical player.” India’s AI & semiconductor ecosystems are also well behind those of Pax Silica countries.
5. The Expectation Gap: The member countries of Pax Silica, in addition to their technological strengths, are US allies & high income countries. If India decides to join the Pax Silica, it will be the first developing country & also the first non-US ally to join the initiative. This may create an ‘expectation gap’ between India & the other members of Pax Silica.

6. Digital Sovereignty: The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act mandates that critical citizen data stay in India. However, Pax Silica encourages seamless data flows between “trusted partners.”.

What can be the way forward?

1. Build Domestic Capability:

Upstream Raw Material Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map and develop domestic quartz/silica sand resources (e.g., in Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) with high purity, while establishing strategic stockpiles. Invest in beneficiation and purification technologies to upgrade low-grade silica, reducing import dependency.
Midstream Manufacturing Push	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scale up polysilicon and wafer production (for solar and electronics) through PLI-like incentives, joint ventures with tech leaders, and low-cost financing. Establish specialized silicon industrial parks with reliable power, water, and logistics – critical for energy-intensive silicon refining.
Downstream Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become a global hub in solar module assembly and advance into high-value semiconductor fabrication (leveraging the India Semiconductor Mission). Focus not just on chips but on compound semiconductors (GaN, SiC) for EVs, defense, and telecom.

2. “China+1” with Indian Advantage: Position India as a reliable alternative in the Friendshoring/China+1 strategies of the US, EU, Japan, and Taiwan. Use free-trade agreements (e.g., with Taiwan, Australia) to secure technology transfer and materials access.

3. Strategic Alliances:

- Join mini-lateral initiatives like the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP) to access global critical minerals (including high-purity silica resources).
- Deepen collaboration with Quad on supply chain resilience, R&D in advanced materials, and securing seabed/mining rights.

4. Invest in R&D and Skilling for Next-Gen Technologies:

- Fund research into silicon recycling/recovery from PV panels and e-waste, and alternative substrates (e.g., perovskite-silicon tandem cells).
- Create specialized training programs in materials science, semiconductor process engineering, and advanced manufacturing via partnerships with IITs, global universities, and industry.

5. **Strategic Autonomy with Alignment:** In order to secure its strategic autonomy, India needs to maintain ties with both Western “Pax Silica” blocs and resource-supplying Global South nations, avoiding over-dependence on any one camp.
6. **Diplomatic Leverage:** Use India’s market size and strategic location to negotiate tech transfers (e.g., from Taiwan, Japan) and attract FDI in silicon-based industries.

Conclusion: India should look forward to transform itself from a silicon & high tech consumer to a producer and innovator. This requires combining – Industrial policy (like the China model), Global partnerships (like Japan’s resource diplomacy) & Tech leapfrogging (like Taiwan’s semiconductor focus). By doing this, India will establish itself as a key node in the resilient, diversified global silicon economy while boosting energy security, high-tech employment, and geopolitical influence.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations

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CBDC – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

The RBI has recently recommended to the Central Government that the interlinking of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS countries be included in the agenda of the BRICS 2026 Summit, which is to be hosted by India. Previously, India has pushed for international cooperation & standardization on cryptocurrencies during its presidency of G-20 in 2023. In this regard, let us understand the CBDC as a concept.



What is CBDC?

- CBDC i.e. Central Bank Digital Currency is a digital form of a country's official currency (like the digital dollar, digital euro, digital yuan, etc.) issued and regulated directly by the central bank, rather than by commercial banks or private entities.
- Types of CBDC:
 - Retail CBDC = Designed for the general public, households, and businesses for everyday transactions (buying groceries, paying bills).
 - Wholesale CBDC = Restricted to financial institutions (banks) for large-value settlements, such as interbank transfers or government bond trading.
- Examples:
 - China: Digital Yuan (e-CNY) - Already in advanced pilot stages
 - Eurozone: Digital Euro - Under investigation by the European Central Bank
 - USA: Digital Dollar - Still in research and discussion phases
- The RBI has historically been very conservative about private cryptocurrencies, repeatedly calling for a ban, and progressive about CBDC, arguing that they have multiple uses.

What are the key features of CBDC?

1. Sovereign Guarantee: Unlike money in a private bank account, a CBDC is a direct liability of the central bank. It is considered "risk-free" because it is backed by the government.
2. Legal Tender: It must be accepted for all payments, just like physical cash.
3. Digital-Only: It exists purely in electronic form, though it may be accessible via digital wallets, cards, or apps.
4. Non-Interest Bearing: CBDCs do not earn interest, ensuring they act as a medium of exchange rather than a speculative investment.

Difference between Cryptocurrency & CBDC:

Cryptocurrency	CBDC
Decentralized (no central authority). Created by private entities or algorithms.	Centralized (issued and backed by the nation's central bank). Sovereign liability.
Value is highly volatile, driven by speculation, adoption, and market sentiment.	Value is stable, pegged 1:1 to the physical national currency (e.g., 1 digital rupee = 1 paper rupee).

Primarily uses public, permissionless blockchains (e.g., Bitcoin, Ethereum).	Likely uses permissioned/distributed ledger or advanced centralized database; not necessarily a blockchain.
User-controlled	Central Bank & Government controlled
Transactions are public on the ledger, but identities are hidden behind wallet addresses.	Likely requires identity verification (KYC). Full transaction transparency to the central bank.
Not legal tender	Legal tender

What is the significance of CBDC?

- 1. Financial Inclusion for the “Unbanked”:** CBDC could give unbanked populations access to digital payments via basic digital wallets, without requiring commercial bank accounts. Also, lower transaction costs benefit low-income households and small businesses.
- 2. Monetary Policy and Stability:** CBDCs give Central banks better control over the monetary policy in the following way:
 - Monetary Policy Transmission: CBDC can help in better transmission of central bank's policy actions like changing interest rates.
 - Programmability: Money can be “programmed” for specific uses (e.g., a subsidy that can only be spent on food or fuel), ensuring that public funds are used as intended.
- 3. Combating Financial Crime:** Every unit of a CBDC has a digital “fingerprint,” because of which it is much harder to counterfeit or use for illegal activities compared to physical cash. Thus, CBDC has:
 - Traceability: It allows authorities to track money laundering, tax evasion, and terrorism financing more effectively.
 - Digital Transparency: While this raises privacy concerns for some, it ensures that the “shadow economy” is brought into the light of regulation.
- 4. Cross-border Payments:**
 - Cross-border payments are slow and expensive at present, involving multiple “correspondent banks” and high fees (sometimes over 6%). CBDCs can settle transactions instantly, at any time, without waiting for bank opening hours.
 - By removing middleman banks, CBDC can help in reducing the the cost of remittances drastically.
 - CBDC payments would also help India to make its payments to Russia & Iran easier because SWIFT framework is currently not available for either country.
- 5. Offline Transactions:** One of the hardest technical challenges is making digital money work without the internet (like cash does). While “hardware wallets” are being tested, ensuring they can't be “double-spent” while offline is difficult.

6. **Fiscal Policy Efficiency:** CBDC allows instant distribution of subsidies, or benefits with reduced leakage or fraud. Thus, help in reducing the corruption in the administration.

What are the risk & challenges involved in CBDC?

1. **Bank Disintermediation (“Run Risk”):** If people feel a CBDC is “safer” than a bank account, they might move all their savings from commercial banks to the central bank. This could trigger or accelerate bank runs, destabilizing the banking system.
2. **Impact on Credit Creation:** Commercial banks rely on deposits to fund loans. A large-scale shift to CBDC could shrink banks’ deposit bases, potentially raising lending costs and reducing credit availability for households and businesses.
3. **Loss of Financial Privacy:** Unlike physical cash, all CBDC transactions are inherently digital and traceable. While designed to combat illegal activity, this creates a potential for state surveillance of citizens’ financial lives.
4. **Cybersecurity risks & Systemic Failure:** A centralized or semi-centralized CBDC system becomes a single point of failure. A technical glitch, cyberattack, or power outage could cripple a nation’s entire digital payment system.
5. **Digital Divide:** If CBDC becomes the primary payment method, it could exclude populations with limited digital access or literacy (elderly, rural poor).
6. **Tariff Threat:** US President Donald Trump has already warned the BRICS countries of additional tariffs if they move away from dollar-based international monetary system. With 50% tariffs already in place, India needs to plan how to accommodate the additional tariffs.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Phased Implementation:** Many countries are prioritizing “Wholesale CBDCs” (for bank-to-bank transfers) because they offer immediate efficiency gains in cross-border trade without the massive privacy and tech risks of a public-facing currency. For public use, the focus is on starting with small, restricted pilot groups to test “load capacity” and offline functionality before a full national rollout.
2. **Privacy by Design:** Privacy concerns can be addressed by adopting:
 - Privacy-Enhancing Technologies:** The most successful CBDC frameworks are adopting Privacy-Enhancing Technologies (PETs).
 - Tiered Privacy:** Small, daily transactions (like buying a coffee) could be made anonymous, similar to cash.
 - Threshold Monitoring:** Only large or suspicious transactions would trigger regulatory oversight to prevent money laundering.
 - Sunset Clause for Data:** Mandate automatic deletion of transaction data after a short period for routine payments, preserving auditability for crime prevention but limiting mass surveillance.
3. **Offline Functionality:** Developing “hardware-based” solutions (like smart cards or specialized phone chips) that allow transactions to occur during internet outages.
4. **Universal Access Design:** Ensure interfaces are simple, accessible for the disabled and elderly, and usable on basic feature phones.

Conclusion: The ultimate test of a successful CBDC will be to make the monetary system more efficient & inclusive without making it more fragile & authoritarian. Navigating this carefully is the most challenging aspect of the central bank digital currency.

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UPSC GS-3: Economics

Himalayan Ecocide – Reasons & Consequences – Explained Pointwise

Recently, the Uttarakhand Forest Department approved the felling of nearly 7000 Deodar trees in the Dharali-Harsil region for the Char Dham road-widening project – diverting 43 Ha of forest land for the project, with 10 Ha meant for muck dumping. With nearly 331-days of continuous climate impact, >4000 deaths attributed to climate-induced disasters like cloudburst, landslides, avalanches & flash floods in 2025 alone in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand – such a decision by the govt has been termed as the Himalayan ecocide i.e. the destruction of Himalayan ecosystem.



How fragile the Himalayan ecosystem is?

- 1. Young and Unstable Mountains:** The Himalayas are geologically young and still rising, making them prone to severe erosion, landslides, and earthquakes. Because the Indian tectonic plate continues to push into the Eurasian plate at a rate of approximately 5 mm per year, the mountains are literally still “growing.” This constant movement makes the region one of the most earthquake-prone zones in the world (Zones IV and V on seismic maps).
- 2. Steep Slopes and Rugged Terrain:** The dramatic vertical relief leads to rapid runoff of water and sediments, limiting soil formation and stability. Even minor disturbances can trigger slope failures.

3. **Cryosphere Sensitivity:** The region is the “Third Pole,” holding the world’s largest volume of ice outside the polar regions. Glaciers, permafrost, and snow are acutely sensitive to even small changes in temperature.
4. **High Altitude and Low Resilience:** Organisms in high-altitude ecosystems are specialized to narrow climatic ranges. Even small temperature shifts can push species beyond their survival limits, with nowhere higher to migrate.

What are the reasons behind rising fragility of Himalayas?

Climate Change (The Greatest Threat)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rapid Warming: The Himalayas are warming at a rate significantly higher than the global average (3 times the global average). 2. Glacial Retreat: Glaciers are melting at an alarming pace, affecting long-term water storage and river flows. 3. Permafrost Thaw: Permafrost that holds rocks together is melting very fast. This makes high-altitude peaks literally crumble, contributing to disasters like the 2021 Chamoli debris flow.
Human Pressures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deforestation: Oak and Deodar forests act as natural sponges, absorbing rainwater and anchoring the soil with deep roots. Massive clearing for resorts and highways has stripped this armor. Without trees, the thin topsoil is washed away instantly during a “cloudburst,” turning rain into a “debris flow” of mud and boulders. 2. Unsustainable Tourism: Massive influxes of tourists (like in Ladakh, Nepal, or Himachal) strain limited water resources, generate unmanageable waste, and lead to trail erosion and pollution. 3. Unsustainable Infrastructure: Large-scale road construction, dam building, and mining trigger landslides, alter river ecosystems, and fragment wildlife corridors. For e.g. To widen roads for projects like the <i>Char Dham Pariyojana</i>, hills are cut vertically rather than using safer, stepped “benching.” This removes the base support of the slope, leading to over 800 active landslide zones along newly built highways. 4. Muck Dumping: Debris from construction is often illegally dumped into riverbeds. This raises the river level, so when even a moderate rain occurs, the river overflows much faster, causing “man-made” flash floods.

What could be the consequences of Himalayan ecocide?

1. **Water Security Threat:** The Himalayas are the source of 10 major Asian river systems (Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, etc.), supporting ~1.5 billion people. Changes in snowmelt and glacier melt disrupt the timing and volume of this “water tower,” threatening agriculture, hydropower, and drinking water.
2. **Biodiversity Loss:** The Himalayas are a global biodiversity hotspot with thousands of endemic species (e.g., snow leopards, red pandas, Himalayan flora). Habitat destruction, invasive species, and climate shifts could trigger irreversible species loss.

3. Increased Disaster Risk: A combination of melting permafrost, intense rainfall, and destabilized slopes leads to more frequent and severe landslides, flash floods, and debris flows for e.g. formation of glacial lakes – Meltwater forms unstable lakes behind moraine dams, risking catastrophic Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) that can wipe out communities and infrastructure downstream.
4. Disruption of Monsoon Systems: The Himalayas play a crucial role in driving and modulating the South Asian monsoon. Large-scale ecological changes could alter monsoon patterns, leading to unpredicted rainfall, increased drought in some regions & extreme floods in others.
5. Collapse of Livelihoods: Millions depend on Himalayan ecosystems for agriculture, pastoralism, and freshwater fisheries. Tourism (trekking, pilgrimage, mountaineering), traditional medicine and non-timber forest products, Himalayan ecocide will lead to loss of livelihood of millions of people.
6. Mass Migration: As mountain springs dry up (a phenomenon called “dying springs”) and villages sink due to land subsidence, thousands are forced to migrate. This creates a surge of climate refugees moving into already overcrowded cities like Delhi, Dhaka, and Karachi.
7. Cultural Loss: The Himalayas are a cultural and spiritual heartland for multiple religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, indigenous traditions). Loss of sacred landscapes, pilgrimage routes (e.g., Char Dham, Mount Kailash), and traditional knowledge would represent an irreplaceable cultural extinction.

What should be the way forward?

1. Himalayan-Specific Building Codes: Implementation of seismic-resilient construction that combines traditional methods (like the *Dhaji Dewari* or *Kath-Kuni* styles) with modern engineering.
2. Mandatory Carrying Capacity Audits: Before any large-scale project is approved, a scientific audit must determine if the land, water, and air can support the additional load.
3. Green Roads: Moving away from vertical hill cutting to “stepped” or “benched” slopes. Using soil bio-engineering (planting specific native deep-rooted grasses and shrubs to naturally anchor soil) is significantly more effective and cheaper than concrete walls.
4. Dhara Vikas (Spring Rejuvenation): Scaling up the “Sikkim Model” of recharging mountain springs through “staggered contour trenching,” which allows rainwater to seep into the ground rather than running off and causing erosion.
5. The “Bhutan Model”: Shifting toward a “High Value, Low Volume” tourism strategy. This involves entry permits, daily tourist caps, and “Sustainable Development Fees” that are directly reinvested into local conservation.

Conclusion: Himalayas are not just a geographical entity, it is the very foundation of the subcontinent's existence. The continuing sequence of disasters in the Himalayas shows the prioritization of short-term, economic gains over long-term disaster resilience. It is high time that we plan & implement genuine, science-based sustainable development policies by keeping in mind the axiom that “*without Himalayas, there is no India*”.

UPSC GS-3: Disaster Management

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Delimitation Exercise in India- Explained Pointwise

Every democracy must periodically redraw its electoral map to reflect population change. In India, this process is known as delimitation. The **last delimitation happened in 1975**, after which Indira Gandhi put a freeze until 2000. A year later, Parliament again froze the number of members of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies till 2026. The delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the **first Census after 2026**. Due to this inordinate delay, several issues related to democracy, demography and federalism await the fifth delimitation exercise.



What is Delimitation? What is the constitutional status behind Delimitation in India?

- 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**.

- The last Delimitation Commission (2002-08) only redraw the internal constituency boundaries without reallocating seats among the States. The next Commission would probably reallocate seats among States for the first time since 1976, redraw all constituencies, and create reserved constituencies for women's 33% quota.

What is the significance of Delimitation Exercise in India?

1. Political Representation and Electoral Fairness: Ensures democratic legitimacy through equitable distribution of seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. E.g. The 2002 Delimitation Commission led to a **better voter-per-MP ratio in urban and rural areas** and prevented malapportionment, ensuring each MP represents roughly the same number of citizens.
2. Upholding Democracy: Reduces gerrymandering (political manipulation of electoral district boundaries to advantage a party, group, or socioeconomic class within the constituency), ensuring fair electoral contests. E.g. Supreme Court in **Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006)** upheld the importance of delimitation for fair democracy.
3. Socio-Economic Equity: The Delimitation Exercise enhances representation for marginalized communities and Scheduled Tribes. E.g. The J&K Delimitation Commission **allocated more seats to Jammu** to address past disparities.
4. Strengthening of Federalism: The Delimitation process ensures equitable representation among states, balancing national unity with regional autonomy. E.g. The **42nd Amendment's population freeze prevented southern states with lower population growth from losing representation**, thereby upholding the spirit of cooperative federalism, crucial for India's unity.
5. Administrative Efficiency: The Delimitation exercise ensures a manageable voter-to-representative ratio, aiding governance. E.g. **Mumbai and Bengaluru saw improved electoral administration post the 2002 exercise**.
6. Electoral Integrity and Governance: The Delimitation process aligns representation with new demographic realities, as seen in global examples like the **UK Boundary Commission**.

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**. According to delimitation projections, if seats were allocated purely by population in an expanded Lok Sabha of approx. 888 members, UP would rise from 80 to 151 seats & Bihar from 40 to 82, while for TN it would increase from 39 to 53 & Kerala from 20 to just 23.
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 Kuldip 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.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- 1. Implement Expert Recommendations:** The following commissions have suggested the following reforms for ensuring federal balance and delimitation needs:
 - **Sarkaria Commission (1983):** Suggested a balanced approach between federalism and national unity.
 - **Punchhi Commission (2010):** Proposed equal weightage to population and governance needs.
- 2. Ensure Transparency and Independent Oversight:** The Election Commission's autonomy should be strengthened to ensure fair delimitation process.
 - In **Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006)**, SC emphasized the need for fair representation while balancing federal concerns.
 - In **TN Seshan v. Union of India (1995)**, SC highlighted the importance of an independent delimitation body.
- 3. Constitutional and Legislative Reforms:** Amend **Articles 81** and **82** to ensure balanced regional representation and introduce proportional representation models used in Germany and Canada.
- 4. Policy Suggestions:**
 - **Weighted Representation Model:** Adopt a weighted formula – 80% weight for population, 20% for development indicators such as literacy, health, or sustained fertility control – similar to how Finance Commission uses composite indicators for tax devolution.
 - **Independent Delimitation Commission:** Free from political interference.
 - **Phased Implementation:** A gradual transition to prevent political instability.

Conclusion: Delimitation is a delicate balance between democracy and federalism. While it ensures equal representation, challenges related to regional disparities, population dynamics, and governance issues must be addressed. The Supreme Court and Election Commission must play a proactive role in ensuring transparency and fairness. A balanced approach grounded in constitutional values, expert recommendations, and global best practices – is essential to uphold India's democratic and federal ethos.

Read more- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Geriatric Care – Explained Pointwise

The RBI has recently released a new report on the demographic transition happening in the country. The report links demographic change to the long-term sustainability of regional budgets & envisions graceful ageing of the elderly population.

The **care for elderly population in India** is an emerging challenge with the rapid growth in the number of elderly population in India. With all the focus on demographic dividend, India is also witnessing a

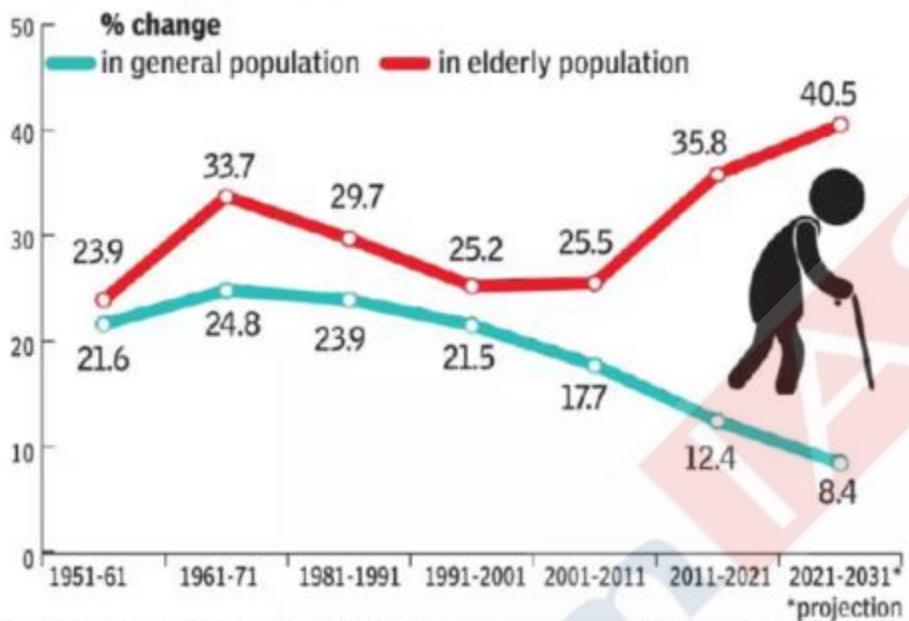
silent rise in the elderly population in India. The need of the hour is to provide adequate care for the elderly population in India.



What is the Status of Elderly Population in India?

- The number of elderly (persons above 60 years) is set to increase from **100 million in 2011** to **230 million in 2036**. By 2050, the elderly population is expected to constitute nearly **one-fifth of the total population**.
- Increase in the old age-dependence ratio: The old age-dependence ratio denotes the number of persons aged 60-plus per 100 persons in the age group of 15-59 years. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MOSPI) '**Elderly in India 2021**' report, the old-age dependency ratio is increasing in India. The old age-dependence ratio has increased from **10.9% in 1961** to **14.2% in 2011**, to **15.7% in 2021** and is projected to increase to **20.1% in 2031** respectively.

Decadal growth in elderly population compared to that of general population



Population Census Data, Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections November 2019, Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Census of India 2011

Source: MOSPI

Source- MOSPI

- **Inter-State Variation:** The demographic transition is also not even across the States. According to the RBI report, Kerala & TN will be “ageing States” by 2036 because their elderly populations will exceed 22% & 20% respectively. On the other hand, the working age populations of Bihar, UP, Jharkhand will continue to rise beyond 2031, Karnataka & Maharashtra occupy the middle ground – balancing growth with the onset of ageing pressure.

What is the need for taking care of the Elderly Population in India?

1. **Channelization of experience:** Elderly peoples carry an **immense personal and professional experience**. We need to channelize these experiences by taking care of the elderly population.
2. **Generational Link:** The elderly citizens provide a **vital generational link** for the upcoming generation, such as **providing support** and **stability to families and society at large**. For ex- **Grandparents in joint families** provide a **crucial link for transferring values and morals** to the younger generation.
3. **Social Harmony:** The deep cultural impressions and social experiences of the elderly population in India **provide the necessary buffer** against **intolerance, violence and hate crimes**.
4. **Moral and ethical responsibility:** It is the moral and ethical responsibility of the society to care for its people beyond their prime. This helps in **reciprocating their lifetime of physical, social, emotional, and economic investment** in the society.

What are the Challenges Faced by Elderly Population in India?

Social Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Neglect: Elderlies are increasingly being neglected by the younger generation due to various social reasons such as western education, globalisation, nuclear family structure. 2. Abuse of the elderly population: Elderlies in India face various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, psychological or financial. They suffer from emotional harm that emerges from verbal or emotional abuse. 3. Intersection of Caste and Elderly: The lower caste elderly have to keep on working for livelihood even at old age due to financial issues. While for the upper caste elderly, good jobs become less available and they hesitate to take menial jobs which creates a feeling of 'worthlessness' amongst them. 4. Feminisation of ageing: The life of elderly widows is riddled with stringent moral codes of the society. Social bias against elderly women results in unjust allocation of resources, neglect, abuse, exploitation, gender-based violence, lack of access to basic services and prevention of ownership of assets.
Economic and Financial Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of Income & Poor financial status: According to PFRDA report on Financial Security of India's elderly, a large elderly population which remains outside the pension safety net. Furthermore, the pension provided to them remains very low for their proper sustenance. 2. Low funding by the government: India spends only about 1% of its gross domestic product on pensions. India's income support systems in their current form remain incapable of catering to the old age population. 3. Lack of housing and other basic amenities: The housing available to a majority of the senior citizens are sometimes inappropriate and unsuitable to their requirement.
Health Issues and Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rise in age-related chronic illness: According to the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) in 2021, One in five elderly persons in India has mental health issues and around 75 per cent of them suffer from a chronic disease. 2. Increasing need for geriatric care: Increased health-related expenses for the treatment of diseases like Non-Communicable diseases, cataract, hearing loss etc. creates financial problem for the elderly population.

What are the Government initiatives for elderly care in India?

National Policy for Older Persons 2011	The policy aims to encourage individuals to make provisions for their own and their spouse during old age, to bring non-governmental organizations for caring for older persons and to provide healthcare facilities to the elderly.
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)	The scheme provide an old-age pension for persons above the age of 60 years belonging to the BPL category.
Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)	The scheme provides Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices for Senior citizens belonging to the BPL category.
Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana	The scheme aims to provide social security during old age. It also protects elderly persons aged 60 and above against a future fall in their interest income due to uncertain market conditions.
Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) Initiative and SAGE portal	It aims to help startups interested in providing services for elderly care.

What should be the Way Forward?

1. Formalization of caregiving economy:
 - o According to a NITI Aayog report, healthcare offered at home can replace up to 65% of unnecessary hospital visits and reduce hospital costs by 20%.
 - o Well-trained caregivers possessing empathetic outlook towards elderly need to be provided formal and better work place conditions.
 - o Recognition of "home" as a place for providing care and as a "place of work" for caregivers will be the first step towards elderly care.
2. Comprehensive policy on home based care: This policy must include within its ambit the streamlining of vocational training, nomenclature, roles, and career progression of the caregivers. It must also streamline the registry of caregivers, ensure transparency and accountability and establish grievance redressal mechanisms.
3. Strengthening pension systems: The government must allocate a special budget for the elderly population to strengthen the pension systems through better funding and coverage.
4. Replication of Switzerland's TIME BANK initiative: Under this initiative, the younger generation start to save 'time' by taking care of senior citizens. Later, they can use the saved 'time' when they get old, sick, or in need of someone to take care of them. This initiative must be applied to Indian setup.

5. Raising of retirement age: India should raise the retirement age in the future, in a phased manner so as not to jeopardize opportunities for younger generations.
6. Proactive government policies: The Government should proactively work on **lifestyle modification, non-communicable disease management, vision and hearing problem management, and accessible health care of the elderly population in India.**
7. Silver Economy: Encourage private sector investment in assisted living facilities (with strict quality control), elderly-friendly products, and services.
8. Rationalisation of subsidies: The RBI report recommends the ageing States to rationalize their subsidies to afford rising pension costs & youthful States to invest heavily in human capital.

Conclusion: For most of the India's elderly, the future looks less like 'graceful ageing' & more like financial dependency, unless the State drastically expands social pensions, because without a massive expansion of the public geriatric care, the 'graceful ageing' will be available only to the wealthy.

Read More: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Govt policies for vulnerable section

India-EU FTA – Explained Pointwise

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement (called the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)) has been under negotiation since 2007, with talks restarting in 2021 after a long pause. Now after almost 2 decades of negotiation, India & EU have finalized the FTA – which has been referred to as the 'Mother of All Deals'.

What are the important provisions of India-EU FTA?

1. Trade in Goods & Tariffs:

- EU Access for India: The EU will eliminate tariffs on over 99% of Indian exports by value. This is a massive boost for labor-intensive sectors like textiles, apparel, leather, gems and jewellery, and marine products, which will now enter the EU duty-free.
- Indian Access for EU: India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on roughly 92-97% of EU goods.
 - Automobiles: Duties on luxury EU cars (above €15,000) will drop from 110% to 10% over five years under a quota system (250,000 vehicles/year).
 - Alcohol: Tariffs on premium wines will be cut from 150% to 20%, and spirits to 40%.
 - Machinery & Chemicals: Duties of up to 44% on machinery and 22% on chemicals will be mostly eliminated.

2. Services and Professional Mobility:

- Market Access: India secured access to 144 EU services sub-sectors (including IT, finance, and education), while India opened 102 sub-sectors to the EU.
- Professional Mobility: The FTA provides a predictable framework for business travelers, intra-corporate transferees, and independent professionals.
- Students: A new framework guarantees post-study work rights (up to 9 months) and eases the path for Indian students to study in the EU.

- **Social Security:** Both sides agreed to work toward a Social Security Agreement within five years to ensure Indian professionals don't lose their pension contributions while working in the EU.

3. Sustainability and Climate:

- **CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism):** India secured "Most Favored Nation" (MFN) assurance. While not fully exempt, India will receive technical cooperation and financial assistance (€500 million) to help industries like steel and aluminum reduce their carbon footprint.
- **Labor Rights:** Both parties committed to core International Labour Organization (ILO) principles, including the abolition of child labor and non-discrimination at work.

4. Intellectual Property (IPR) & Technology:

- **Traditional Knowledge:** The EU has formally recognized India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), protecting Indian heritage (like Yoga or Ayurveda) from being patented by foreign firms.
- **Tech Cooperation:** The deal goes beyond trade to include collaboration on Artificial Intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and clean energy.

5. Sensitive Sector Safeguards:

- **Agriculture & Dairy:** To protect small-scale farmers, India has completely excluded sensitive items like dairy, wheat, rice, and sugar from liberalization.
- **Geographical Indications (GIs):** A separate agreement is being finalized to protect iconic products (like Darjeeling Tea or Champagne) from imitations.

• WHO GAINS WHAT, WHAT NEXT



FOR INDIA

	Before FTA	After FTA
Marine sector	upto 26%	0%
Chemical	upto 12.8%	0%
Leather & footwear	upto 17%	0%
Plastic & rubber	upto 6.5%	0%
Textile & apparel	upto 12%	0%
Base metal	upto 10%	0%
Gems & jewellery	upto 4%	0%
Railway, aircraft, ships	upto 7.7%	0%
Furniture & light consumer goods	upto 10.5%	0%
Toys	upto 4.7%	0%
Sports goods	upto 4.7%	0%

FOR EU

	Before FTA	After FTA
Motor vehicles	110%	10% (quota of 250k/yr)
Wine	150%	20% (premium); 30% (medium)
Spirits	up to 150%	40%
Beer	110%	50%
Olive Oil	up to 45%	0%
Kiwis & pears	33%	10% (in-quota)
Machinery & electrical equipment	up to 44%	0% for most products
Aircraft & spacecraft	up to 11%	0% for most items
Iron and steel	up to 22%	0% for most items
Pharma	11%	0% for most items
Processed food (bread, biscuit, pasta, chocolate, pet-food)	up to 50%	0%

- India's labour-intensive annual exports worth \$35 billion benefit immediately
- Signing of the deal expected later this year
- Legal scrubbing to take 4-5 months

- Deal expected to come into effect by early next year
- India will receive same flexibility as US on EU's carbon tax



SOURCE: COMMERCE & INDUSTRY MINISTRY, EUROPEAN UNION



Source: The Indian Express

How does it benefit India?

- Boost to Exports & Economic Growth:** India would gain greater and more predictable market access for its competitive export sectors. This includes:
 - Textiles and Apparel:** Reduced EU tariffs (currently up to 9-12%) would make Indian garments, home textiles, etc., more competitive against rivals like Bangladesh and Vietnam (who already enjoy duty-free access to the EU under Everything But Arms/EBA scheme).
 - Agriculture & Processed Foods:** Products like basmati rice, mangoes, grapes, spices, and seafood could see higher exports with simplified regulations and recognition of India's Geographical Indications (GIs).

- Services: Major gains for IT/ITeS, business services, engineering, and R&D. Easier cross-border data flow provisions would be a huge boost.
- Overall, 6% of India's exports will see tariff reduction - mostly sourced from the labour-intensive sectors - which will help in improving the trade competitiveness of Indian products in the EU market.

2. Movement of Skilled Professionals:

- The FTA will help Indian professionals (engineers, IT experts, consultants, nurses, chefs) to get easier & quota-based temporary work visas & permits.
- Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) for professional qualifications (e.g., degrees, certifications for accountants, architects). This would allow Indian professionals to work in the EU without retraining.
- This helps India leverage its demographic dividend, secure high-value remittances, and reduce friction in a traditionally restrictive area for the EU.

3. Attracting FDI: The agreement would boost the investor confidence, encouraging EU companies to set up more manufacturing and R&D hubs in India to serve both the Indian and wider Asian markets ("China+1" strategy). This aligns with Make in India and can create jobs and facilitate technology transfer.

4. Consumer Benefits: Indian consumers and industries would get access to high-quality EU goods at lower prices due to tariff reductions.

5. Technology Transfer & Upgradation: Increased competition and collaboration would push Indian industry to improve quality and innovation. Partnerships in green tech, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure (areas where the EU is a leader) could accelerate India's sustainable development goals.

6. Recognition of Indian Heritage: The EU has officially recognized India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL). This prevents foreign companies from "biopiracy" - patenting traditional Indian assets like Yoga, Neem, or Ayurveda - and ensures these remain protected Indian intellectual property.

How does it benefit EU?

1. Access to a Massive, Fast-Growing Consumer Market: India, with its 1.4 billion people and a rapidly growing middle class, represents one of the world's last untapped large consumer markets. The EU seeks guaranteed, preferential access for its premium goods -especially in sectors like - Automobile & Auto parts, Wines & Spirits, Cheese & Dairy, Machinery, Chemicals etc.

2. Countering China's Influence (China-Plus-One): The EU has a clear "de-risking" and diversification strategy. Deepening ties with democratic India is a geopolitical imperative to reduce economic over-dependence on China and build a reliable strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific.

3. Access to Raw Materials & Intermediates: Reliable access to Indian materials and processed goods (like generic pharmaceutical ingredients, textiles, leather) is crucial for EU industries.

4. Boosting EU's Services & Digital Trade:

- Financial, Legal, and Business Services: EU banks, insurance companies, and professional service firms seek better access to India's vast and protected services market.
- Digital Trade: New rules protect software source code from mandatory disclosure and establish high standards for data privacy, providing legal certainty for EU tech firms.

5. Sustainability Standards: By including chapters on climate (aligned with the Paris Agreement) and labor rights, the EU ensures that its trade with India adheres to the high environmental and ethical standards demanded by European voters.

What are the challenges that remain?

- 1. India's Demands on Agri & Textiles:** India wants greater access for its textiles, garments, and agricultural products (like rice, fruits, shrimp). The EU resists due to sensitive domestic producers (e.g., textile makers in Italy/Portugal, farmers in France/Poland) and non-tariff barriers like stringent Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures.
- 2. Non-Tariff Barriers:** For Indian exporters, the biggest challenge isn't the tariff anymore; it's the Non-Tariff Barriers like:
 - a. CBAM (Carbon Tax):** The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is set to enter its full definitive phase. Even with the FTA, Indian steel and aluminum exporters may still have to pay a "carbon cost" or face 15-22% price cuts to stay competitive unless they drastically green their production.
 - b. EUDR (Deforestation Regulation):** New EU rules (phasing in through late 2026) require proof that products like coffee, rubber, and leather did not come from deforested land. This is incredibly difficult for India's millions of small-scale farmers to document.
 - c. SPS Norms:** The EU has some of the world's strictest Sanitary and Phytosanitary rules. Many Indian agri-products often face rejection due to pesticide residue levels that are acceptable in India but banned in the EU.
- 3. Data Privacy and Digital Friction:** While there is alignment between India's DPDP Act (2023) and the EU's GDPR, full "data adequacy" has not yet been granted. Without a formal "adequacy status" from the EU, Indian IT firms still face a "compliance tax"—expensive legal and technical hurdles to move and process European data in Indian servers.
- 4. Ratification Hurdles:** The agreement must be ratified by the European Parliament. Some EU nations with strong agricultural lobbies (like France) may still raise objections to specific provisions, even though sensitive items like beef and sugar were excluded.

UPSC GS-3: Indian Economy

Read More: [The Indian Express](#)

HIGHLIGHTS: ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

HIGHLIGHTS: ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

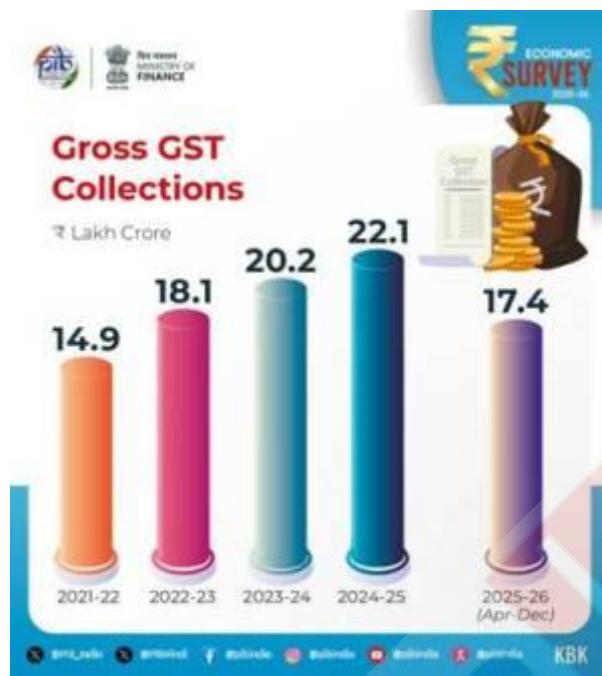
STATE OF THE ECONOMY



Source – PIB

1. The global environment remains fragile, with growth holding up better than expected but risks elevated amid intensifying geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation and financial vulnerabilities. The impact of these shocks may still surface with a lag.
2. Against this backdrop, India's performance stands out. The First Advance Estimates place FY26 real GDP growth at 7.4 per cent and GVA growth at 7.3 per cent, reaffirming India's status as the fastest-growing major economy for the fourth consecutive year.
3. Private Final Consumption Expenditure grew by 7.0 per cent in FY26, reaching 61.5 per cent of GDP, the highest since 2012 (FY23 also recorded 61.5 per cent share). This growth is supported by low inflation, stable employment, and increasing real purchasing power. Strong agricultural performance has bolstered rural consumption, while improvements in urban consumption, aided by tax rationalization, indicate broad-based demand momentum.
4. Investment activity strengthened in FY26, with Gross Fixed Capital Formation growing by 7.8 per cent and its share remaining steady at 30 per cent of GDP. This momentum was buoyed by sustained public capital expenditure and a revival in private investment activity, as evident from corporate announcements.
5. On the supply side, services remain the main driver of growth. In the first half of FY26, the Gross Value Added (GVA) for services increased by 9.3 per cent, with an estimated 9.1 per cent growth for the entire fiscal year. This trend indicates a broad-based expansion across the sector.

FISCAL DEVELOPMENTS: ANCHORING STABILITY THROUGH CREDIBLE CONSOLIDATION



1. The government's prudent fiscal management has strengthened credibility and reinforced confidence in India's macroeconomic and fiscal framework. This led to three sovereign credit rating upgrades in 2025 - by Morningstar DBRS, S&P Global Ratings, and Rating and Investment Information (R&I), Inc.
2. Centre's revenue receipts strengthened from an average of about 8.5 per cent of GDP in FY16–FY20 to 9.2% of GDP in FY25 (PA). This improvement was driven by buoyant non-corporate tax collections, which rose from about 2.4 per cent of GDP pre-pandemic to around 3.3 per cent post-pandemic.
3. The direct tax base expanded steadily, with income tax returns filed increasing from 6.9 crore in FY22 to 9.2 crore in FY25. Higher return filings reflect improved compliance, greater use of technology in tax administration, and a growing number of individuals entering the tax net as their incomes rise.
4. Gross GST collections during April–December 2025 stood at ₹17.4 lakh crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 6.7 per cent. GST revenue growth is broadly aligned with prevailing nominal GDP growth conditions. In parallel, high-frequency indicators suggest robust transaction volumes, with cumulative e-way bill volumes during April–December 2025 growing by 21 per cent YoY.
5. The effective capital expenditure of the Central government rose from an average of 2.7 per cent of GDP in the pre-pandemic period to about 3.9 per cent post-pandemic, and to a higher 4 per cent of GDP in FY25.
6. Through Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure (SASCI), the Centre has incentivised States to maintain capital spending at around 2.4 per cent of GDP in FY25.
7. The combined fiscal deficit of State Governments stayed broadly stable at around 2.8 per cent of GDP in the post-pandemic period, similar to pre-pandemic levels, but has edged up in recent years to 3.2 per cent in FY25, reflecting emerging pressures on State finances.

- India reduced its general government debt-to-GDP ratio by about 7.1 percentage points since 2020, even while maintaining high public investment.

MONETARY MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL INTERMEDIATION: REFINING THE REGULATORY TOUCH

Monetary aspects

- India's monetary and financial sectors have exhibited robust performance in FY26 (April-December 2025), underpinned by strategic policy actions and structural resilience across financial intermediation channels.

Banking sector performance

- A significant improvement has been observed in the asset quality of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs), as evidenced by their GNPA ratio standing at 2.2% in September 2025 and net NPA ratio at 0.5% in September 2025, having reached a multi-decadal low level and record low level, respectively.
- As of 31 December 2025, the year-on-year growth in outstanding credit by SCBs increased to 14.5 per cent compared to 11.2 per cent in December 2024.

Financial inclusion

- The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), launched in 2014, has opened 55.02 crore accounts as of March 2025, with 36.63 crore in rural and semi-urban areas, establishing foundational savings and transaction infrastructure for previously unbanked populations.
- The Stand-Up India Scheme offers bank loans ranging from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore to SC, ST, and women entrepreneurs for establishing greenfield enterprises.
- The PM Street Vendor's Aatmanirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme is providing collateral-free working capital loans to street vendors.
- The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is financing micro and small enterprises in manufacturing, trading, services, and allied agricultural activities. By October 2025, the scheme had disbursed over ₹36.18 lakh crore across 55.45 crore loan accounts.

Other aspects of the financial sector

- During FY26 (till December 2025), 235 lakh of demat accounts were added, pushing the total count beyond 21.6 crore. A key milestone was the crossing of the 12-crore mark for unique investors in September 2025, with nearly a fourth of them being women.
- The mutual fund industry also expanded, with 5.9 crore unique investors as of the end of December 2025, of which 3.5 crore (as of November 2025) were from non-tier-I and tier-II cities, underscoring the diffusion of financial participation beyond traditional urban centres.
- India's first international financial services centre at GIFT City is creating an enabling ecosystem to attract and channel global capital.

Outlook for the sector

- The systemic rise in regulatory quality has received international validation through the Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP) conducted jointly by the IMF and World Bank in 2025. Both reports noted an increasingly resilient, diversified, and inclusive financial system, with total financial sector assets at nearly 187 per cent of GDP in CY 2024 and capital markets

expanding from 144 per cent of GDP in CY 2017 to 175 per cent in CY 2024. The assessments found that banks and NBFCs possess adequate capital buffers even under severe stress scenarios.

EXTERNAL SECTOR: PLAYING THE LONG GAME



Figure 2. Source – PIB

merchandise exports.

5. Services exports touched an all-time high of USD 387.6 billion in FY25, growing by 13.6 per cent, reinforcing India's position as a global hub for technology and business services.
6. India's current account deficit remained moderate, supported by strong net inflows from services exports and remittances that offset the merchandise trade deficit. In Q2 FY26, India's CAD, at around 1.3 per cent of GDP, compared favourably with several other major economies.
7. India remained the world's largest recipient of remittances, with inflows reaching USD 135.4 billion in FY25, supporting stability in the external account. The share of remittances from advanced economies increased, reflecting a growing contribution from skilled and professional workers.
8. India's foreign exchange reserves increased to USD 701.4 billion as of 16 January 2026, providing import cover of about 11 months and covering over 94 per cent of external debt, thereby strengthening resilience against external volatility.
9. Amid a subdued global investment environment, India continued to attract substantial foreign direct investment, with gross FDI inflows reaching USD 64.7 billion during April-November 2025.
10. India ranked fourth globally in Greenfield investment announcements in 2024, with over 1,000 projects and emerged as the largest destination for Greenfield digital investments between 2020-24.

INFLATION: TAMED AND ANCHORED

1. India recorded the lowest inflation rate since the beginning of the CPI series, with April-Dec '25 average headline inflation coming in at 1.7%. The moderation in retail inflation can primarily be attributed to the general disinflationary trend in food and fuel prices, which together account for 52.7 per cent of India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket.
2. Notably, among major Emerging Markets & Developing Economies (EMDEs), India has recorded one of the sharpest declines in headline inflation in 2025 over 2024, amounting to about 1.8 percentage points.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD MANAGEMENT

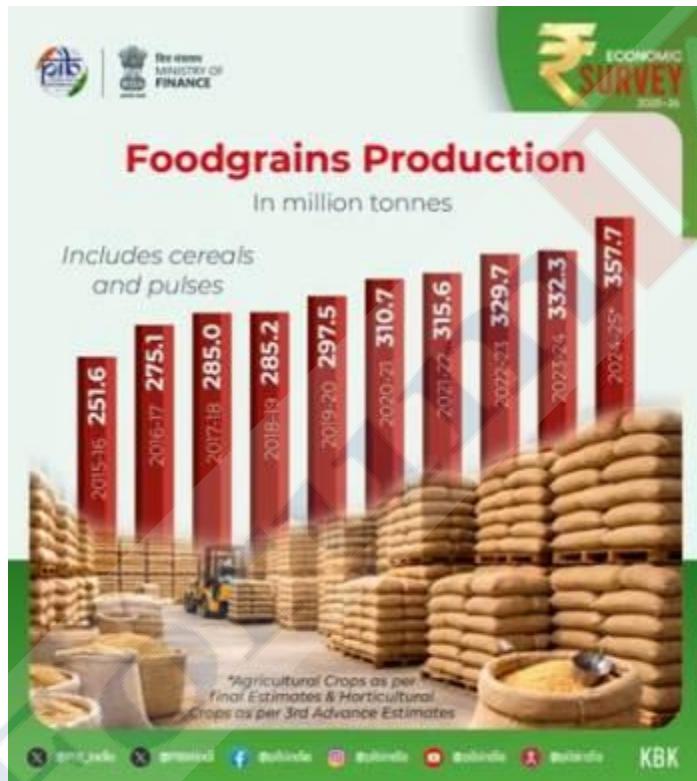


Figure 3. Source – PIB

1. Between FY15 and FY24, the livestock sector witnessed strong growth, with GVA rising by nearly 195 per cent. The fisheries sector has also performed well, with fish production increasing by more than 140 per cent during 2014-2024, compared to the increase from 2004-14.
2. With a good monsoon season, India's foodgrain production is estimated to have reached 3,577.3 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) in Agriculture Year (AY) 2024-25, an increase of 254.3 LMT over the previous year. This growth has been driven by higher output of rice, wheat, maize and coarse cereals (Shree Anna).
3. Despite rising foodgrain output, horticulture, accounting for about 33 per cent of agricultural GVA, has emerged as a key driver of agricultural growth. In 2024-25, horticulture production

reached 362.08 million tonnes (MT), surpassing the estimated food grain production of 357.73 MT.

4. To improve efficiency in agricultural marketing and infrastructure, the Government is implementing the Agriculture Marketing Infrastructure (AMI) sub-scheme under ISAM and the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) to strengthen farm-gate facilities and encourage private sector participation. Price discovery has been enhanced through the e-NAM Scheme, which, as of 31 December 2025, has onboarded about 1.79 crore farmers, 2.72 crore traders and 4,698 FPOs, covering 1,522 mandis across 23 States and 4 UTs.
5. Farmers' incomes are supported through assured MSP for mandated crops and PM-KISAN income transfers. In addition, the PM Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY) provides pension support, strengthening farmers' income security and social protection. Since its inception, under PM-KISAN, more than ₹4.09 lakh crore has been released to eligible farmers in 21 instalments. Under PMKMY, 24.92 lakh farmers are enrolled as of 31 December 2025.

SERVICES: FROM STABILITY TO NEW FRONTIERS

1. Services' share in GDP rose to 53.6 per cent in H1 FY26; Services' share in GVA stood at the highest ever – 56.4 per cent – as per FAE of FY26 which shows the rising weight of modern, tradable and digitally delivered services.
2. India is the world's seventh-largest exporter of services, with its share in global services trade more than doubling from 2 per cent in 2005 to 4.3 per cent in 2024.
3. The services sector continues to be the largest recipient of foreign direct investment inflows, accounting for an average of 80.2 per cent of total FDI during FY23-FY25, up from 77.7 per cent in the pre-pandemic period (FY16-FY20).

INDUSTRY'S NEXT LEAP: STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND GLOBAL INTEGRATION

1. Industrial activity strengthened in FY26, with Industry GVA growing 7.0% (real terms) in H1, despite subdued and persistent global headwinds.
2. Manufacturing growth accelerated, with GVA expanding 7.72% in Q1 and 9.13% in Q2 FY26, reflecting structural recovery.
3. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes across 14 sectors have attracted over ₹2.0 lakh crore of actual investment, generating incremental production/sales exceeding ₹18.7 lakh crore and over 12.6 lakh jobs as of September 2025.
4. India's innovation performance has strengthened steadily, with its Global Innovation Index rank improving to 38th in 2025 from 66th in 2019.
5. The India Semiconductor Mission has advanced domestic capabilities, with 10 semiconductor manufacturing and packaging projects approved across 6 States, involving about ₹1.60 lakh crore of investment.

INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE: STRENGTHENING CONNECTIVITY, CAPACITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

1. The Government of India's capital expenditure has increased nearly 4.2 times, from ₹2.63 lakh crore in FY18 to ₹11.21 lakh crore in FY26 (BE), while effective capital expenditure in FY26 (BE) is ₹15.48 lakh crore, positioning infrastructure as a key growth driver.
2. National highway infrastructure expanded substantially, with the NH network growing by about 60 per cent from 91,287 km (FY14) to 1,46,572 km (FY26, up to December), and

operational High-Speed Corridors increasing nearly ten-fold—from 550 km (FY14) to 5,364 km (FY26, up to December).

3. Railway infrastructure continued to expand, with the rail network reaching 69,439 route km as of March 2025, a targeted addition of 3,500 km in FY26, and 99.1 per cent electrification achieved by October 2025.
4. India has emerged as the world's third-largest domestic aviation market, with the number of airports increasing from 74 in 2014 to 164 in 2025.
5. The power sector recorded sustained capacity expansion, with installed capacity rising 11.6 per cent (y-o-y) to 509.74 GW as of November 2025, and the demand-supply gap declined from 4.2 per cent in FY14 to nil by November 2025.
6. Power sector reforms delivered a historic turnaround, with DISCOMs recording a positive Profit after Tax (PAT) of ₹2,701 crore in FY25 for the first time, alongside a reduction in AT&C losses from 22.62 per cent (FY14) to 15.04 per cent (FY25). Renewable energy constitutes around 49.83 per cent of total power generation capacity as of November 2025, with India ranking third globally in overall RE and installed solar capacity.
7. Tele-density reached 86.76 per cent, and 5G services are now available in 99.9 per cent of districts in the country.
8. Over 81 per cent of rural households have access to clean tap water under the Jal Jeevan Mission, as of October 2025.
9. Space infrastructure strengthened, with India becoming the fourth nation to achieve autonomous satellite docking (SpaDeX), alongside expanded indigenous missions and increased private-sector participation.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE: BUILDING A RESILIENT, COMPETITIVE AND DEVELOPMENT-DRIVEN INDIA

1. During 2025-26 (up to 31st December 2025), a total of 38.61 GW of renewable energy capacity has been installed in the country, which includes 30.16 GW of solar power, 4.47 GW of wind power, 0.03 GW of Bio-Power and 3.24 GW of hydro power

EDUCATION AND HEALTH: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT'S NEXT

1. India today operates one of the world's largest school systems, serving 24.69 crore students across 14.71 lakh schools, supported by over 1.01 crore teachers (UDISE+ 2024-25).
2. India has made notable gains in school enrolment by strengthening infrastructure and teacher capacity, with schemes like Poshan Shakti Nirman and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan promoting access and equity. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) are 90.9 at the primary stage (Grade I to V), 90.3 at the upper primary (Grade VI to VIII), 78.7 at the secondary stage (Grade IX and X) and 58.4 at the higher secondary stage (Grade XI and XII).

Higher education

1. The number of higher education institutions (HEIs) has increased from 51,534 in 2014-15 to 70,018 as of June 2025, significantly improving access. This increase is marked by substantial growth in universities and colleges. The number of premier higher education institutions (HEIs) has expanded significantly between 2014-15 and 2024-25. It now stands at 23 IITs, 21 IIMs, and 20 AIIMS, alongside the establishment of two international IIT campuses in Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi.

2. Under the NEP, the higher education system has undergone several reforms.
 - a. The National Credit Framework (NCrF), which aims to blend academic and skills-based learning, has been adopted by 170 universities.
 - b. The Academic Bank of Credit covers 2660 institutions, with over 4.6 crore IDs issued, including the generation of 2.2 crore APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) IDs with credits.
 - c. 153 universities have introduced flexible entry-exit pathways and biannual admissions to achieve the NEP target of 50 per cent GER by 2035.

Health

1. Since 1990, India has reduced its maternal mortality rate (MMR) by 86 per cent, far exceeding the global average of 48 per cent. A 78 per cent decline in the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) was achieved, surpassing the global reduction of 61 per cent and a 70 per cent decline in the neonatal mortality rate (NMR) compared to 54 per cent globally during 1990-2023.
2. The infant mortality rate (IMR) marked a drop of more than 37 per cent over the past decade, declining from 40 deaths per thousand live births in 2013 to 25 in 2023.

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT: GETTING SKILLING RIGHT

1. A total of 56.2 crore people (aged 15 years and above) were employed in Q2 FY26, reflecting a creation of around 8.7 lakh new jobs in Q2 compared to Q1 of FY26.
2. The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), which covers the organised manufacturing sector, results for FY24 highlight the manufacturing sector's resilience, showing a 6 per cent YoY increase in employment over the previous year. This translates to an addition of over 10 lakh jobs in FY24 compared to FY23.
3. The Labour Codes have formally recognised gig and platform workers, expanding social security, welfare funds, and benefit portability.
4. As of January 2026, the e-Shram portal has successfully registered over 31 crore unorganised workers; women account for over 54 per cent of total registrants, substantially strengthening the reach of gender-focused welfare schemes.
5. The National Career Service (NCS) is a one-stop solution connecting job seekers, employers, training providers with over 59 million registered job seekers and 5.3 million job providers across diverse sectors and mobilising approximately 80 million vacancies.

Skill ecosystem

1. The National Scheme for Upgradation of ITIs proposes to upgrade 1,000 government ITIs, including 200 hub ITIs and 800 spoke ITIs, through smart classrooms, modern labs, digital content, and industry-aligned long- and short-term courses.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRESS: FROM PARTICIPATION TO PARTNERSHIPS

1. The World Bank has raised the poverty line from USD 2.15 to USD 3.00 a day, adjusted for the purchasing power of money to 2021 prices. According to the revised IPL, India's poverty rates in 2022-23 were 5.3 per cent for extreme poverty and 23.9 per cent for lower-middle-income poverty.

2. The general government's social services expenditure (SSE) has shown a rising trend since FY22.
3. The SSE stands at 7.9% of GDP in FY 2025-26 (BE) against 7.7% in 2024-25 (RE) and 7% in 2023-24.

Health of the rural economy

1. As of December 2025, the drone survey under SVAMITVA has been completed in 3.28 lakh villages, against a target of nearly 3.44 lakh villages notified for drone survey. 2.76 crore property cards have been prepared for nearly 1.82 lakh villages. Lead Fertiliser Companies distributed 1,094 drones to SHG Drone Didis in 2023-24 using their own resources, with 500 of these drones provided under the Namo Drone Didi Scheme.

EVOLUTION OF THE AI ECOSYSTEM IN INDIA: THE WAY FORWARD

Smaller, task-specific models deployed across sectors allow innovation to diffuse more evenly, reduce entry barriers for firms, and better fit the diversity of India's economic landscape. India's demand for AI is emerging from real-world problems rather than speculative frontier uses. Across healthcare, agriculture, urban management, education, disaster preparedness, and public administration, there is a growing appetite for AI systems that work on local hardware and operate in low-resource settings.

URBANISATION: MAKING INDIA'S CITIES WORK FOR ITS CITIZENS

The Namo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System illustrates how high-speed regional connectivity can reshape urban and peri-urban labour markets. By sharply reducing travel times between cities and their surrounding regions, such systems expand access to jobs, support polycentric growth, and ease pressure on core metropolitan areas.

FROM IMPORT SUBSTITUTION TO STRATEGIC RESILIENCE AND STRATEGIC INDISPENSABILITY

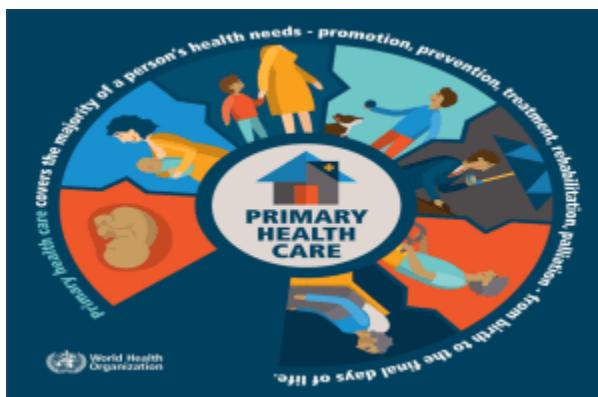
1. 'Swadeshi' must be a disciplined strategy, as not all import substitution is either feasible or desirable, a disciplined approach to indigenisation is presented through a three-tiered framework that distinguishes critical vulnerabilities with high strategic urgency, economically feasible capabilities with strategic payoffs, and low strategic urgency or high-cost substitution.
2. A National Input Cost Reduction Strategy that treats competitiveness as infrastructure, recognising affordable and reliable inputs.
3. A progression from 'Swadeshi' to Strategic Resilience to Strategic Indispensability, in which intelligent import substitution invests in national strength and ultimately embeds India in global systems, so that the world moves from "thinking about buying Indian" to "buying Indian without thinking."

Public Health Sector- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

India's public health system struggles with chronic underfunding, privatization, policy failure, and social inequalities. At the same time, the risk factors for disease are steadily rising due to policy gaps & systemic policy failures. The consumption of ultra-processed foods is driving an epidemic of non-communicable diseases, while unchecked air, water, and soil pollution, along with climate change are pushing millions into poverty. In this scenario, the role of public healthcare becomes even more important.

In this article, we will look at what constitutes a public health and the public health sector in India. We

will look at the challenges faced by the public health sector in India. We will also look at the significance of a robust public health sector in India and the ways to achieve it.



Source- WHO

What constitutes Public Health? What is the structure of public health sector in India?

Public Health: According to WHO, "Public health refers to all **organized measures to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life** among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to **provide conditions** in which people can be **healthy** and **focus on entire populations**, not on individual patients or diseases."

Categorisation of Public Health: Public health needs can be broadly categorised into three groups.

Protection against Diseases of Poverty faced by the Poor and Vulnerable	It includes diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, undernutrition, maternal death , bouts of illnesses due to food and water-borne infections leading to typhoid, hepatitis, and diarrhoeal diseases . These are faced by the poor and the vulnerable.
Protection against Environmental issue related diseases faced by the Middle Class	It includes air, water, waste management, lack of drainage facility, failure to ensure healthy foods and eateries, road traffic accidents, climate change and the rise of chronic illnesses .
Curative Public healthcare	Curative care needs of a population are the most popular needs in public health. Provisioning of curative care is the most critical and controversial policy question in public health.

Levels of Public Health Sector in India:

Primary Healthcare	<p>India's primary health sector consists of sub-centers (SCs) and primary health centres (PHCs), which form the foundation of the public healthcare system.</p> <p>Sub-centers: These are the most peripheral units, serving populations of 5,000 in plain areas and 3,000 in hilly/tribal areas.</p> <p>Primary Health Centers: These are the first point of contact with a qualified doctor, serving populations of 20,000-30,000. Each PHC is expected to have 4-6 beds and provide promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative care.</p> <p>The poor and the vulnerable rely on primary healthcare institutions of the public sector for primary-level care. It is the most affordable public health service and is closer to their places of residence.</p>
Secondary Healthcare	<p>The secondary health sector in India consists of Community Health Centers (CHCs), which serve as referral units for PHCs.</p> <p>CHCs are 30-bed hospitals providing specialist care in medicine, surgery, obstetrics & gynaecology, and paediatrics. There is one CHC for every 80,000-120,000 population in plain areas and 40,000-60,000 population in hilly/tribal areas.</p>
Tertiary Healthcare	<p>The tertiary health sector consists of district hospitals, medical college hospitals, and other highly specialized facilities.</p> <p>District Hospitals are 100-300 bed facilities providing specialist care, located at the district level.</p> <p>Medical College Hospitals are tertiary care teaching institutions, located in state capitals and major cities.</p> <p>Specialized Tertiary Healthcare Facilities: These include regional cancer centres, mental health institutes, trauma centres, and other super-speciality hospitals.</p> <p>The tertiary sector provides highly specialized care and acts as a referral point for the secondary and primary levels of the health system.</p>

What are the Government initiatives that have been launched for the development of Public Health Sector in India?

National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and National Health Mission (NHM)	<p>The NHM and NRHM have focused on strengthening public sector healthcare through architectural correction. Efforts have been undertaken to follow the principles of primary health by strengthening the primary healthcare institutions under these missions. These have led to the development of 1,53,655 sub centres, 25,308 primary health centres (PHC) and 5,396 community health centres (CHC) as per the rural health statistics, 2015.</p>
Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)	<p>It is a publicly funded health insurance scheme (PFHI) that provides financial protection to over 100 million families for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.</p>
Health and Wellness Centers (HWCS)	<p>The government is working towards transforming primary health centres into HWCS to provide comprehensive primary healthcare services, including preventive and promotive care.</p>
Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana	<p>PMSSY aims to enhance tertiary care capacities and strengthen medical education in the country by setting up new AIIMS (All India Institutes of Medical Sciences) institutions and upgrading existing government medical colleges.</p>
Jan Aushadhi Scheme	<p>The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) aims to provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices through Jan Aushadhi Kendras.</p>
National Health Digital Mission (NDHM)	<p>NDHM aims to create a digital health ecosystem, including health IDs for citizens and the establishment of a national digital health infrastructure.</p>

What are the existing challenges in the public health sector in India?

1. **Inadequate Access to Healthcare:** Inadequate access to basic healthcare services remains a critical public health issue, particularly in rural and underserved areas. For ex- **Shortage of health Infrastructure** and **health professionals** (shortage of around 600,000 doctors).
2. **Myopic focus on short-term results:** There has been focus on promotion of initiatives that promise immediate results, such as **opening new hospitals, subsidised treatments, and populist health policies**.

The **neglect of the holistic development of primary and secondary healthcare capabilities** has led to deterioration of public health sector in India.

3. Low Healthcare expenditure by the Govt:

- The **government** (Centre and states put together) spends about **1.9% of the GDP**. This is extremely low when compared to other government health expenditure in countries like **China (3%)**, **Thailand (2.7%)**, **Vietnam (2.7%)** and **Sri Lanka (1.4%)**. Bhutan's per capita spending on health was 2.5 times that of India, that of Sri Lanka was 3 times & that of other BRICS nations was almost 14 times that of India in 2021.
- The National Health Policy (2017) had committed to increase the health expenditure by govt to 2.5% of GDP by 2025 – but this basic goal is nowhere near realization.
- During the COVID period, public spending on health had increased, but much of the rise attributed to the States rather than the Union govt. In fact, while the States have sustained such increase in post-COVID period (increased from 0.67% in 2017-18 to 1.1% in 2025-26), the Union govt's spending on health, which increased moderately during the pandemic (from 0.32% of GDP in 2017-18 to 0.37% in 2020-21), has decreased to 0.29% of GDP in 2025-26.

Health is wealth

During the COVID years, public spending on health as a percentage of GDP had increased somewhat, with much of the rise attributed to the States rather than the Union government

CHART 1: Union and State government spending on health (as % of GDP)

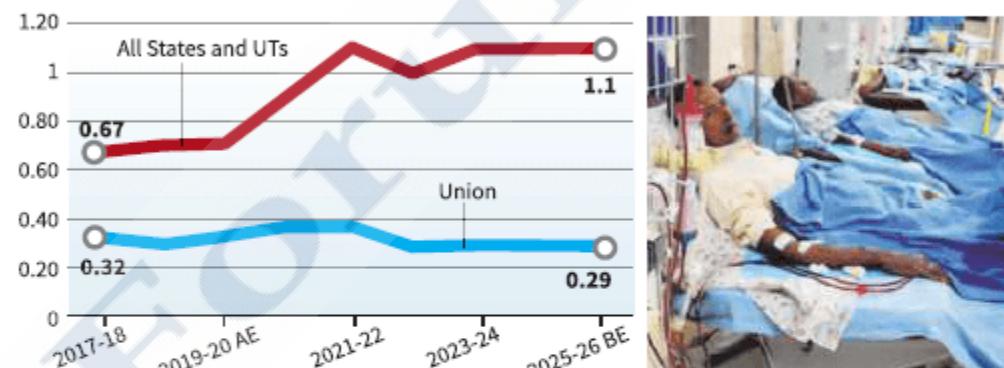
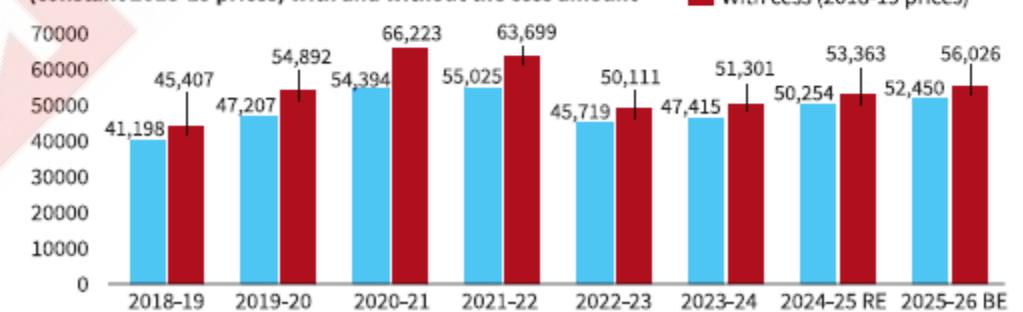


CHART 2: Union government expenditure on health (constant 2018-19 prices) with and without the cess amount



Source: india.budget.gov.in/EconomicSurvey/RBI's%20State%20Finance%20Study%20of%20Healthcare.pdf

Source: The Hindu

- Health & Education Cess, which was introduced in 2018-19 to expand the existing govt spending on health, has not been used to increase the health budget, but instead is being used to supplement the tax resources.
- Almost 75% of the Union govt's spending on health was used to be transferred to the States in 2014-15 for various Centrally Sponsored Schemes like National Health Mission. But this share has consistently declined to reach just 43% in 2024-25 – which is completely insufficient to maintain basic health services.

4. Lack of adequate emphasis on critical areas: There has been lack of adequate attention to critical areas such as **sanitation, disease surveillance**, and **public health education**, which are important to maintain population health and prevent disease outbreaks. For ex- **Lack of long-term strategies like understanding vector control or developing effective vaccines** in case of dengue.

5. Profit-Driven Pharma Sector: The pharmaceutical industry's profit-driven nature **often sidelines areas such as public health**. There has been a loss of trust towards healthcare providers (private sector due to commercial interests). For ex- **Medical marginalisation of TB patients in India**.

6. Lack of a Comprehensive Approach: India's current public health approach is **physician-centric**, without **adequate focus on expertise from various fields** such as environmental science, sociology, urban planning, and economics.

7. Lack of Preventive Care: Preventive healthcare is undervalued in India, despite its importance in reducing disease incidence and healthcare costs. This is especially significant as India faces a '**triple burden**' of disease, comprising **communicable diseases** (like tuberculosis and malaria), **non-communicable diseases** (such as diabetes and heart disease), and **emerging infectious diseases**.

What are the advantages of robust public health sector in India?

1. Improved the Access to Healthcare: The Lancet in its latest study ranked **India at 145th among 195 countries in terms of quality and accessibility of healthcare**, behind its neighbours China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Thus, there is a need to improve the public health sector by making it more accessible by **improving the quality of medical professionals and infrastructure**.
2. Improved Health Outcomes: Robust public healthcare leads to early detection and treatment of diseases, resulting in improved health outcomes and a decrease in the burden of illness. For ex- **Early detection and treatment of Non-Communicable diseases like Cardiovascular Diseases**.
3. Reduction of Financial Burden: Improved public healthcare services can **alleviate the financial burden** and **improve household financial stability** by reducing the high out of pocket expenditure. For ex- According to the WHO, **55 million people fall into poverty or deeper poverty every year** due to catastrophic expenditures on health.
4. Social Justice: Universal healthcare and publicly funded health system provide timely, effective and free care, irrespective of social class. This in turn promotes social justice and **fulfillment of DPSP principles**.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. Increase Public Health Expenditure: Raise public health spending from the current ~1.9-2% of GDP to at least 2.5-3%, as recommended by the National Health Policy 2017.
2. Transform Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (formerly HWCs): Move beyond infrastructure to ensure they are functional, well-staffed, and stocked. Empower them as the first point of comprehensive care.
3. Robust Human Resources: Address the massive shortage of doctors, nurses, and especially mid-level providers (Community Health Officers). Decentralize recruitment, improve working conditions, and create clear career pathways. Create a dedicated "All India Service" for public health (similar to the IAS) to manage health administration and policy at the state and district levels.
4. Leverage Telemedicine and AI: Use tele-consultation to bridge rural-urban gaps. Explore AI for public health analytics, early diagnosis (e.g., in TB or retinal scans), and optimizing supply chains.
5. National Commission for Healthcare Cost Management: The government should appoint a **National Commission to make recommendations for the spending on healthcare systems** and monitor its performance.
6. Comprehensive Approach: Effective public health management should **encompass preventive measures, policy formulation, community health, environmental health, etc.**
7. Universal health coverage: State governments should **draw up blueprints for universal health coverage** and begin experimenting and innovating with pilot programmes.

Conclusion: The goal for India should be to build a resilient public healthcare system that secures the well-being of its 1.4 billion people & provides Universal Health Coverage (UHC)—quality care for all, without financial hardship.

Read More- [The Hindu, The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS Paper 2 Social Justice – Issues relating to Health.

Menstrual Health – Explained Pointwise

Recently, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment has declared the right to menstrual health & access to menstrual hygiene management (MHM) measures in educational institutions is a part of the fundamental right to life & dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution.



What is Menstrual Health?

- Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to the menstrual cycle.
- It goes beyond just having a period to encompass everything needed for a person to manage their menstrual cycle with dignity, safety, and good health.

Physical & Biological Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular, predictable cycles ● Access to safe, effective menstrual products
Mental & Emotional Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freedom from stigma, shame, and psychological distress associated with menstruation.
Social & Cultural Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participation in all aspects of life—education, work, sports, social, and religious activities—without restriction or exclusion due to menstruation. ● Freedom from harmful cultural practices (e.g., segregation, restrictions on food or movement).

Access to Information & Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate, timely, and age-appropriate education about the menstrual cycle, before the first period (menarche) and throughout life. • Understanding the link between the menstrual cycle and other aspects of reproductive and overall health (e.g., fertility, bone health, iron levels). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines it with four key dimensions:
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What is the significance of Menstrual Health?

1. **A Fundamental Human Right & Matter of Dignity:** Managing menstruation safely, comfortably, and without shame is a basic necessity for half the global population. The inability to do so infringes on fundamental rights to health, education, work, non-discrimination, and human dignity. Recognizing menstrual health is a step toward gender equity.
2. **School Attendance & Performance:** Lack of products, pain management, and poor sanitation facilities are leading causes of school absenteeism for girls. This disrupts education, lowers academic performance, and increases dropout rates, limiting future economic and social opportunities.
3. **Essential for Economic Participation & Productivity:** Menstrual health is a major driver of economic participation. Lack of menstrual health support leads to “presenteeism” (working while unwell) or absenteeism, reducing productivity and career advancement. Supportive policies (like sick leave for severe pain) and workplace facilities are key to an inclusive economy.
4. **Foundation for Reproductive Autonomy:** Understanding one's cycle is foundational for reproductive health literacy. It empowers individuals to make informed choices about their bodies, recognize fertile windows for pregnancy or contraception, and understand changes throughout life (puberty, postpartum, perimenopause).
5. **Core to Mental Well-being:** Breaking stigma and shame fosters positive body image, self-confidence, and reduces anxiety and depression linked to menstrual distress.

What are the challenges to Menstrual Health?

1. **Deep-Rooted Stigma & Taboos:**
 - Menstruation is often shrouded in secrecy, considered “impure” or “dirty,” leading to restrictions on mobility, food, religious participation, and social interaction.
 - In some communities, practices like isolation (e.g., staying in menstrual huts) persist, though declining, perpetuating shame and risk.
2. **Limited Access to Affordable Menstrual Products:**
 - **Period Poverty:** Many cannot afford commercial pads, tampons, or reusable options, leading to use of unsanitary materials like old cloth, ash, or leaves. These materials are difficult to clean and significantly increase the risk of Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs).

- **Taxation:** Until recently, menstrual products were taxed as “luxury items” (GST reduced to 0% on some products in 2018, but affordability remains uneven).
- **Supply Chain Gaps:** Rural and remote areas often lack consistent availability of quality products.

3. **Lack of Private, Safe Toilets:** Many schools, workplaces, and homes lack functional toilets with water, locking doors, and disposal systems, making menstruation management difficult and unsafe.
4. **Disposal Challenges:** Even in areas with product access, there is often no way to discreetly or safely dispose of used materials, leading to unhygienic environments.
5. **Lack of Medical Attention:** Menstrual disorders (e.g., PCOS, endometriosis, dysmenorrhea) are often dismissed as “normal pain,” leading to underdiagnosis and suffering.

What the SC said in the recent ruling on Menstrual Health?

1. **Fundamental Right:**
 - The Court declared that the right to menstrual health is part of the “Right to Life” under Article 21 of the Constitution. Lack of menstrual hygiene management undermines the dignity, privacy & bodily autonomy of a girl child.
 - The right to free & compulsory education under Article 21A includes supply of free sanitary napkins in schools.
2. **Mandatory Provisions:** It directed all states and Union Territories to provide free biodegradable sanitary napkins and functional, separate toilets in all schools (government and private).
3. **Menstruation is not a “Gender-specific” Issue:** The judgment clarified that menstruation is not just a “women’s issue” but a human rights issue affecting all genders, including transgender persons and non-binary individuals.
4. **Binding Directions for All Schools:** The Court issued several mandatory directives for all schools (both government and private) across India, with a three-month deadline for compliance such as:
 - Providing free oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins to all girl students in Classes 6–12.
 - Ensure functional, gender-segregated toilets with usable water connectivity.
 - Establish “Menstrual Hygiene Management Corners” equipped with, spare innerwear, spare uniforms etc for menstruation related emergencies.
 - Installing safe disposable facilities.

What have been the various initiatives to improve the Menstrual Health?

1. **PMBJP (Suvidha Pads):** Perhaps the most visible success, the *Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana* provides “Suvidha” pads (which are oxo-biodegradable) for just ₹1 per pad at over 16,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras.
2. **National Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS):** Run by the Ministry of Health, this targets adolescent girls (10–19 years). It uses ASHA workers to distribute subsidized pads in rural areas and hold community meetings to break taboos.
3. **State govt initiatives:**

- Kerala - Menstrual Cup Revolution: First state to actively promote menstrual cups as a sustainable alternative.
- Maharashtra - Asmita Yojana: Uses Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to manufacture and distribute pads, creating local livelihoods while solving the supply chain issue.
- Rajasthan - Udaan Scheme: Provides free sanitary napkins to all women and girls in the state, not just those in schools.
- Andhra Pradesh - Swechha: Focuses on providing branded, high-quality napkins to school and college students to ensure comfort and dignity.

4. Initiatives by NGOs:

- Goonj (NJPC): Their "Not Just a Piece of Cloth" campaign transforms old clothes into hygienic cloth pads, treating menstruation as a tool for rural development.
- Pinkishe Foundation: Runs "Pad Banks" where urban donors can sponsor "hygiene kits" for girls in slums and rural areas, combined with "Pink Talks" to educate families.
- Social enterprises like Saathi (biodegradable pads), Aakar Innovations (compostable pads), and Jaipur Cups (menstrual cups) provide eco-friendly and affordable options.

Conclusion: In essence, menstrual health is not just a "women's issue." It is a public health imperative, an economic necessity, and a social justice benchmark. Thus, investing in it creates ripple effects – creating more equitable & resilient societies that uphold the dignity & rights of all people who menstruate.

Read More: [The Hindu](#)
UPSC GS-2: Social Justice